

Draft Annual Plan 2026/27 Consultation Document



TE KAUNIHERA Ā-ROHE O
Whanganui
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Message from the Mayor Kia ora koutou

Keeping our rate rises as low as possible is a priority for our council. On the back of the lowest average rates rise in New Zealand this current year, we've worked hard to keep the proposed average rates increase to 5.8 percent for the 2026/27 year.

It's a balancing act as we try to keep rate rises low and at the same time deliver what matters for all of us. It's a figure that reflects the reality of continued rising costs across New Zealand; while ensuring we don't let our essential pipes, roads, and services crumble.

We're making these decisions in a challenging environment. Costs are rising, infrastructure is becoming more expensive to maintain and replace, and central government reforms are changing how councils operate. These pressures are being felt across New Zealand, and Whanganui is not immune.

In response, we've taken a careful and considered approach. We've looked closely at our spending, prioritised what matters most, and explored ways to increase revenue from sources other than rates. Along the way, we've had to weigh up some difficult trade-offs. In some cases, options that might bring in additional income could also reduce wider benefits for our community and local economy. Where that's the case, we've taken a longer-term view.

But being "careful" involves some genuine trade-offs, and this is where I need your voice:

- **Big Projects:** Do we hit "pause" on the Davis Library extension to save costs now?
- **Debt & Buffers:** How fast should we pay down what we owe, and do we keep our budgets lean or build in a safety net for the unexpected?
- **The Sarjeant Gallery:** Should entry remain free for everyone, or is it time to look at other models?
- **Whanganui East Pool:** Should the pool open next summer, or take a one summer pause until it's refurbished to help reduce costs whilst it's closed?

We've also made good progress over the past year - supporting community organisations, improving infrastructure, and building on our strengths as a UNESCO City of Design. Looking ahead, we're progressing important work like establishing a new water services organisation with Ruapehu, advancing key projects such as the Dublin Street Bridge and 125 Grey Street, and exploring new ways to improve housing in our district.

This plan reflects the reality of the environment we're operating in - careful, balanced, and focused on the future. It won't get everything perfect, and there are real choices to make. That's why your feedback matters.

I encourage you to take a look, think about what matters most to you, and let us know your views.

Together, we can keep building a Whanganui that works for today and is ready for tomorrow.

Kōrero mai. Have your say.



Andrew Tripe
Mayor of Whanganui

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Let us know what you think



This year we are consulting on a number of different things. You can read and provide feedback about all of them at www.whanganui.govt.nz/HaveYourSay You can choose to provide feedback on everything, or just one or two things.

We are seeking feedback on:

Annual Plan 2026/27

This annual plan represents a difficult balancing act.

We want to know if you think we have the balance right between rates affordability, managing our risks, delivering services that are important to the community and planning for our future.

We're open to ideas about how to do things differently to get this balance right.

Fees and charges

As part of the annual plan we are proposing to increase most fees and charges for council services by 3% to cover the cost of inflation, and we'd like your feedback on these.

Framing the Long-Term Plan 2027-2037

We've started planning for the next 10 years. As a first step, we have some general questions about whether you feel you get value for your rates, the services council delivers and what we could do differently.

Our policies and bylaws

We have a policy and a couple of bylaws that we are required by law to review. While we're not proposing to significantly change them, we do need to consult with the public on them. The policy and bylaws are:

Keeping of Animals, Poultry and Bees Bylaw

Let us know what you think about how we regulate the control and keeping of animals – from chickens to bees (so we don't cock it up - pun intended!).

Dog Control Policy and Bylaw

Let us know what you think about how dogs are controlled in Whanganui.

Have your say

Tēnā, tukua mai ō whakaaro / We'd like to hear from you

This is your opportunity to contribute and have your say on all the matters outlined in this document. We will be consulting from Tuesday, 31 March until Sunday, 3 May 2026.

All feedback must be submitted by 5.00pm, Sunday, 3 May 2026.



Make a submission online

www.whanganui.govt.nz/annual-plan



Pick up a hard copy

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You can also

Email your submission

policysubmissions@whanganui.govt.nz

Give us a call

(06) 349 0001

Post your submission

**Whanganui District Council
PO Box 637, Whanganui 4541**

You will also be given the opportunity to speak to councillors directly about your feedback at a council hearing.



