

# BAY BUZZ

## BayBuzz Questions & Responses for Napier City Mayoral Candidates

### **NCC plans to spend \$701 million through to 2034 to improve water infrastructure. Is this appropriate and who should pay?**

**Richard McGrath:** I believe we have struggled to prioritise and deliver spending \$20m on water annually, now we are going to be capable of spending \$70m plus annually, why weren't we delivering this over the last few years when water was said to be our number one priority. Who should pay? With council assets lasting from 30-80 years then intergeneration payment is a fair and practical way for the end user to pay for the service or facility they use or receive.

**Nigel Simpson:** I support Napier having water infrastructure that meets national standards and delivers water quality that meets health guidelines. It is necessary for Council to invest for improvement and set programmes to influence priorities for the new water entity. Like any utility the users connected to water infrastructure should pay volumetrically for the network they benefit from.

**Kirsten Wise:** Napier has budgeted \$701 million through to 2034 to upgrade and future-proof our drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater systems. This investment is essential to meet health standards, replace aging assets, and protect the environment, it is currently funded by ratepayers. We are proposing to transfer our water assets to a new regional water services entity. This entity would then take over responsibility and funding, however this funding would still be predominantly paid by our community. Until that happens, we must continue our programme to keep our water networks safe and reliable.

### **Does Napier need a new aquatic centre? If so, where?**

**Richard McGrath:** In 8-10 years we will need a new facility. We have just spent money buying us that time. I believe Onekawa is the right place for the facility and ticked many of the boxes set out in Sport NZ's aquatic guidelines.

**Nigel Simpson:** Since 2019 Napier rates payers have been forced to budget and spend up to \$8 Million on keeping the aging Onekawa Aquatic Centre operating, that's nearly a quarter of the 2019 tendered price for a whole new facility! An extensive study identified the Prebensen Drive site as the most appropriate at that time, circumstances have changed since. There is a need to reevaluate what aquatic facilities Napier needs and that analysis should provide current criteria for site evaluation.

**Kirsten Wise:** Napier's current aquatic facility has served our community well, but it now has an estimated lifespan of only around eight more years. That means we need to start planning for its replacement now, so that we're ready before the existing pool reaches the end of its life.

We know this is a significant decision and has a contentious history — the last time we discussed a new aquatic centre with our community, around seven years ago, there was a wide range of strongly held views on whether, where, and how such a facility should be built.

To ensure the decision reflects our community's priorities, we are running a Citizens' Assembly. This group, made up of Napier residents, will consider all the relevant information and community perspectives before making recommendations to Council on what our new facility should include and where it should be located.

This approach allows us to learn from the past, engage more deeply with our community, and make a decision that will stand the test of time.

## **Do you support NCC continuing to dump partially treated wastewater into Hawke Bay?**

**Richard McGrath:** Currently we have consent to continue and have invested millions of dollars in the facility and site, as regulations are updated so will we improve. I'm open to having a conversation as to other options and solutions, but the community would have to want to and be in a position to pay for any other option proposed.

**Nigel Simpson:** Napier needs to develop and implement actions to improve the quality of waste and storm water discharges into Hawke Bay.

**Kirsten Wise:** Napier's wastewater is treated to the standard and conditions required by our resource consent before being discharged out to sea through our 1.5km outfall pipe. It is carefully monitored to ensure it protects both people and the environment.

While the sea discharge method isn't ideal, unfortunately a full land-based discharge option isn't possible for Napier – we simply don't have the amount of land that would be needed to make it work. Instead, we're constantly working to improve how we treat and manage wastewater, so that we can achieve the best possible outcome for our environment and our community. This includes the planning underway for the replacement of our outfall pipe which will be much longer than the current pipe.

## **Name 2-3 specific NCC projects, policies or spends over the past three years with which you personally disagree.**

**Richard McGrath:** The Ahuriri Regional Park, new Council Chambers, and the \$58m Library. These are nice to have but not essentials at this time. Post the 2020 floods, Covid and the Cyclone, we should have been concentrating on water projects. We currently have the same number of water bores as we did 5 years ago and still had water restrictions in mid-April and have only renewed 113m of storm water pipes in the last 2 years. While I agree we needed a new library, I believe a cheaper option should have been considered, noting that South Dunedin's new library is about \$ 22m.

**Nigel Simpson:** The War memorial needed to be reinstated, but I disagree with the nearly 50% overspend (\$1.2M) for a political campaign promise. I agree that we need a better Library and staff accommodation, but disagree with the \$110M commitment commencing during a period when many ratepayers are struggling. Hopefully the current Rating Policy review will bring fairness and equality that the last review failed to do. I'm very disappointed that in 24/25 we justified increased labour costs by 11.75% (within a 23.7% rates increase) only to turn around in 25/26 to slash budgets and cut jobs in an election year, where's the long term strategy in that?

**Kirsten Wise:** When I disagree with a project, policy or spend I work with elected members, the chief executive and council officers to find a solution. An example of this was the draft 2025/26 Annual

Plan which came to us with a proposed 15.7% rates increase – this was unacceptable. I drove the process to find \$7 million of savings and reduce the rates increase to 8.9%.

Another example was the proposed early closure of our Napier CBD library which we consulted on as part of our 2025/26 Annual Plan. We heard loud and clear from our community that this should not happen and again I worked with council officers to find an affordable, practical solution to keep the library open.

