



# Thriving Communities Collaboration

c/- PO Box 1367,  
Hamilton 3240  
Ph: 07 838 1583

## For Purpose Sector Joint Submission

### A Collective Voice

- This submission is a collaboration between Community Waikato, Creative Waikato, Go Eco, The Waikato Wellbeing Project, Seed Waikato and HMS Trust. It represents the shared vision and aspirations of those of us working to build the capacity, capability and well-being of our local landscape. It includes a holistic approach to building a thriving community

### Shaping the future of Waikato District

- There are clear strategic alignments between the work of the community, creative, environment and youth sectors, across both soft and hard infrastructure, to Waikato district's vision of liveable, thriving and connected communities, the 4 community outcomes and 6 strategic priorities. Most significantly, *"celebrating who we are"* *"having well-connected communities"*, *"Our environmental health underpins the health of our People"* and *"we support local prosperity"*, while fairly simple elaborations on the basic purpose of local government, are important wellbeing signposts for the council to follow in its strategy, planning and resource allocation.
- Youth, arts, culture, creativity, Maaori, social services, disability and ethnic communities can and should make significant contributions to 'liveable, thriving and connected communities'. Understanding how our green spaces and biodiversity create healthy communities is critical to underpin good decision making. Shaping a future for the Waikato district needs to be collective, co-designed, and through the numerous lenses of the beneficiaries of the district, present and future.
- A fair and reasonable democratic process is supported by accessible and equal communication pathways and opportunities to influence the decision-makers. Some communities, for example ethnic communities, face additional barriers and relying on traditional feedback methods such as the submission process, does not facilitate engagement from these communities. Strategies should be co-designed with the community they target, especially communities that have traditionally had a limited or absent voice from council, such as our young people.

### Valuing communities

- While the community makes a significant contribution to these areas through investment, in-kind support, volunteer time, and creative passion, it is essential that the Council maintains and increases investment into this sector as a core provision of service to our growing community.
- Our future now depends on how we allocate resources, ensuring the needs and well-being of people and nature are central to our budgetary decisions.
- As a district sandwiched between New Zealand's biggest and fastest growing cities, it is vital the Waikato district grows well - this means valuing and investing in art and creativity, culture, community services, our greenspaces and biodiversity, venues, creative spaces and events, development programmes, and opportunities to weave cultural storytelling, placemaking and playful creative expression throughout partnership with the community, and within core council business.
- Community granting makes an important contribution to supporting for-purpose organisations, sustaining community services, local venues, and investing in our whenua. This partnership between council and community is directly connected to cultural and community wellbeing outcomes for the council.





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## Impact on social and cultural wellbeing

Beyond economic measures, the impacts of the non-profit community on social and cultural wellbeing is also significant.

- The community and social service sector encompass a broad range of initiatives that offer invaluable support and foster connections within diverse populations. Beyond just alleviating poverty and social isolation, these services bring a plethora of benefits to the community. They promote inclusivity, empower individuals to overcome challenges, and enhance overall well-being. Additionally, they contribute to the development of stronger social bonds, cultivate a sense of belonging, and foster a culture of empathy and compassion.
- In-depth Waikato-focussed research from 2022 highlighted regular access and perceived access to arts, culture and creativity is a significant driver of individual wellbeing. This contributes to better mental health outcomes, and shows measurable connection to social cohesion, community connection, civic pride, and sense of identity.
- Investment in the whenua is critical. Community access to open and accessible greenspaces, even in an ostensibly rural environment, can have profound effects on well-being, promoting physical health, mental clarity, emotional resilience, and social connection.
- Climate-resilient towns and settlements require systemic approaches that address both the physical and social dimensions of resilience. This includes investing in green infrastructure like parks and urban forests, as well as social infrastructure such as community centres and cultural hubs which promote social cohesion and empowerment. By incorporating the voices and perspectives of diverse communities into the budgeting process, we can ensure that our investments reflect the needs and priorities of all residents

## Investing in people

- In this current cost of living crisis, a careful and well considered fiscal approach to local government funding and services is supported. At the same time, the Council needs to keep front of mind its responsibility and duty to its people. The Council's vision of "*working together as a district to build liveable, thriving and connected communities*" is functionally appropriate, but lacks appeal to the human spirit. It is a council purpose statement of the here and now, but as a vision it offers very little for our tamariki and rangatahi to be inspired by. Between now and the next LTP, the Council might like to ask its people what their vision for the future is, in their words, and adopt that. This should be done in terms of their lived experienced, not necessarily from the point of view of the Council.
- At a time of increased need, now is the time to invest in people. Support the people who provide positive outcomes for diverse communities. Art, culture, and creativity sits alongside social services, kai, health, education, environment, and community connection as interwoven components of thriving communities.
- It requires civic investment as a part of ensuring community access. Not investing in our social infrastructure will result in the degradation of our community services, arts, culture and environment at a time of a growing population.
- A thriving and prosperous city will always be a combination of physical assets and infrastructure we can see, and the less tangible social, economic, cultural and environmental foundations which we all rely on for our wellbeing. We urge the council, even in difficult fiscal times, to keep a balanced and people-focused approach to all aspects of wellbeing, as is required by the Local Government Act (2022).





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- Too many in our community are suffering with hunger, poverty and poor housing – the foundations of a sustainable community. The council should not underestimate its important community leadership role in these issues.
- We encourage Council to activate its leadership role in the food security of the district, joining other cities and towns in Aotearoa bringing their attention to this issue. We request that Council leads and jointly implements a food strategy for the Waikato district which lays out a path to food security and sovereignty. We have made the same submission to Hamilton City and Waipa Councils, so a joint strategy would also be an option.
- Ultimately, creating a prosperous, climate-resilient city with thriving communities is about more than just mitigating the impacts of climate change, the odd art exhibition or Pataka kai stations in communities. It is about building a future where people and nature coexist harmoniously. By putting people at the heart of our budgetary decisions, investing in partnerships and encouraging imagination and creativity, we can pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient future starting now.



## Recommendations and Opportunities

- At a time of increased need, commit to maintaining and increasing community funding to support organisations to continue to deliver positive outcomes.
- Work collaboratively with community providers to lead and implement a joint regional food strategy in collaboration with city and district councils and Waikato Regional Council.
- Engage and fund services from relevant community organisations to co-design civic engagement strategies to enable meaningful and reciprocal access and support for vulnerable communities.

**The joint signatures to this submission are well-placed and able to work with Council on these initiatives which will help 'our people thrive'.**

