



Submission

Waitaki District Council
2021-31 Long Term Plan

Connecting People & Advancing Business

www.otagochamber.co.nz

INTRODUCTION

1. The Otago Chamber of Commerce welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the proposed Waitaki District Council's 2021-31 Long Term Plan. The Chamber has consistently worked to ensure the district business community has a voice in council matters, and long term plans are an essential part of this.
2. We provide constructive comments on the positive initiatives and what changes we would like to see in the final Long Term Plan document. These are based on a range of research, member surveys, and our observations and expectations from our member base. We also provide some recommendations to the Council for amendments to this draft LTP to meet the Council's vision.
3. The Chamber would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with the Council.

ABOUT THE CHAMBER

4. The Chamber is a membership based service organisation that has been the home and voice of business in the Otago region¹ since 1861. It offers business and business people a range of services and advocacy. We are dedicated to promoting and actively encouraging business growth and opportunity throughout the Otago region.
5. Comprised of over 950 members, the Chamber actively provides information, advocacy and support for business, connecting members through networking events and functions, and developing capability and skills through our training workshops and programmes.
6. We also advocate and offer a voice for business concerns and submit on behalf of members on local and national government policy. Representation occurs on behalf of a broad cross-section of business demographics including size, location and industry type, with the full range from small businesses through to large employers and stakeholders in the region.

SUMMARY

7. We are pleased to make a submission on behalf of our members, particularly those in the Waitaki District. Overall, the Chamber supports the Council's vision "*the best place to be*" and continuing focus on promoting growth and opportunities in the Waitaki District over the next 10 years.
8. The goal of having a "prosperous district – being attractive to new opportunities, supporting local businesses, fostering a diverse and resilient economy", fits well with the mission of the Otago Chamber of Commerce to have a "Thriving Otago Community", if

¹ There are two chambers operating within the Queenstown Lakes District Council area ie. Queenstown Chamber of Commerce and Ignite Wanaka.

the economy is doing well the whole community benefits. Also the Chamber is all about connections and having a connected community is vital on so many levels. Last but not least, growth needs to be sustainable both in the environmental and in the economic sense.

9. Whilst we are aware the Waitaki District Council are working on a spatial plan, there is no mention of this work in the 10 year plan. The Chamber would like to see more focus on the growth of the region and how this is being planned, particularly in regards to housing, transport and business development.

10. The Chamber welcomes:

- a. The focus on investing in the district and keeping services running.
- b. Support for businesses in the region.
- c. Priority being given to asset and infrastructure maintenance and development to ensure investment for the long-term future.
- d. Proposed asset infrastructure initiatives spread across the district that recognise the importance of nurturing and sustaining local communities, including Omararama, Otematata, Hampden, Oamaru airport and wharf, district wide water supply upgrades and unsealed road metalling and sealed road resurfacing.

11. We would like to see the following reflected in the final LTP document:

- a. A focus on growth and plans to support that growth – for example, housing, transport, and business development. [Promoting the filling of jobs and investing in housing development is important from a business perspective.](#)
- b. A commitment to finding efficiencies in current spending.
- c. Collaboration, innovation and partnerships with the business community.
- d. An intent to minimise administrative 'red tape' and keep costs down for new developments, particularly in light of those impacted due to COVID-19.
- ~~e. [Promoting the filling jobs and investing in quality housing is important from a business perspective.](#)~~
- ~~g.f.~~ The promotion of active transport and public transport initiatives should be included. There is no public transport in Oamaru and surrounding areas, and this should be addressed particularly in light of the [district's](#) growth and [in](#) consideration of the [environment carbon zero targets](#). ~~[The Otago Regional Council is currently consulting actively with the Otago Regional Council to be developing local public transport initiatives.](#)~~

12. The Chamber would like to see:

- a. Further discussions happen in the business community to fully understand the implications of the financial strategy and rating system, with the potential to review other financial solutions.
- b. Businesses within the district being given the opportunity have a role in providing the labour, skills and expertise to undertake work in council priority work and other projects, whether that be in a one-off or ongoing regular basis.

- c. How the Council plans to do things differently to create efficiencies to afford future projects. The Chamber is concerned the current draft plan does not describe how this will happen. What projects / services is the Council going to stop, merge or redesign?
- d. Brave decisions to ensure value and sustainability for ratepayers, both commercial and residential. Do it once and do it right is a common theme for Chamber members.

