

Submission on Hutt City Council's Representation Review 2024

Community Boards and Community
Engagement

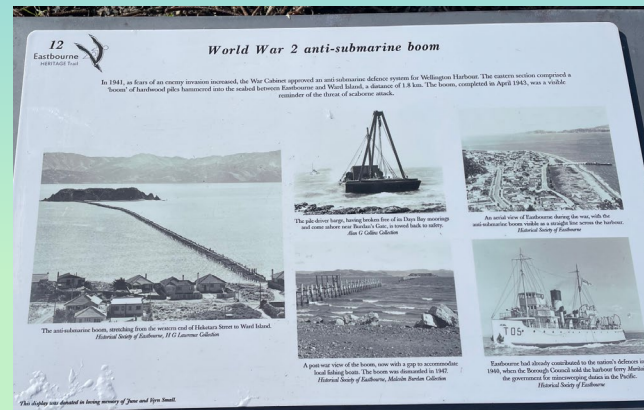
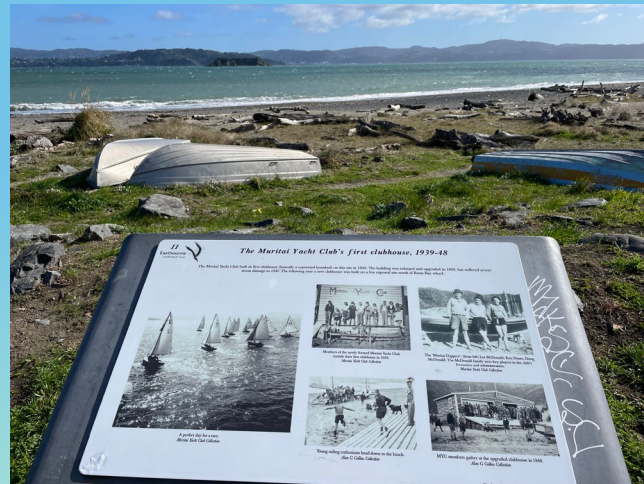
Jeremy Winter

Key Points

1. The actual findings of the Review Panel do not support its recommendation that there are no Community Boards in Hutt City
2. There is no evidence that Community Boards have outlived their usefulness. Their members are our neighbours who give us a voice over local things that effect our lives in an increasingly impersonal digital age
3. Community Boards represent value for money as an effective mechanism – or bridge – for quality engagement between the Council and its citizens
4. Community Boards have yet to be given a chance by Council to operate to their full potential
5. Changing the Community Board structure in Hutt City is premature given the current discussions on amalgamation and ‘Local Water Done Well’

- Support for Community Boards is very strong in communities which have Community Boards: **82%** support in Harbour and Wainuiomata Wards
- Community Boards address the strong desire for clear, accessible and well-promoted structures and arrangements for contacting the Council
- Community Boards are about ‘lived experience’ of that community engaging at ‘their place’ ... builds genuine engagement channels and trust between the Council and the community
- Community Boards can undertake delegated decision-making ... close to the people affected, and undertaking other agreed responsibilities, may encourage greater community participation

Community Boards work well in communities with a strong sense of identity and Community Board members are motivated to take the initiative and find local sponsors to invest in great projects



Footpath mosaics in Eastbourne shopping precinct

Eastbourne Heritage Trail

Wainuiomata, Petone and Eastbourne have unique vulnerabilities and challenges, such as single access road, especially susceptible to bush fires, storms, tsunami, cuts in utilities and services, traffic disruptions with influxes of visitors ...

Community Boards can provide leadership after natural disasters: have local knowledge and contacts; and know who, what and how to best support our communities

Council officers would not be in a position to lead the community if transport and communication links were disrupted.

One Ward Councillor for each of the Wainuiomata, and Harbour Wards cannot hope to be able to provide the same connection between residents and Council



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE EXPO

Is your family and community prepared for disruption, emergencies and climate change?

This FREE expo will include demonstrations, activities, training, information, products and services to help you get ready.

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MURITAI SCHOOL | 10AM TO 3PM
166 MURITAI RD, EASTBOURNE, LOWER HUTT | **SUN 24 MARCH**

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eastbourne.nz/resilience-expo



The poster features a colorful illustration of a coastal town with houses, a lighthouse, and people enjoying outdoor activities like cycling and walking. The background shows rolling green hills and a blue sky.

