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SocialLink Western Bay of Plenty is a registered charity based at The Kollektive in 17th Avenue, Tauranga. It is the umbrella peak body for the social and community sector in the Western Bay of Plenty. Its vision is a resourced, skilled and cohesive for purpose sector enabling communities to flourish. Its purpose is to build the capability, confidence, sustainability and voice of community organisations in the Western Bay of Plenty.

As an umbrella organisation, SocialLink is involved in supporting social service and community organisations doing their work, as well as advocating in various ways for social justice and equity of opportunity for all people living in the WBOP.

Submission on Smartgrowth Strategy 2023-2027

SocialLink recognises that population growth will continue in the western Bay of Plenty and sensible long term plans are required to provide healthy affordable housing, work and income, education, recreation and leisure opportunities for all, safe and socially inclusive, vibrant communities, as well protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

We acknowledge the challenges set out in the Strategy that face the sub-region. We acknowledge housing intensification is required as well as a multi modal transport system.

We wish to focus in this submission on the needs of the substantial group of people in the western Bay of Plenty who will not have the wealth to own or rent housing of their choice. They will likely have limited financial means in general to have a secure and settled future.

They are therefore very dependent on their needs being met in the Smartgrowth Strategy.

We acknowledge there are many things that need to be taken into account in planning for the future. In this submission we want to concentrate on a few elements that we believe would contribute to a liveable region for all the people who live here.

General points

‘Vision’ should be revised to reflect contemporary perspectives

The current Smartgrowth vision is ‘Western Bay – a great place to live, learn, work and play.’ (pg 16). With respect, this does not present as a vision reflecting contemporary and likely future

aspirations. It seems outdated and bland. 'Great' for example, can be defined in a myriad of ways. It also focuses only on human expectations and activity, with no reference to how humans are part of the natural world, and that our activity impacts on the climate, nature, wildlife and the general environment to their and our detriment.

We acknowledge the strategy seeks to address the four Local Government Act wellbeings (environmental, social, cultural and economic). However we think the vision itself should be more in step with contemporary concerns such as sustainability, protection of our environment, equity, inclusiveness, and health. Visions are important, they underpin the heart of our thinking, feeling and action.

Below are some examples of what other regions' future plans include in their vision elements which we think are more on track:

- 'Liveable, safe, sustainable and healthy place.'(Greater Christchurch);
- Several phrases form the vision for the Future Proof Strategy for the Hamilton/Waikato area: *A diverse and vibrant city centre, thriving towns and rural communities, place of choice, variety of housing options, protection of natural environments, landscape and heritage, productive partnerships, sustainable infrastructure and resource use, responds to climate change urgently, building resilience and supporting the transition to low carbon economy* (Future Proof Strategy, Waikato)

It would be valuable to incorporate the values expressed by tāngata whenua on pg 61 of the Strategy into this region's vision. The values expressed are

“Manaakitanga – respect and care for others:

We build warm and affordable homes and communities for all socioeconomic backgrounds. We also are good ancestors who plan and make decisions for our mokopuna and future generations.

Kaitiakitanga – environmental responsibility and reciprocity:

We are dependent on the natural world for their well-being and survival and therefore have a responsibility to care for and protect the environment in return. We are good ancestors who leave the natural environment in a better state for our mokopuna and future generations. Environmental reciprocity involves moving away from an exploitative mindset and creating a more balanced relationship between human activity and nature to ensure the health and wellbeing of all.”

These values will also resonate with many people who are tau iwi, 'reflecting the interconnectedness between people, place and space and recognising the need for a healthy environment for future growth that is responsive to the concerns and aspirations of tangata whenua.'

Purpose of the Strategy

“This Strategy aims to provide the blueprint for delivering on a well-planned and well-functioning urban environment and wider sub-region.” Pg 13

While we understand the Strategy sets high level direction, in some ways the Strategy may be overemphasising high level broad challenges in comparison to what can be done.

Many of its opportunities on page 40 are at a high level rhetorical statement – ‘encouraging’, ‘creating’ ‘enhancing’.

It would be helpful to have more practical ideas, detail and examples on what and how things can be achieved, which in turn could help lead and focus direction.

While the ‘how to’ options might be laid out in the Implementation Plan, we think some of the thinking about this would be helpful to lay out in the Strategy.

1. Housing Issues

(Transformational Direction 1 Homes for Everyone, Chapter 7).

We acknowledge the concern and challenges around catering for people’s housing needs over the next few decades.

One of the Growth Directives states that ‘A range of housing types, tenures and price points is provided within all growth areas and Maori land.’

Housing will need to include well-designed and affordable accommodation for low income generations, accessible homes for people with disabilities, growth in multi-generational households and more options for single person households.