FEEDBACK ON PROPOSALS

13. The Chamber has the following feedback on the proposed projects and options as detailed in the *Getting Back to the Future* consultation document. Members were surveyed to get their feedback on the range of options.

Note: comments below from members are noted in italics – it should be noted that these comments reflect the views of individual members.

Issue	Feedback
Community Outcomes - Economic	<p>The Chamber supports having a “prosperous district” as one of the Council's community outcomes. We endorse the intent to be attractive to new opportunities, support local businesses, and to foster a diverse and resilient economy. The Chamber asked members what Council should be doing for businesses in the district, some of their comments are provided below.</p> <p><i>Comments:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Provide support and encourage businesses to flourish rather than tax them for developing. Remove commercial development contributions and provide rates relief as an incentive. Provide an in-house business support officer to assist with mapping the consenting process - rather than making people employ consultants.</i> - <i>WDC should prioritise spending from local businesses. There needs to be a policy(s) whereby staff understand that procurement from local contractors, consultants, professionals and businesses is the preferred option and they should have to complete a form to support their decision making if they go outside this policy.</i> <p><i>I would challenge this to some extent.</i></p> <p><i>Local spending is good and should be encouraged, but we may get suboptimal outcomes if we use local professionals when there may be specialists who can give a better result / more experience / different perspectives from out of town. Oamaru is a small town and doesn't have the breadth of experienced professionals that may be required.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Support businesses by being flexible and quick with legislation, permits and the like. Don't create obstacles.</i> - <i>Invest money into making town more attractive to visitors and businesses to move here. I understand nothing has been done in this space for over 30 years, it appears the harbour gets priority over town so I think that putting some real investment to make town more attractive and a better use of space would be the best way you could help business.</i> - <i>Reduce compliance costs particularly for start-ups or small business. Support and encourage developments without penalising them. Stand</i>

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	<p><i>beside business owners to support them through their business journey. Actually get out and about and talk to business.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spend your money locally - go and support local shops. - Have a professional event coordinator that can take the current events and elevate them to a national standard.
<p>COVID-19 Recovery</p> <p>[40% do nothing; 40% do something; 20% unsure]</p>	<p>The Chamber supports initiatives that assist the community to recover from the pandemic, and the Council undertaking them in collaboration with key stakeholders across the district. The decision not to increase rates in 2020/21 was one that was appreciated by the business community. The decision not to charge for car parking March-Sept 2020 was also a welcome initiative.</p> <p>Member responses were evenly split on whether the Council needs to <u>do</u> anything further. The general consensus was that any further initiatives depend on Central Government decisions and the support offered by Central Government.</p> <p>Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Depends if the process to open the borders continues. If yes, then priority should be on making the roads (WDC is responsible for) safer and ensuring pedestrians and cyclists have alternative spaces.</i> - <i>Put Tourism Waitaki under Council for this and alongside the economic development unit they could be doing more to attract people here for weekends. Every campaign fails to mention shopping - we have some of the coolest shops right here but it is never promoted as a place for shopping. Winter months might be tough for some business, supporting events and activities that attract people to town would be a start. Utilising your social media channels to promote shopping local.</i> - <i>No Central Government is splashing enough cash.</i> - <i>Mention is made in respect of the Council's preparedness for the Governments shovel ready projects however there is no detail within the Capital Works Programme of such projects?</i>
<p>Climate Change</p>	<p>The Chamber supports the Council prioritising infrastructure spend on roading and flood protection to mitigate the impacts from climate change.</p> <p>As NZ transitions to a low-emissions economy in the next 30 years, there will be future costs implications for business. The council needs to consider providing incentives for businesses to transition to a lower carbon economy.</p> <p><u>Road Materials:</u></p> <p><u>Comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>The existing road network is susceptible to the potential effects of climate change and extreme weather events. Increased investment in the transport network exposed to regular and increasingly severe weather events particularly flooding (Maheno, Papakaio, Danseys Pass) is required to ensure that the District does not lose its connectivity.</i> <p>— <u>Example:</u></p> <p>https://www.odt.co.nz/regions/north-otago/january-flooding-damage-bill-tops-out-ever-1m?fbclid=IwAR1vR2CFXRiBvQUG_TFEsbdK9iQYovDEj7uMDZZnvPisNgYWzTXnKhyLbe</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Coastal erosion is also affecting parts of the district through the loss of roads and erosion of the existing network.</u> - <u>Let central government oversee this. Pass a by-law to cease carbon forestry farming in our district.</u> - <u>Again Central Government is driving that. So long as Council owned entities are being responsible we should be OK</u> - <u>We need to strategize our waste disposal. Trucking outside the region is not sustainable in the long term.</u> - <u>Just follow Government lead.</u> - <u>Climate change is not only about resilience to extreme weather events. The long term plan needs to make provision for enabling decarbonisation in the region. Whether people agree with it or not, it will happen and so we need to be prepared for it. Decarbonising fleets for council, funding for electric heating of public facilities (if coal or gas fuelled) and council contractors, sustainability reporting, allowing for offsetting carbon may be required in future so should be flagged (if not done so).</u>
<p>Rates <u>smoothing and affordability</u></p>	<p>The level of rate rise is a concern for the business community, this comes on top of a number of cost increases for business and will be a challenge for some in terms of affordability.</p> <p>The Chamber supports smoothing rate increases evenly across the years of the LTP. It is also important to use a mix of reserves, internal and external debt to keep rates down.</p> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Why are your rates outstripping inflation so much? What is happening to your operational costs - are they increasing exponentially? Where is the efficiency and automation of systems of this decade? Your website is not even e-commerce capable.</u> - <u>Maybe it's time to review your own internal costs and start getting prudent. Staff wage increases not acceptable. A thick band of middle managers not acceptable. Personal assistants not acceptable.</u> - <u>On the other hand, good admin staff ease the load on management to get on and tackle the big issues. A busy CE or executive get huge value from a good PA — but how many is the real question.!</u> - <u>I support a review of internal efficiencies though (low cost doesn't always translate to good performance). The risk of doing pay freezes is that it doesn't motivate or inspire staff, and makes attraction of talent difficult.</u> - <u>Do we understand enough about the compliance pressures the council is facing? Is it being expected to 'do more stuff' and therefore needs more people to do it? Water reform, developing good asset management capability, and ongoing central government pressures are facing most infrastructure businesses - being expected to do more stuff so it does need to be resourced (efficiently).</u> - <u>I would like to see a full review of Council's costs before you even look at putting up rates, currently you have stretched your staff over two buildings and bursting at the seams. We have all had to reduce costs and pivot, so should a responsible Council.</u> - <u>To ease the things for business as we recover from COVID and the current Government policies</u>