There's some hot topics to think about

We've thought carefully about what should be in this plan. We want to hear what you think about it overall, and we're especially interested in your views on these key topics.

Door charges at the Sarjeant Gallery

The council looked at whether to charge an entry fee for out-of-town visitors to Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery.

A charge could bring in between \$30,000 and \$396,000 a year to help cover running costs. At best, this will save \$20 on rates per household per year. But the evidence shows it would likely lead to fewer people visiting.

Right now, the Gallery attracts more than 100,000 visitors each year. These visitors spend an estimated \$32.6 million in Whanganui annually and support around 236 jobs. If visitor numbers dropped, the local economy could lose between \$5 million and \$14 million each year.

Taking everything into account, the council decided not to introduce a door charge at this time. However, Elected Members know people may have different views — especially given the cost of living and how council services are funded.

What do you think

Should entry to the Gallery stay free, or should some visitors pay?

Whanganui East Pool

Whanganui East Pool is planned to be refurbished, but it won't be upgraded in time for next summer. In the meantime, the pool can still open as usual, although the experience is more limited than it used to be (for example, some features are no longer available, like the hydro-slide).

Council discussed whether it's worth opening the pool for one more summer before it's refurbished, or whether we should take a one summer "pause" and put that money toward keeping rates lower. Not opening for that one summer would save around \$190,000 for the year, which is roughly \$10 off the average rates bill.

At this stage, council's direction is to keep the pool open next summer, but we're keen to understand what the community thinks.

What do you think

Should Whanganui East Pool open next summer, or take a one summer pause until it's refurbished and to help reduce costs whilst its closed?

Delaying the Davis Library extension

We had planned to extend the Davis Library, but costs have increased a lot since the work was first priced before COVID-19.

Council has decided to delay the extension. We want to take another look at whether it still makes sense to go ahead in today's financial climate, and how it compares with other priorities.

We will still replace the roof on the existing library, as this work is urgent.

What do you think

Should we delay the library extension so we can review the costs and compare it with other projects in the Long-Term Plan?

Slowing down loan repayments

Last year, council chose to pay an extra \$590,000 on top of our usual loan repayments (around \$10.9M) to reduce our debt faster.

Lower debt gives us more room to borrow if we face unexpected costs or emergencies. It made sense to do this when rates increases were very low (in fact, we had the lowest in the country last year).

This year is different. Costs are higher and the proposed rates increase is larger. Because of this, council is proposing to return to our normal loan repayment programme by removing the extra \$590,000 and further reduce loan repayments by \$200,000. This has reduced rates by \$790,000 which equates to \$42 for the average ratepayer.

What do you think

Should we keep paying off debt faster (and have slightly higher rates), or reduce the loan repayments to help keep rates as low as possible?

Keeping budgets lean – or building in a buffer

We've generally aimed to keep our budgets lean. That means we only collect what we need from ratepayers each year, to help keep rates as affordable as possible.

This approach keeps costs down in the short term. However, it also means we have less flexibility when unexpected costs come up. When that happens, we may need to borrow more or increase rates.

This year is a good example. We're facing a number of financial pressures, including:

- an \$11 million loss on our investment in NZICPA (which will add about 0.8% to next year's rates increase)
- potential future costs at the Port
- inflation increasing our costs, such as the impact on fuel prices due to the tensions in the Middle East and increases in energy costs.

An alternative approach would be to build more of a buffer into our budget each year. This could help manage unexpected costs and smooth rates increases over time. However, it would likely mean higher rates in the short term.

What do you think

Should we keep our budgets lean and only collect what we need each year?

Or should we build in a buffer to better manage unexpected costs, even if it means slightly higher rates now?



The context of this Annual Plan

We've gone to great lengths to keep rates as low as possible

The proposed average rates increase for 2026/27 is 5.8%.



This is the average across all types of properties, but your rates increase will depend on a number of factors including how much your property valuation has moved compared to other properties.

To see what this means for you, you can check your property's proposed rates for 2026/27 on our website:
www.whanganui.govt.nz/Property-and-Rates/Rates/Property-Rating-Search

We know no-one likes paying more rates – especially when the increase is above the rate of inflation. But we need to balance affordable rates with providing the services our community values, now and into the future.

