

Key reasons for Auckland Council to invest in community and social infrastructure¹

Auckland Council is in a unique position to put communities at the forefront as it considers how to navigate a \$295 million budget deficit. Investment in community and social infrastructure across the city is essential to enable good lives across Tāmaki Makaurau for everyone, every day. The recent weather events are just one example of the massive value communities provide to disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

Inspiring Communities has worked for over 15 years in community-led development. This document outlines evidence for the value of Auckland Council investment in community and social infrastructure. Community and social infrastructure support the development of community capital, of local capacity to be community-led, of community cohesion and community resilience.

Over the past four years, multiple lockdowns, floods and cyclones have seen Aucklanders from Wellsford to Pukekohe co-create good lives together, withstand adversity and come together in times of need.

Community capital, community cohesion and local capacity to be community-led have been proven time and time again as key to effective disaster preparation, response and recovery. All three of these aspects require quality community and social infrastructure in order to be effective.

Investment in community and social infrastructure also supports high quality lives in communities every day. It can help address inequities, mitigate impacts of climate change, support strong local economies and thriving natural environments as well as facilitate participation, inclusion and belonging.

¹ Community infrastructure is the framework of physical facilities needed to support and sustain a community of people to live and work in a place e.g. parks, community centres, flood mitigation, medical centres. Social infrastructure is the social organisation of a community such as trust, norms and networks of a society to take coordinated action e.g. values, beliefs, culture and behaviours etc.

Both **physical structures** (facilities, amenities) and **programming** that enables trust, connection and belonging to grow are essential for this to happen. Community and social infrastructure help make places work for the people that live, work, play and invest in them. It also helps places themselves to thrive.

Auckland Council holds a unique position to invest in community infrastructure as it operates at a number of collective levels - Auckland region, Wards, Local Boards and neighbourhoods - and because it has relationships with a large number of other investors, such as central government, large firms and various population groups. Council's investment leverages investment from elsewhere and is part of an ecosystem of investment where the sum is both bigger than the contributing parts and reliant on each contributing part.

Investing in community infrastructure is, therefore, key to ensuring good quality of life across the region and needs to be prioritised as a critical part of business as usual for Auckland Council at all times.

For such investment to be effective, there are five key conditions to be consider:

1. **Understand community culture, context, dynamics and aspirations:** No community is the same, and every community is changing and capable of change. Acknowledging this and strengthening what is already in place by listening to what matters to local people is key to developing community capital, cohesion and resilience. For example, Māori communities have a tried and tested resilient community foundation based on te ao Māori values and practices. Papakura Marae have intentionally embedded Māori values into their strategic plan by aligning to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and looking toward 2040. They have a mantra to do “whatever it takes” to support their whānau to thrive.
2. **Enable equity in community resilience efforts:** Inequities exist, especially for Māori, Pacific peoples and communities marginalised by race, gender and sexual orientation. Looking for, supporting and resourcing community partners who are already working with these groups to increase and expand their capacity in ways that matter to them can reduce inequities. Uptempo (housed within the Community Innovation Unit at Auckland Council), for instance, works with community partners and employers to support Pasifika aiga into long term quality employment opportunities creating genuine family and thus community prosperity.
3. **Support existing local government and community relationships:** Lean into existing relationships across the local government network. Connect communities to decision makers to support collective efforts and assist communities to navigate local government so they can flourish.

As an example, Auckland based youth-led initiative The Whole 09 was provided with financial support by Auckland Council during the Covid-19 Delta lockdown (late 2021) to support an online wellbeing opportunity across west Auckland. The funding was provided quickly with minimal paperwork required because there was already a high trust relationship between fundee and funder.

4. **Consider the psychosocial context:** Different communities are under different kinds of pressures. There is often immense pressure during both the response and recovery periods of all kinds of crises (economic, environmental, criminal and/or socio-cultural). While this is not only about responding to disasters, communities do need to be equipped with support systems to guide them through response and recovery, and to prepare for potential future events. Resourcing the availability of expertise for communities (at the individual, street, neighbourhood, community and city-wide levels) to better prepare, respond and begin to recover in ways that work for them is essential. A case in point; Auckland Emergency Management worked alongside the local communities in Piha and Karekare to develop resilience frameworks and action plans for emergencies following a previous period of flooding. During the recent cyclone Gabrielle, both Karekare and Piha communities have been able to act on these plans and get resources such as food and mail into the community despite roads being closed.
5. **Support community-led approaches:** Communities have solutions; they know what works, what doesn't and what skills and resources they need alongside them to achieve collective aspirations and goals. When local government devolves power structures and funding systems, investment, responsibilities, risk and successes become shared. This is a way for communities to realise tino rangatiratanga. For example, the Awataha Stream greenway project was intentionally designed to enable "locals to be guardians and owners" and involved local children as well as Mana Whenua alongside a range of local, regional and national organisations. The design was intended to cope with a 1 in 100 year flood. During the floods in late January, it coped with volumes likened to a 1 in 1000 year flood.