Housing options for older people

As noted in the Strategy, the older age group of over 65 years is going to be a considerable proportion of the population. They will be nearly one in three in Tauranga by 2030. However there is limited information in the Strategy on specific ideas taking into account and planning for this impending wave.

Many older people with personal options or wealth open to them will sell and buy or make arrangements with family in the available private housing market, irrespective of regional plans.

However to accommodate the financial, physical and lifestyle needs of older people who have limited options, we think the Smartgrowth Strategy needs to plan for the following types of housing throughout the western in each of the locations.

- Secure rental based accommodation for single older people living on superannuation only or with very limited savings. This is a significant group who are or will be at risk of homelessness. Abbeyfield is one housing model where a group of residents live independently and share meals prepared by a housekeeper, see <https://www.abbeyfield.co.nz/> Funding for these complexes is currently raised through grants, fundraising, mortgage and similar. One is already developing in Katikati. As part of the Smartgrowth Strategy there may be ways to support other Abbeyfield developments through local structured support eg identifying and securing suitable land, funding and community housing trust partnerships.
- Other options along similar lines could be fostered and enabled through planning, house modification and other support. These include co-housing with shared common areas, where residents participate in daily tasks, social activity and joint decision-making. Options

to have the choice to live with similar age groups or live together with people of different ages could be catered for.

- Small stand or duplex houses/units with single or two bedrooms for rental or purchase (standalone, duplex, terraced, apartment options) as more older people seek to downsize.
- Housing/apartment complexes can be built to accommodate a diverse demographic groups as well as including gardens and local businesses within them.
- Support for turning houses into 'flating arrangements' for older people such as doing modifications.
- Multi-generational options for extended families
- Retirement villages provided by private developers or community trust partnerships
- 'Rest home' facilities to provide care and support for people who are unable to remain living by themselves.
- Aged care and dementia care facilities – there will be an increasing need for these.
- Papakainga housing for kaumatua (including multi-generational housing).

We expect the Connected Centres will have a range of housing options and social infrastructure.

What is good well-designed housing for older people that meets environmental, access and social cohesion goals are also likely be good housing options for other groups, particularly for those with limited financial resources. Some of what is built for older people will be repurposed as the 'baby boom' generation tails away.

2. Provision and development of green space including public parks

Green space is identified in the Strategy as important for a range of solid reasons. However there is limited mention about specific objectives and activities.

We note that the transformation Goal **0.5 Restore and enhance ecosystems for future generations** is the only one referring to the natural environment. However it does not specifically refer to green space/parks.

Recommendation: Plan for an urban public garden/botanical garden accessible by all ages and abilities.

We suggest the Growth Directives include mention of development and retention of land so people have access to green space public parks with trees, gardens and nature, no matter their income, age or mobility level.

We believe it is important that the Strategy pushes for purchase or redeployment of land for a public park/botanical garden within the urban boundaries of Tauranga, as the largest regional city. A common feature of many cities is a large public park, often with a botanical garden that provides education and research efforts to help the local community with planting and gardening suitable in the local climate, and that are open to and accessible by all.

Tauranga is very poorly off for such urban parks, presumably due to lack of visionary planning by our previous city councils. It is difficult to understand why land was not been set aside for this purpose during the various iterations of council since the 1960s. While the western Bay of Plenty area does have several parks outside the city boundary such as McLaren Falls Park and TECT Park, these are some kilometres away and only accessible by vehicle.

(Other cities often have similar parks outside urban boundaries as well as their large urban garden park, so local authorities cannot use the existence of these two parks to say we have provided along the same lines as other cities).

Perhaps too much emphasis has been put on the harbour and beaches as people’s recreational places. These areas will be less accessible to many people in terms of hot climate, sea rise and the proportion of the population in the older age group.

The Western Bay of Plenty is blessed with beautiful coast line, beaches, rivers and estuaries and opportunities for people to walk in native forests (‘bush’) such as in the Kaimai Mamaku ranges. However for many people such options are not what they will enjoy, or the sites are beyond their physical safety, mobility limits or they can’t afford to get there.

On the other hand, a large urban public garden will be generally reachable to all through private vehicle, bus, cycling or walking.

Urban Tauranga does have large green areas such as Kopurererua Reserve and Carmichael’s Reserve, with walking, cycling and wildlife and water management areas, cultural heritage areas and in the case of Carmichael’s Reserve, a playground. However these reserves offer a different experience to green space public gardens.

Public gardens such as botanical gardens are developed in a way that means they are more accessible and useable to all age groups, from infants to the very elderly as well as people with different levels of mobility and ability. They generally have multi assets such as sweeping lawns, places where people can picnic or sit comfortably, paths, large trees, gardens, glass houses, water features, sculptures, playgrounds and so on.