Most people value the council's core services, like roads, libraries, parks and swimming pools. We also want the things that make Whanganui a great place to live, such as the gallery, museum and events. Many people also expect the council to support community groups – those helping people in need, caring for the environment and making Whanganui a safe and enjoyable place to be.

The council is working to keep rates as affordable as possible while continuing to deliver the services and facilities our community relies on.

We're turning over all the financial "rocks" to:

- find ways to run services more efficiently
- focus spending on what matters most
- increase income from sources other than rates, where we can
- manage debt carefully to support long-term financial stability.

We're balancing costs, risks and priorities

The council is balancing a number of financial pressures while trying to keep rates as affordable as possible for households and businesses.

The cost of delivering services is rising. Inflation, a weaker New Zealand dollar and increasing regulatory requirements are all pushing up costs. There is also uncertainty around fuel prices, with tensions in the Middle East creating a risk of higher or more volatile costs for transport, construction and day-to-day operations.

At the same time, the council is managing an ageing asset base. Maintaining and replacing infrastructure such as roads, water services and community facilities is becoming more expensive, and new investments are adding to ongoing costs through higher depreciation.

The proposed average rates increase is around 5.8 percent. However, changes in property values mean some households may see higher or lower changes than this, which can create affordability pressures and concern in the community.

Overall, the council is weighing affordability today against the need to manage risk, maintain services and invest for Whanganui's future.

Our only constant is change

There are several things happening nationally that affect how the council works. The government is making changes to water services, looking at rates limits and reforming planning laws. It has signalled a major reorganisation to simplify local government across New Zealand. These changes will affect how councils are structured and funded and how we deliver services in the future.

A lot of this is outside the council's control – but it still shapes the choices we have to make. So, our focus is on managing money carefully, keeping essential services running well and staying flexible so we can respond as things change.



What we're focusing on – our community, our economy, and reliable services

We're focusing on the things that matter most to our community – strong neighbourhoods, a healthy local economy and reliable services.

We're working with Iwi, community groups and local organisations to strengthen connections and create welcoming places. This includes upgrading parks and community facilities, planning for our coastline, adding solar power to community sites and progressing projects like North Mole.

We're supporting jobs and growth by promoting Whanganui as a creative and innovative place. We're hosting the Festival of Design, improving access at the airport, building on our UNESCO City of Design status, and exploring opportunities like medical training placements.

We're also investing in the services people rely on every day. This includes improving drinking water services, upgrading water treatment plants, progressing key roading and stormwater projects, expanding wastewater connections, and continuing work on the Mountains to Sea cycle trail.