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Waste Minimisation	<p>The Chamber notes that the Council does not provide kerbside rubbish collection in the district. This job is done by private providers. The general feedback from Chamber Members was that kerbside recycling would be beneficial to the community.</p> <p>80% of respondents would like to see Council do more in the waste minimisation area, and education activities.</p> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide curbside recycling and waste pick up Invest in a recycling furnace to burn recycling into a reusable oil INNOVATE ! - Install public recycling collection bins, (not to mention curbside collection or state of the-or sorting and handling) we are still operating in the 1990's in this space with all waste collected publicly going to out of district landfill. No waste minimization in place - Start with your own organisation on waste minimization. And get kerb-side recycling! - Assist with education in schools. That will flow through in time. It's too hard trying to change attitudes set in years of habit. - Recycling pick up for residential and business - no more excuses its time!!
Indoor Sports and Events Centre	<p>The majority supported the proposal to develop and build the centre (subject to the business case).</p> <p>Responses were strongly- in favour of building an indoor sports and events centre. The options supporting a council contribution were largely evenly split across all 3 funding options. There is a strong sense in the community of wanting to get this project done, without further money spent on developing the business case.</p> <p>Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get it done! Look at other revenue options, e.g. sell Forrester Heights sections to pay for the sports stadium. - Let a private trust oversee this development with professional services and the desired outcome achieved. Don't want the mistakes of our pool being made again - too short, no diving well, poor design, no indoor outdoor flow. - I think philanthropic trusts etc should be sought for the Waitaki Recreation Centre and the standard of this lifted considerably. - Just go for it and get it done! Lucky to have amazing local support and philanthropic funding, make the most of this opportunity. Sell sections to Forrester Heights to pay for it?! - Bite the bullet and do it
Rates affordability	<p>The level of rate rise is a concern for the business community, this comes on top of a number of cost increases for business and will be a challenge for some in terms of affordability.</p> <p>The Chamber supports smoothing rate increases evenly across the years of the LTP. It is also important to use a mix of reserves, internal and external debt to keep rates down.</p> <p>Comments:</p>