## **Do you support building homes in these two areas – Riverbend Road, Ahuriri Station?**

**Richard McGrath:** Yes, we are short of space to build in Napier. Both of these sites will have to comply with the relevant regulations and engineering standards. The developer will then determine if it's financially viable to proceed with the build.

**Nigel Simpson:** Yes, Napier needs more homes, if developers are prepared to design and build hazard resilient suburbs in Riverbend Road and Ahuriri Station let them get on with it.

**Kirsten Wise:** The building of homes in these areas will only happen where the developers can demonstrate, through the resource consent process, that the risk of flooding and weather events can be effectively mitigated. Without that assurance I will not support development in Riverbend Road or Ahuriri Station.

## **Should residential water metering be introduced in Napier?**

**Richard McGrath:** I'm not a big fan of water metering, if its about water conservation lets start with a real education program, if its about leak detection then it's a good tool but we should sort our own water loss issues before we bill everyone else. It is estimated to cost of installing water meters in Napier is \$26m, then there's the ongoing cost of monitoring them.

**Nigel Simpson:** Yes, the current non metred water network is inequitable. Elsewhere consumers who receive a metered water bill quickly learn to reduce wastage to save money.

**Kirsten Wise:** Bearing in mind the proposed establishment of a regional water services entity means the future charging model will sit with that entity, Napier City Council's Long Term Plan currently includes \$2-5 million for installing water meters between 2029 and 2034. This is primarily for leak detection and system monitoring however other benefits include water-use awareness and conservation, and charging based on actual consumption to distribute costs equitably.

I support water metering however any model should include consumer protections using rebate schemes and providing behavioural support – not just pure volumetric billing – to ease the burden. The introduction should be a phased rollout with community engagement through clear consultation and clear communication. This balanced approach helps Napier move toward sustainability and user-pays fairness while mitigating risk and cost concerns.

## **Do you *personally* support retaining Māori seats at your council table?**

**Richard McGrath:** This decision is now in the hands of the community via a referendum, I will respect whatever the result is.

**Nigel Simpson:** Any candidate who can demonstrate they have the governance skills and capability to contest and win an open election will have a seat at the council table.

**Kirsten Wise:** I personally support Māori wards at our council table to ensure fair representation, strengthen Māori voices in decision-making, and bring a long-term view that benefits future generations. This is also aligned with the approach to Māori seats in central government.

## **Do you believe councils' rates should be 'capped' by legislation?**

**Richard McGrath:** Rates capping is worth exploring and understanding exactly what the Government has in mind. It's like all new ideas; it's about knowing what the fishhooks are and see if its suitable for our city. Rather than waiting for it to happen we should be looking at what we are currently prioritizing our spending on and make appropriate changes and savings.

**Nigel Simpson:** Council rates should be capped by common sense and good strategic governance. For Councils that have very low per capita rates, like Napier, there are considerable risks associated with imposing capping legislation.

**Kirsten Wise:** I support exploring a rates cap model that allows us to fund essential services sustainably but gives our community confidence we're not spending on 'nice to haves'.

## **Does Hawke's Bay need five councils, or do you support amalgamation, in any form?**

**Richard McGrath:** I do not support amalgamation, it certainly hasn't fixed the problems in Auckland, their rates still go up and I believe they have more staff now than when it was 5 councils, Wellington Water is another example of bigger not necessarily being better. Regional set ups haven't worked well for us, think Buses, Hospitals, Civil Defence during the cyclone. Talking amalgamation is just a polarizing distraction from everyone getting on and doing their jobs.

**Nigel Simpson:** If the Government was serious about the cost and imposition of Local Government, they would abolish regional councils immediately.

**Kirsten Wise:** In 2015, our community made its views clear, with 87.68% of Napier residents voting against amalgamation. As Mayor, I remain guided by that decision and respect the strong message our people gave at the time.

That said, communities and circumstances do evolve. If there were ever to be another conversation about amalgamation in the future, it would need to be driven by the people, not by government. Until then, my focus is on what we can do right now — and that's strengthening collaboration and shared services across Hawke's Bay.

We're already seeing the benefits of this approach through initiatives like Hawke's Bay Civil Defence Emergency Management, the joint waste management plan, shared economic development programmes, joint procurement opportunities and shared staff resources. These partnerships help reduce duplication, save costs, and deliver better outcomes for our residents, while still protecting the local voice that communities like Napier value so strongly.

Napier's identity and independence remain important to our community, but so too does the benefit of regional cooperation — and I'll continue to support both.

## **Would you support Councils appointing an independent “Hawke’s Bay Auditor General” to monitor councils’ spending and programme performance?**

**Richard McGrath:** Yes, I have no issues with that, we are already audited annually currently. Will this be an additional cost to the ratepayers?

**Nigel Simpson:** To reduce the cost of Audit, Councils need the ability to choose or competitively tender the contract for their Audit services.

**Kirsten Wise:** I would support exploring the appointment of an independent Hawke’s Bay Auditor General in place of the current model of external audits completed council by council.

A regionally based, visible watchdog that reports directly to Hawke’s Bay residents could help build local trust through transparent, accessible reporting. Publishing plain-language reports, scorecards, and benchmarking tools so that ratepayers can easily see how councils are spending their money and performing. It can take a regional view – comparing performance, highlighting duplication, and identifying opportunities for shared services and efficiencies across councils.

In summary compared with today’s external audits, an Hawke’s Bay Auditor General could potentially deliver greater independence, more regional oversight, stronger performance scrutiny, better transparency, and lower costs.