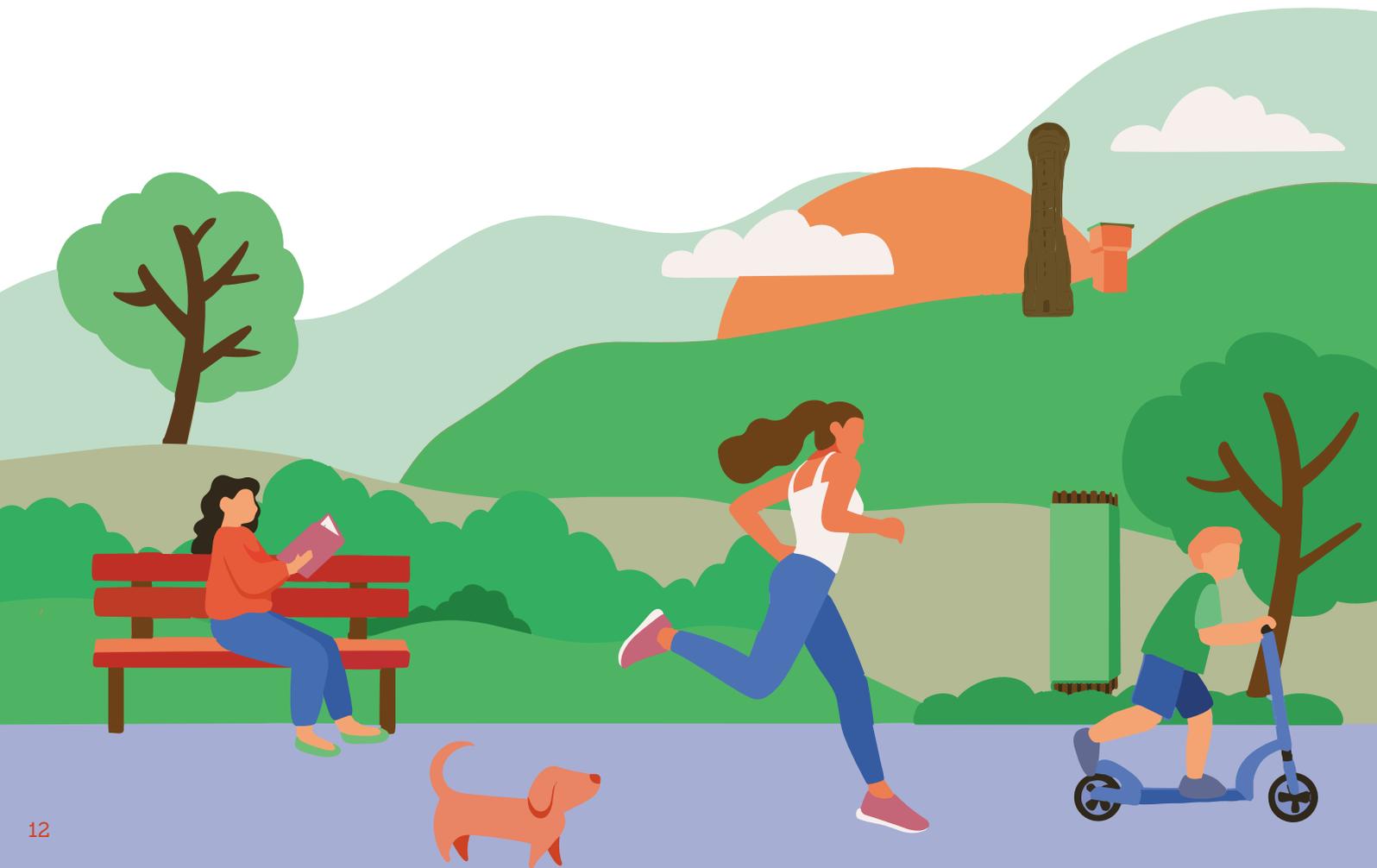
What is an annual plan?

An annual plan is the council's budget for the year. It sets out what we plan to do, how much it will cost, and how it will be paid for.

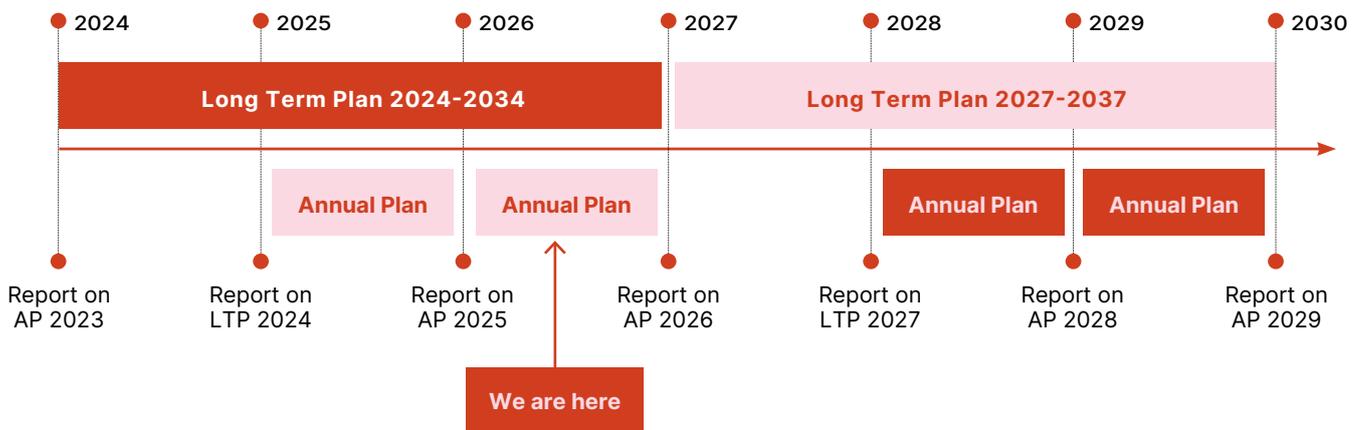
In simple terms, we work out the cost of delivering services and facilities, then figure out how much needs to be collected through rates and other income.