	<p>Why are your rates outstripping inflation so much? What is happening to your operational costs — are they increasing exponentially? Where is the efficiency and automation of systems of this decade? Your website is not even e-commerce capable.</p>
<p>Financial strategy</p> <p>Results: 33% did support 67% did not support</p>	<p>The Chamber notes that over the term of this LTP, the council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - useUse reserves extensively, and continue to use both internal and external debt as needed. - nowNow open with external debt and is expected to have an external debt balance throughout the life of this plan. The utilisation of external debt will fund the replacement of core infrastructure and other capital projects. <p>The majority did not support this approach, although it is reasonable to take on some debt to stimulate growth. How much that debt is of concern to members, and the implications for businesses and the wider community.</p> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - take on some debt for the sake of community growth - Some debt is acceptable but keep it small and manageable as interest rates will not stay down for ever - It is unclear what all the debt is being raised for over the 10 year period.
<p>Infrastructure projects</p>	<p>The council is proposing infrastructure projects to start within the next 10 years to "catch up with previous underspending on maintenance and/ or renewals of key infrastructure assets, in particular the Three Waters". These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - water supply upgrades - Ōmārama adventure playground - District wide unsealed road metalling and sealed road resurfacing - Ōamaru Airport lighting upgrade - Hampden Beach landfill removal - Sumpter Wharf Ōamaru maintenance - Otematata gardens and seating area <p>Should the council invest in these infrastructure projects? Do you see benefits for your business or businesses generally?</p> <p>The Chamber of Commerce recognises the importance of investing in infrastructure and how important this is to the sustained growth of the district. However, there were varying views from members on the identified infrastructure projects.</p> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not to mention our Cape Wanbrow and Parks and Reserves are being maintained to the bare minimum, take some pride and lift these assets. Why are you paying catch up - are we constantly falling behind due to mismanagement and under-funding? What about expanding wellbeing facilities further - such as bike tracks, footpaths and great investment of our Parks and Reserves which are all in decline. - Would need to know more about the requirements but am very concerned about the level of debt the Council is planning on drawing down. - I don't see a benefit to our company from this spending and I do not agree with spending on the items below Otematata gardens and seating area - community based action Ōmārama adventure playground not a priority Hampden Beach landfill removal not a priority <p><u>Read Materials:</u></p>

Commented [NAM5]: Should we put the feedback in order of the questions asked in the draft plan?

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Other issues	<p>It is noted on page 16 of the consultation document that several</p> <p>Where is anything on supporting the town centre through upgrades? Nothing has happened to make Oamaru town attractive for decades.</p> <p>Stop accepting average and paying the bare minimum. Our roads, footpaths, parks and reserves have no level of pride. Invest more and lift our profile to one to be proud of. →</p> <p>It is unclear what all the debt is being raised for over the 10 year period.</p> <p>Stick to what is needed rather than what is wanted until we can afford it.</p>
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~~There seem to be a number of issues not covered under the 10 year plan, which our members and Advisory Committee would like to have an update on:~~

- ~~• Waterfront/harbourside development~~
- ~~• Cycle ways and footways~~
- ~~• Traffic management – concerns that the roundabout design is poor; how can traffic be slowed down and heavy traffic minimised?~~
- ~~• What is the council doing to deal with the seagull problem in the town centre?~~

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~~20.16. In regards to infrastructure, the Chamber recognises the importance of maintaining a strong infrastructure whilst planning for future growth. We are aware that investment in infrastructure is key to the ongoing development of the region. recognises the key areas for growth, including the importance of re-zoning land and planning for those working from home. We support your plans to be adaptive to growth and enable private infrastructure investment where it will benefit our community's well-being.~~

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CONCLUSION

~~21.17.~~ The Chamber supports the region's commitment to vibrant rural towns and being connected and collaborative, and a healthy sustainable environment. We recognise that a strong infrastructure is important to support sustainable growth and that well considered new initiatives can bring multiple benefits to the region long term.

~~22.18.~~ This submission is submitted on the basis that it provides feedback and the opportunity to further engage with the council on a number of issues. We are committed to joining and working with the Council to achieve our shared objective of attracting and encouraging the development of business opportunities in the ~~Clutha-Waitaki~~ District.

~~23.19.~~ Thank you again for the opportunity to submit. The Chamber would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with the Council.

Yours sincerely,

Nicky Aldridge

Acting Chief Executive Officer

[Otago Chamber of Commerce](#)