**Tamahere-Woodlands Councillors’ update March 2024: District news**

**Long Term Plan deferred**

Waikato District Council has decided to defer its next Long Term Plan (LTP) until 2025.

Using a one-off opportunity offered under legislation repealing the previous Government’s Three Waters programme, the Council will switch to an ‘enhanced Annual Plan’ for public consultation for the 2024/25 financial year, followed by a nine-year LTP from 2025-2034.

A key consideration in this decision is to gain better certainty around the Government’s next steps to implement its ‘Local Water Done Well’ programme. This will roll out in two Bills later this year, with the second one - providing for new types of structural and financing tools - not expected to be introduced to Parliament until December.

**General rates increase of 13.75% proposed**

To meet a range of increased costs including inflation, interest rates, increasing compliance requirements, and increasing asset maintenance costs, the Council’s draft 2024-25 Annual Plan proposes a general rate increase of 13.75%.

This is a no frills budget and will only just allow the Council to continue to provide services at the same levels as previously.

Three years ago the last Council planned for inflation levels of 2-3%, but in practice costs for the Council have inflated at least 17% since then, with the current cost of civil construction being 26% higher than three years ago.

In order to keep general rates to the level being discussed, the Council has had to find about $2m in operational efficiencies, and reduce expectations for our roading network with a budget which will afford only a small lift in resurfacing and rehabilitation work.

**Annual Plan consultation**

Consultation on the Annual Plan will take place from 25 March – 26 April and will include face-to-face meetings in every Ward. Watch the Council website for more details. Go to [www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/say-it](http://www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/say-it) .

Hearings of submissions on the Annual Plan are scheduled for 14-17 May and deliberations scheduled for 4-8 June. Final adoption of the enhanced Annual Plan is scheduled for the Council meeting on 25 June.

**Advantages in deferring the LTP**

Deferral of the LTP until next year confers several advantages including:

* More time to plan for a new era of water delivery after Watercare confirmed this month its withdrawal, as of June 2026, from a contract to operate the district’s water, wastewater and stormwater services. This is disappointing since the Watercare contract offered benefits in service delivery, capital project delivery and procurement – but it’s also timely for us to consider a range of options for water service delivery post-June 2026, whether that be in-house, a council-controlled organisation (CCO), or delivery by another authority or agency.
* Greater certainty around Waka Kotahi funding (expected to be confirmed in September). Waka Kotahi provides a 51% subsidy for our roading programme which uses about a third of our general rates income.
* Greater certainty for ratepayers on rating impacts when we consult on the LTP in 2025. A QV property revaluation currently underway is not due for delivery until May.

**Other news:**

**Waste minimisation fund**

Applications for Council funding for waste minimisation projects are welcome from now until Friday 19 April. The goal is to encourage long-term waste minimisation action and behaviour change, ultimately reducing waste to landfill. The fund has $50,000 to distribute through a single annual funding round, with up to $10,000 (GST exclusive) available per project. Local businesses, schools, community groups and marae are all encouraged to consider applying. To check the fund guidelines or to make an application, go to the Council website and search for “waste minimisation fund”.

**Reminder: Keeping of animals bylaw**

Share your ideas with the Council on the Keeping of Animals Bylaw before we revise it through a formal consultation process later this year. Early engagement is open until 31 March. This is the time to make your views clear. Go to [www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/say-it](http://www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/say-it) .

***Contact your Tamahere-Woodlands Councillors:***

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