Each year, we also review our plans to reflect changing circumstances. This might mean adjusting what we do, when we do it or how we fund it.

The 2026/27 Annual Plan is the third year of our current long-term plan.



Council planning and performance monitoring cycle



What's the process?

Here's what you can expect if you want to take part:

<p>Consultation opens</p> <p>31 March 2026</p>  <p>You can read the plan and share your feedback by answering a quick survey. All information can be found at www.whanganui.govt.nz/annual-plan</p>	<p>Consultation closes</p> <p>3 May 2026</p> <p>Make sure you've sent us your feedback by this date.</p>	<p>Hearings</p> <p>12 – 13 May 2026</p> <p>If you'd like to speak to your submission, you can present your views to councillors in person.</p>
<p>Decisions are made</p> <p>26 May 2026</p> <p>Councillors consider all feedback and make final decisions.</p>	<p>Annual Plan 2026/27</p> <p>30 June 2026</p> <p>The Annual Plan 2026-27 is adopted by the council.</p>	<p>Annual Plan 2026/27</p> <p>1 July 2026</p> <p>The Annual Plan 2026/27 comes into effect. Rates for the 2026/27 year will apply from 1 July 2026.</p>

The council is with you every minute of your day

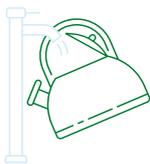
When people think of rates, they often think of places like libraries, parks, or museums. But the truth is, council services quietly support your day from the moment you wake up until you head to bed.

Here's what a typical day might look like.



Morning – Rise and shine

Start your day with some fresh air or a stretch at one of the **144 parks, reserves, and sportsgrounds** we look after across the district.



First things first

Fill the kettle or pour a glass of water straight from the tap – **clean, safe drinking water is there whenever you need it.**



Morning routine

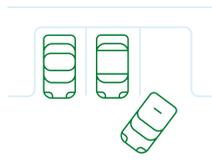
Showers, sinks, toilets – all working thanks to **285 kilometres of wastewater pipes** doing their job behind the scenes.



Heading out for the day

Whether you're driving, walking or cycling, you're travelling on **850km of roads, 345km of footpaths** and across **72 bridges.**

You might even pass through the airport or take a ride in the historic underground elevator.



Out and about

Popping into town? There are over **760 metered parking spaces** helping keep things moving and accessible.



Time with the kids

From **water play features** and **skateparks** to **16 playgrounds**, there are loads of places for kids to play, explore and burn off energy.



Walk the dog

With more than **7,000 registered dogs** in the district, we focus on responsible dog ownership and animal control to keep everyone safe and comfortable.



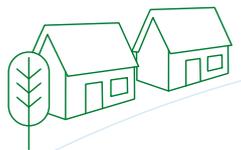
Slow down and switch off

Borrow a book, watch a film, or jump online at one of our **seven libraries**, providing free access to learning, ideas and lifelong literacy.



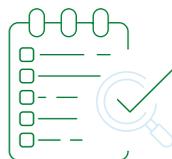
Get cultured

Enjoy **exhibitions, performances, and events** at the arts and cultural facilities we manage for all ages to enjoy.



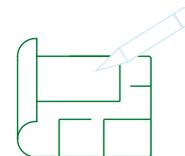
Supporting independence

For older residents, we provide **social housing across 16 complexes**, helping people stay independent and connected to their community.



Keeping Whanganui safe and healthy

We help protect public health by **monitoring food premises, trades and funeral parlours** – and by responding to issues like **noise and illegal dumping**.



Planning for the future

Thinking about building or buying? Each year we assess and monitor around **700 building consents** and **450 LIM applications**, helping Whanganui grow in a way that works for today and tomorrow.



Day or night – we're ready

Emergencies don't keep office hours. Our emergency management team **monitors situations 24/7**, providing advice, education, and support when it matters most.

We've achieved
heaps over the
last year



We've made **strong progress** across the district, supporting our community, investing in infrastructure and **building for the future**.

Stronger communities

We removed overdue fines at the Whanganui District Library. This makes it easier for everyone to return, borrow and learn – and helps create a place where everyone belongs.

We supported 38 community organisations with a total of \$250,000 in funding. Some groups received multi-year funding to give greater certainty and stability.

We worked with the Hindu community to establish a dedicated cultural structure for burials at the Aramoho Cemetery. This ensures our services reflect the needs of a diverse community.