5.1 Value people and relationships: People, connections and trust make things happen as much as any financial investment. Relationship comes before partnership. Invest in relationships and aim to add value by enabling local groups to do what they are good at and to seek expertise where that is useful.

5.2 Build local economic resilience: Fund locally-led enterprise and action. Support processes and capability building that connects and builds more integrated social and economic capacity. Learn from what works and share this with other communities and groups.

5.3 Tolerate more risk: Complex challenges require creative responses that learn and apply those learnings as they go. Mandate innovation and learning. Provide flexible funding and parameters that allow change and adaptation.

It is no accident or surprise that communities who have stronger relationships, and more resource, are able to recover and adapt faster than those communities who aren't strongly connected and don't have access to resources. As Auckland looks towards the work we all need to do locally - to find equitable and mana enhancing strategies, we can reflect on what we have witnessed and learned from our experiences.

We cannot continue to rely on the status quo and we cannot afford to underinvest in community and social infrastructure. Further, there are inequities across the city that need to be addressed. Auckland must determine what intentional community resilience building could and should look like to ensure communities across the Auckland region have the social, human, and financial capital to bounce back from tragedy and to live good lives every day.

Key areas for Council to sustain investment in are, therefore, facilities and activities that enable the people of Tāmaki Makaurau to live good lives here, including in times of significant and abrupt change on a number of fronts. Attention needs to be paid to both short and longer term outcomes, recognising that funding cuts and fee (or charges) increases will cause some organisations to close down so that even if investment returns, the impacts of 'temporary' cuts can be irreversible or take a long time to get back. To ensure effective community and social infrastructure, therefore, investment needs to be sustained in:

- **Māori outcomes**, whether this investment is directly or indirectly allocated, such as through regional and Local Board grants or through specific allocations. Ensuring Māori outcomes remain prioritised to deliver on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and helps address intergenerational disparity.
- Resourcing and activities that will **improve equity** within and across the city in ways that honour and grow local strengths (both place-based and across population groups e.g. Māori, Pacific nations, migrant and refugee background people, Rainbow etc). We are in this together and we are each only well when we are all well.
- Community capacity to **mitigate climate change and prepare, respond and recover from disasters** of all kinds.

- **Locally Driven Initiatives (LDIs), Asset Based Services and alongside local communities** through the Local Boards. Ensure community infrastructure decisions are made with those

who the infrastructure is for and implementation of these decisions complements and extends local goals, aspirations, strengths and energies.

- The **development of all kinds of relationships** by Council staff so that communities (including those who are not 'squeaky wheels') can grow trust with Council as well as navigate and leverage Council and other resources (such as central government) in ways that enable them to uncover and actively pursue local priorities.
- Developing **public/private partnerships to undertake services** currently provided by Council (such as lawn mowing) and/or allowing alternative use of assets, such as using suitable parkland for community food growing.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact:

Denise Bijoux– CLD Evaluation and Practice Lead, Inspiring Communities
Denise.Bijoux@inspiringcommunities.org.nz

References:

Auckland Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group. (2016). Working together to build a Resilient Auckland In: Auckland Council.

Centre for Disaster Resilience, R. a. R. (2017). Building urban resilience in New Zealand: lessons from our major cities. In: University of Auckland.

Chen, E., Craven, B., & Martin, R. (2021). Community resilience - a rapid review of 'what matters' and 'what works'.

City of Westminster. (2023). Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure. Retrieved from

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/planning-building-and-environmental-regulations/planning-policy/neighbourhood-community-infrastructure-fund>

Donkers, L., & Bailey, C. (2021). (Re)connecting Community to the Awataha Stream. Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community, 20. doi:DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24926/2471190X.8673>

Inspiring Communities. (2020). Shaping the Future - Enabling Community-led Change in New Zealand.

Inspiring Communities (Producer). (2022). Embracing Te Tiriti, fostering community webinar.

McNaughton, E., Wills, J., & Lallemand, D. (2015). Leading in Disaster Recovery - a companion in chaos. In: New Zealand Red Cross.

New Zealand Government - Treasury. (2013). Living Standards: A short Guide to 'Social Infrastructure'. Retrieved from **<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2017-12/hls-ag-socinfr-jan13.pdf>**

The Southern Initiative. (2023). Uptempo. Retrieved from **<https://www.tsi.nz/uptempo>**