Community Boards are value for money

The cost of running three Community Boards in 22/23 was \$358,000

Per capita = \$11 per year (33,000 est population Petone + Wainuiomata + Eastbourne)

Average increase in rates for 2024 across the Hutt City is \$560 per annum

➡ Cost of the Community Boards is insignificant compared to our **increase** in rates

🤔 How much would it cost for Council to establish and service new alternative arrangement to fulfill the Report's recommendations (in section 10) for Hutt City Council to improve community engagement?

🤔 What is the 'cost' of losing the goodwill of existing Community Board members already doing this work and keen to do more?

The responses to the Panel over *reasons for no community boards in the city were*

- *concerns regarding costs: 6%*
- *questioning effectiveness and utility: 3%*
- *redundancy and duplication of efforts: 3%*

In concluding, it is acknowledged that

“.. community boards, in both Lower Hutt and more generally across the country, have not been as effective as they could have been.

This is in large measure, a result of actions, or lack of action, by parent councils over the years”



Surely the solution is

- (a) Community Boards are better supported by councils
- (b) Community Boards are established in other distinct Hutt City communities with particular challenges, eg Stokes Valley, Western Hills

In any event, Council should wait for the outcomes of amalgamation discussions before making changes

What I sent in ...

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A submission on

Report and recommendations of the Independent Representation Review Panel on Hutt City Council's Initial Representation Proposal – June 2024

regarding...

Section 9: Effective and fair representation and the community boards option

Summary

The report of the independent Panel reveals there are flaws in its research and analysis which cast serious doubt on its decision to recommend there be no community boards in Lower Hutt and the three existing community boards be disestablished. These weaknesses are:

1. Information asymmetry. Assumptions made about the effectiveness and potential efficacy of community boards is based on perceptions from across the entire city and yet only citizens in three communities have experience with community boards. Furthermore, it is not clear how many, if any, of the independent panel live in, or have lived in, areas served by community boards.
2. Equity is confused with Equality: the report notes that community boards are **not equally distributed** throughout the whole city but fails to recognise that the boards which are in place may in fact be helping to address **equity** issues, such as access to resources, influence, mitigating vulnerability.
3. It is illogical and unfair to penalise the victim. The report recognises that it is the councils – much more than community boards – that have failed in their obligations. It is primarily Council's fault that Community Boards have not been given a chance to shine and yet it's Community Boards which are now in grave danger of being handed the death sentence for not being good enough.
4. Lack of evidence is provided to support the "belief" of the Panel that community boards have outlived their relevance and purpose. Regardless of any historical antecedents, there are valid reasons for persevering with the three community boards and extending the mechanism to other communities who also have a strong sense of identity and also face particular challenges (eg Stokes Valley and Western Hills) – in order to ensure they are not disenfranchised.

What you got to read ...

fails and leaks and adversely effects local residents' domestic, commercial, educational and day-to-day recreational activities • vulnerable to bush fires (Eastbourne, Wainuiomata) • vulnerable to rising sea levels and tsunamis (Eastbourne, Petone) • influxes of 'outside' visitors (to Days Bay, Pencarrow Coast, Wainuiomata Coast, The Remutaka Forest Park, Petone's fabulous eateries and extensive beach) that can bring local and essential traffic to a standstill. 3. Penalising the victim From the report Promoting a good understanding of the community board role and encouraging and facilitating community boards in carrying out their role, sits largely with the council concerned. It is the acceptance, or otherwise, of this responsibility, that appears to be a big determinant of whether, across New Zealand, community boards are seen as effective or not With some notable exceptions, councils around the country appear to have made limited efforts to fully inform their community boards about their actual prescribed role, and to encourage and support them in carrying this out. Neither have many councils, again with some exceptions, resolved to delegate significant decision-making responsibilities to their community boards ... potential benefits [from community boards are] subject to better understanding of the community board role and commitment by both the Council and the boards to giving full effect to that role ... the [HCC] Council could better facilitate community discussion, on both local and city-wide issues, by using the boards to engage with their local communities ... the extent of delegations of decision-making responsibilities made by Hutt City Council to its three community boards, is within the common range of quite limited delegations made by most councils across the country ... community boards, in both Lower Hutt and more generally across the country, have not been as effective as they could have been. This is in large measure, a result of actions, or lack of action, by parent councils over the years. This has seen, for example, very limited delegations of decision-making responsibilities to community boards, and an absence of creative uses of boards in areas such as community engagement. The Panel does not see the current limited approaches to community board responsibilities changing in the foreseeable future Comment These observations do not paint a complimentary picture of the councils. Crucially, these observations do not provide a defensible reason for disestablishing community boards. The report acknowledges the potential of community boards – with the right council stewardship and backing – to be fully