Voter turnout reached 50.3 percent in the 2025 local elections. This is our highest since 2016 and among the strongest results for larger districts nationwide

Infrastructure and resilience

We replaced the roof of the Fordell water reservoir storage tank. This work was brought forward to address safety concerns and maintain a reliable water supply.

We completed a new parallel taxiway at the airport. This improves safety and efficiency and was delivered with support from central government funding.

Environment, culture and place

We supported the expansion of a community-led rowing project to enable wider community use of the space. This includes enhancing the riverbank to support native species and protect habitats in line with Te Awa Tupua.

We refreshed the exterior of the Whanganui Regional Museum. This helps preserve an important heritage building for future generations.

We launched new signage and a mobile guide experience to bring local stories to life across the central city. The project was fully funded through external support.

Economy, skills and opportunity

We partnered with New Zealand Design Week as a Bronze sponsor to host a regional event. With support from Air Chathams and over 15 local businesses, we showcased Whanganui's status as a UNESCO City of Design.

We secured a new aviation training partnership at Whanganui Airport. This supports local jobs and future growth.

We also took the first steps to bring medical students to Whanganui. We are working with partners to explore new training opportunities in the region.

What's planned over the next year?

We're working on a range of projects across the district, focused on **reliable services, strong communities** and **planning for the future**.

Water services and infrastructure

We're setting up a new organisation with Ruapehu District Council to manage drinking water, wastewater and stormwater. This is required under new government rules. From July 2027, it will take over these services for both districts, while keeping infrastructure in public ownership. We're now putting this in place, including appointing a board and chief executive – and planning how services, staff and assets will transfer. The goal is a more reliable and sustainable water system that meets national standards and is affordable for our communities.

We're also upgrading the Whanganui city and Mowhanau water supplies by adding UV treatment and improved chlorination. This will provide extra protection against contaminants and help meet national drinking water requirements. Design work is underway, with construction expected to start later in 2026.

Also in Mowhanau, we're replacing the ageing wastewater plant by connecting the area to the city system. This includes a 13.5km pipeline and new pump stations, providing a more reliable long-term solution.

Work is also underway on the Fox to Fitzherbert Link Road. This includes new roads, stormwater, infrastructure and service upgrades to support housing growth, improve traffic flow and protect Mosston Road as a key freight route. Construction began in October 2025 and is on track for completion by mid-2028.

Planning for growth and the future

The government is changing how planning works in New Zealand. We're preparing for a new regional planning system that will guide how and where Whanganui grows. This includes planning for housing, good urban design, economic development and the infrastructure and services our community needs.

We're also proposing a new, independent housing organisation to improve and grow housing in Whanganui over time. The council currently provides 275 one-bedroom units, many of which are ageing and need upgrading. The proposed organisation would bring a clearer focus on housing with the right expertise, funding and partnerships to improve existing homes and build more over time. The community will have the opportunity to provide feedback before any decisions are made.

Key projects and places

We're planning for the replacement of the Dublin Street Bridge to ensure a safe and reliable connection between Whanganui East and the city. We're working with the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) Waka Kotahi on options and funding, with further detailed work underway to confirm the best approach.

At 125 Grey Street, we're clearing the site and preparing for a future community health hub led by Te Oranganui. Materials are being reused where possible and the site's history is being recognised through recording and design.

We're also transforming the North Mole with Hapū and the Castlecliff community. This includes restoring dunes, completing the final section of the Mountains to Sea cycleway and creating a welcoming destination with a shared path, viewing platform, parking, toilets and a cold shower. Design work is underway, with construction to follow.

Community facilities and spaces

We're upgrading the Whanganui East Pool to improve safety, accessibility and year-round use. This includes improvements to heating, filtration and overall usability, supporting lessons, programmes and everyday use.

Across the district, we're improving community spaces. This includes upgrading the Splash Centre gym, refreshing furniture and equipment in library hubs and adding lighting and power at Castlecliff Beach Park so it can be used safely into the evening.

Environment, resilience and sustainability

We're developing a Coastal Action Plan to help communities at Castlecliff, Kai Iwi and South Beach respond to erosion, storms and climate impacts. At Castlecliff, this work is being led by the community, with council support and guided by Tupua te Kawa.

