

Our Community Plan Christchurch O-Tautahi 2004/14 SUBMISSION

Submissions close on 6 May 2004

I do not wish to make a personal submission at the hearings.

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Your Submission:

re Capital Expenditure

I object to \$10million being spent on staff facilities and a new glasshouse at the botanical gardens. The amount seems excessive and I believe this is the wrong time to do these capital works because of the current building boom in Christchurch.

The building industry seems to go in cycles of boom bust and to be more economic, capital works projects of a large scale should be done when the building industry cycle is in a low for many reasons.

1. Labour prices and other costs will be more affordable.

2. Skilled labour tends to go elsewhere/overseas in the low, but better planned capital works would enable that workforce/ratepayers and their families to remain in Christchurch, along with the flow on effects of stable workforce and other economic benefits.

This same reasoning applies to the second large capital work of the Civic Offices Accomodation.

Many years ago a bright spark in government saw the huge payroll expense and had to trim the budget. They initiated a sinking lid policy, of not replacing staff and also decentralised services. This too seems to go in cyles, centralisng then decentralising. Anyway the net result was the number of staff dropped significantly and many building in Wellington became vacant. Add to that the massive impact of even better computer systems and staff numbers dropped further, then departments amalgimated and the workforce were offered more flexible work times and the staff numbers fell further.

I would like to mention the freezing works as an example here, that the plant/machinery and facilities lay idle 15 hours a day, at a huge cost in overheads until shift work was accepted. Well I see a large Civic Building laying idle for most of a day when many/particuly the mother/parent market could be using the same desk to be processing the work at night.

Many government departments have staff sharing desks on a shift work basis. Then you had the government privatisation of much of the work which reduced the staff numbers even further so today you will see alot of vacant office space in Wellington.

Many banks have also downsized and many dont own the buildings they are in any more and whereas they would take up 4-5 floors, 2 will do.

Genenrally if you reduce the amount of money spent on paper, this reduces the amount of paper used, but more - how many people handle that piece of paper, also the data input factor, which totals a huge saving of costs.

**Your Submission
(Cont'd):**

The bigger the building the more your staff numbers will grow exponentially so even the cleaners will have cleaners.

So I suggest you take a good look at your staffing policies and rethink the amount spent on this capital project.

I believe it is extremely excessive, what are you building, an art gallery to put council staff in, or is this monument building for ego?

re rate increases

The plan seems to have the mindset that it's ok to increase costs, when you could be more civic minded and look at reducing costs.

We are a flat city and our capital costs of providing services should be a lot lower than Dunedin and Wellington with the hill factor and Auckland with the mass factor.

I strongly object to the presentation given as part of the token community consultation process. The powerpoint presentation produced a table called Rating Impact and compared the Average capital value of properties in Christchurch, Auckland, Wellington Dunedin and Hamilton, and was suggested that they were comparing apples with apples, in my view these figures were showing the value of housing stock in Christchurch and we must have a lot of low valued properties in order to have an average capital value of \$164,170, thus reflecting a low socio economic zone and proving that many of the Christchurch ratepayers have low incomes and fixed incomes and for this reason, the rates should in fact be reduced, rather than increased. If you wanted to compare apples with apples you would have shown the rates for properties of the same value in each council.

It looks like someone is trying to pull the wool over your eyes and I would prefer to read the figures of a more suitably qualified person such as an economist or statistician rather than an accountant on this matter.

If the two abovementioned capital projects were delayed and revised then there would never be a need to raise the rates or borrow the money.

Allowing for a 2% inflation rate increase is also wrong. Inflation is due mainly to cost increases and manufactured by the thinking of pushing up prices to allow for inflation, which comes first the chicken or the egg, in this case the duck.

I also have to question the financial Overview forecasts, given that the building boom continues for the next 12-18 months or longer conceivably adding at least \$2m to the coffers, then factoring that the valuation department are looking at capital values of property at the end of the year, and with reading that property values in Christchurch have risen on average by 25% this year, irrespective of the rises since the last government valuations, then a 20% rise in the rate take is estimated at \$32m + \$2mil new rates and we are looking at rate take of about \$198million instead of the projected \$173, and whilst the rate take wasn't defined per residential/business mix so possibly a lower differential, but still there is a gaping gap in projections by about \$25million, what figures are correct?

re Rubbish Bags

If you were truly trying to reduce waste, then the council would use the likes of cornstarch rubbish bags instead of plastic rubbish bags.

The council would also adopt the controls on internal paper use, mentioned above, and also look at double sided, smaller text and smaller margins/header and foot margins on all documents to reduce the number of pages used for documents, and electronic input where possible, like this submission process where applicants also do all the data entry.

**Your Submission
(Cont'd):**

The stall on the northern motorway has been atrocious. Instead of spending millions on consultants and reports which seem to replicate previous reports, the money would have better been spent on getting on with it, and had this happened, the project would never have cost as much as today's estimated costs.

I strongly object to the increase in the percentage charged for rural blocks, and trying to ask rural residents to pay a residential rates. We can't keep horses and cows on town sections.

Starting with 3 hectare blocks and seeing what the level of resistance is before charging residential rates on properties up to 100 acres might be a good commercial business practice but certainly a poor public relations exercise from what is essentially a service sector.

We already pay larger rates as our properties are worth more than the average residential property price, thus the council is double dipping. We also pay more for a large property. Our costs are higher than a residence faces, we put in and maintain our own power, water and sewerage.

It was mentioned that property developers do this and then had the maintenance over to the council and the cost to the developer is about \$60,000 per section which is ultimately paid for by the purchaser of the property, well I can only say that the development costs must have doubled overnight from the costs I was looking at for doing just that, whereas the costs for developing a rural block are considerably higher and the rural ratepayer has to maintain the services and pay for the running of these services, which are high.

Will the council be paying for the maintenance and running of the septic tanks and water pumps and in fact replace the damaged equipment? What more services will be provided to the rural ratepayers than is provided today to justify the increase?

If rural ratepayers are going to be charged residential rates for living on the property, will residential customers be charged commercial rates if they run a business from their home?

Farming is a lifestyle 24 hours a day 7 days a week, overseeing and protecting stock and horticultural activities regardless of the block size, so living on the property is required. We can't just go off on holiday and leave the place unattended, nor can we let our animals roam the streets. Our costs are usually larger than living in a residential area like fencing a boundary line might cost \$2,000 in town but rural cost would add a 0.

Previous council policies on rural blocks has forced people out of town to the like of Ohoka to set up small blocks, and these people are now paying rates to other council in effect robbing the Christchurch City Council of rates and causing congestion on the routes into Christchurch. Will the policy of charging residential rates on rural properties run more out of town and further congest the roads and in fact reduce the Christchurch City Council rate take? This move might also put more pressure on rezoning the blocks to residential.

Reviewing each policy on a case by case basis also seems a large cost to go to to net a small return in the amount of rate increase to be charged, my estimate on our property rate increase at \$550 x 280 properties estimated the take at \$154,000, surely council staff would have better ways of saving this amount, when you think of the amount being spent on this exercise.

Regards Denise
ps copy sent to the Press