The table below reveals that we have less hectares devoted to these types of large urban public gardens and parks than most other cities or large towns in New Zealand. Several smaller cities and towns in terms of population have larger public parks than Tauranga.

Table: Examples of Public Gardens and Parks within New Zealand city boundaries with trees, grass areas, gardens, walks and passive recreation areas

City	Estimated 2023 Population	Examples of Public Gardens and Parks
Tauranga	158,000	Yatton Park (7 hectares), Memorial Park (11 ha)
Hamilton	180,00	Hamilton Gardens (54 ha) , Hamilton Lake Domain (101 ha)
Dunedin	130,000	Dunedin Botanic Garden (33 ha) Town Belt (202 ha)
Invercargill	57,000	Queens Park (80 ha)
Palmerston North	90,000	Victoria Esplanade (26 ha)
New Plymouth	88,000	Pukekura Park and Brooklands (52 ha).
Oamaru	13,000	Oamaru Public Gardens (13 ha)
Timaru	27,000	Timaru Botanic Gardens (25 ha), Centennial Park (65h), Caroline Bay (34 ha)
Nelson	54,000	Botanical Reserve (12 ha), Queens Gardens (2 ha)
Whanganui	48,000	Rotokawau Virginia Lake (25 ha)
Queenstown	16,000	Queenstown Gardens (14ha)
Napier, Hastings, Havelock North	148,000	Napier Botanical Gardens (7 ha) Keirunga Gardens (17ha)
Rotorua	77,000	Government Gardens (20ha) Centennial Park (20 ha)

Tauranga city has many small reserves some of which fairly narrow and link one part of a suburb to another such as through The Lakes area or in Papamoa, but these are not particularly usable as green, treed and wide open space for people and their families to relax.

All citizens and residents should have access to such a space that a public park can provide and it should be of substantial size. Not only is the aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment of such spaces with family or whanau, there are many health and wellbeing benefits to people able to be surrounded by and relax in nature, in gardens, amongst trees. As the Strategy notes on pg 96, 'Access to nature has benefits for people living with mental illness. A UK study found that people who lived in neighbourhoods with more vegetation and birdlife were less depressed, anxious, and stressed.'

Access to such commons that public gardens provide will be particularly important when there is an emphasis in the built environment on intensification of dwellings, smaller sections and apartment living.

Our public gardens and parks were set aside by forbears for the benefit of all, in the knowledge that it would take many years for trees to grow to stature. We believe it is well past time Tauranga had such a development.

The Strategy notes there are pockets of deprivation and poverty, the most deprived areas being largely urban and close to the centre of Tauranga. They in particular will benefit from access to beautiful, treed public parks and gardens.

Public gardens are also a golden opportunity to educate and demonstrate to the public about plants, gardens and the natural. They would also enhance the experience of living in the WBOP for the wider population as well as for visitors to the region.

The current 85 ha Greerton Maarawaewae reserve/Tauranga Race Course area may be one option to develop. Unfortunately it appears to be one of the last remaining areas of land suitable for a public treed park within the urban area. Its contours mean it is relatively accessible however.

2. Further develop urban existing reserves, parks and esplanades

In terms of building more opportunity for green space development that meets the needs of a more urbanised population, we suggest the 50 year strategy could include reviewing existing ways small reserves and parks belonging to the local Councils are used. Could they be repurposed with community input to enhance community connectedness, natural space enhancement, biodiversity of insect and plant life for instance?

For example, Tauranga City Council's Reserve Management Plan¹ lists 292 reserves, parks and esplanades. Some of these have historical, cultural or natural significance. Others are quite small and perhaps could be developed into community gardens or allotment space still owned by Council but peppercorn rented to local residents.

The Strategy notes in terms of housing, connected living and that *"many purchasers are not demonstrating a strong desire to "downsize". They are not yet seeing the value of living smaller but*

¹ Tauranga City Council (2019) Tauranga Reserve Management Plan (2019) Reserve Specific Information

closer to services...It is imperative to build climate resilient communities, however the western Bay as a community does not yet recognise the benefits of the "15-minute neighbourhood", over the "quarter acre paradise"." (pg 112)

Provision of amenities such as quality public parks are likely to help enhance the benefits of living in more intensively developed urban communities.

These ideas may be seen as too minor or too detailed, but the point we are trying to make is there are a range of things we feel could be encouraged as part of a 30 to 50 year plan that give optimism and hope to make our local places friendly, socially inclusive and liveable and at the same time be sustainable and supportive of nature.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

We would like to make an oral submission.

Ngā mihi

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