We're installing solar panels and battery back-up systems at up to six community facilities. This will help these sites stay open and support people during power outages and emergencies.

In addition, we're preparing a new Waste Management and Minimisation Plan. This will set out how we can reduce waste to landfill and improve reuse and recycling, with public consultation later this year.

Economy and connections

We're improving access at Whanganui Airport by upgrading and expanding parking. This will reduce congestion, improve safety and make it easier for passengers, visitors and people with accessibility needs to use the terminal area.

We're also hosting the first New Zealand Festival of Design in October 2026, bringing exhibitions, talks and events to Whanganui and Palmerston North and building on our UNESCO City of Design status.

Making sense of the dollars

Our Financial Strategy is to balance the services the community want with what is it prepared to pay for.

It is built on tightly controlled expenditure, relatively low rates rises and moderate increases in debt to fund large capital projects.

We know keeping rates affordable matters, but the cost of delivering services is rising. Inflation, a weaker dollar, new rules, and higher fuel and construction costs are all adding pressure. At the same time, we need to maintain ageing assets like roads and water services, while also paying for new ones like the Sarjeant Gallery and wastewater treatment plant. Overall, we are balancing affordability today with the need to manage risk, maintain services, and invest in Whanganui's future.

Here's a high-level overview of our current financial projections for the 2026/27 financial year versus what we had projected for 2026/27 in the Long-term Plan, alongside our actual results for 2024/25 and our Annual Plan numbers for 2025/26.

\$ Millions	Year 1 Actual 2024/25	Year 2 Annual Plan 2025/26	Year 3 LTP 2026/27	Year 3 Projected 2026/27
Total capital expenditure	\$47M	\$44M	\$50M	\$37M
Total operating expenditure	\$101M	\$98M	\$100M	\$107M
Average rates increase	11.2%	2.2%	6.6%	5.8%
Rate revenue	\$86M	\$88M	\$98M	\$94M
Total operating funding sources	\$119M	\$116M	\$125M	\$122M
Total assets	\$1,670M	\$1,736M	\$1,691M	\$1,758M
Net debt	\$196M	\$221M	\$231M	\$247M
Debt to revenue ratio	150%	176%	168%	192%
Balanced budget	-\$2.7M	-\$5.5M	-\$1.0M	-\$14.8M



The council is also proposing an unbalanced budget of around \$14.8 million. This means our forecast operating income does not cover our operating expenses, including depreciation. This is mainly driven by higher depreciation costs from rising asset values (especially in areas like roading and three waters) and new infrastructure like the Sarjeant Gallery and the wastewater treatment plant. While we are repaying debt on these new, long-life assets we don't believe it's fair for the current ratepayers to also fund the replacement of the same assets many years into the future. That would mean current ratepayers were effectively paying twice for these assets.

The balanced budget figure is also impacted by some one-off projects being funded through borrowing to spread their cost over time; this contributes \$6.8 million of the unbalanced budget. This approach helps smooth rates in the short term, but means some costs are carried into the future and will need to be managed carefully.

What this means for your rates

We've worked to keep the proposed average rates increase for 2026/27 as low as possible, and we are proposing an average rates increase of 5.8%.

It's important to note that these figures are averages only. **What you pay may be higher or lower depending on your property – especially this year because of the rating revaluation.** Rates vary based on factors like your property's value, land size and the services you receive, such as wastewater or kerbside recycling.



To see what this means for you, you can check your property's proposed rates for 2026/27 on our website:
www.whanganui.govt.nz/Property-and-Rates/Rates/Property-Rating-Search

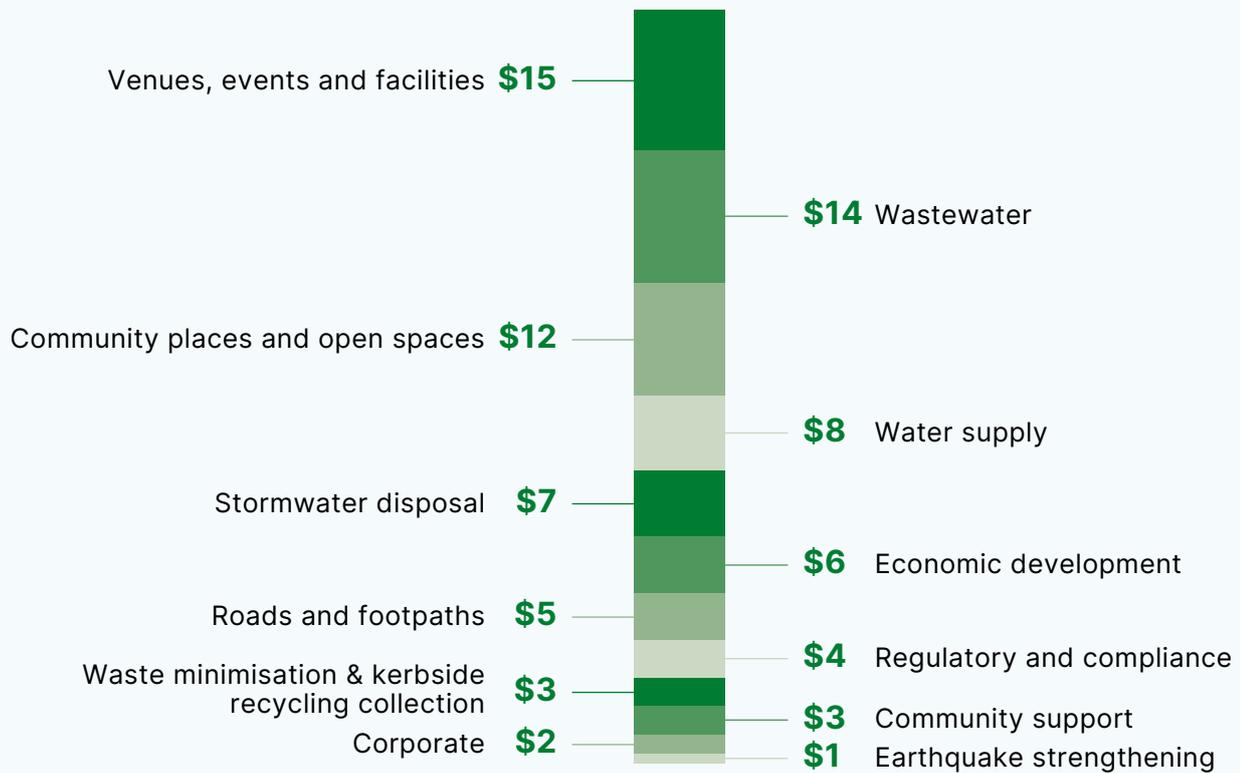
Proposed average rates and rates increases for 2026/27

Property type	Average land value	Average capital value	Proposed average 2026/27 rates	Proposed rates \$ increase	Proposed rates % increase	Average rates increase last 5 years
Residential	\$256,000	\$537,000	\$4,153	\$205	5.2%	7.6%
Lifestyle	\$507,000	\$809,000	\$3,615	\$320	9.7%	9.3%
Farming	\$1,603,000	\$1,945,000	\$6,258	\$276	4.6%	5.9%
Commercial	\$623,000	\$2,020,000	\$14,299	\$1,103	8.4%	5.4%
Overall	\$347,000	\$714,000	\$4,824	\$263	5.8%	7.1%



What do your rates pay for?

The proposed average weekly residential rate of \$80 funds the following council services:



Tell us what you think

Tēnā, tukua mai ō whakaaro / We'd like to hear from you

This is your opportunity to contribute and have your say on all the matters outlined in this document. We will be consulting from Tuesday, 31 March until Sunday, 3 May 2026.

All feedback must be submitted by 5.00pm, Sunday, 3 May 2026.



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PO Box 637, Whanganui 4541**

You will also be given the opportunity to speak to councillors directly about your feedback at a council hearing.



Supporting documents

This document has been prepared with a number of supporting documents. The supporting information for our proposed annual plan is available on our website:

www.whanganui.govt.nz/annual-plan or call (06) 349 0001 to request a copy

- Full financial statements
- Funding Impact Statement - rates information
- Capital expenditure projects by area
- Disclosure statements

Meet your council

Our mayor and councillors would love to hear your views!

If you want your feedback on the annual plan or our policies and bylaws to be formally considered as a submission it is best to submit through one of the channels listed on pages 5 or 24.



If you'd like a conversation with an elected member, you can find their contact details here:
www.whanganui.govt.nz/elected-members





TE KAUNIHERA Ā-ROHE O
Whanganui
DISTRICT COUNCIL