

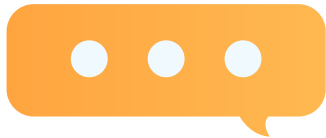
Waitoa Water

Community Panel Recommendations

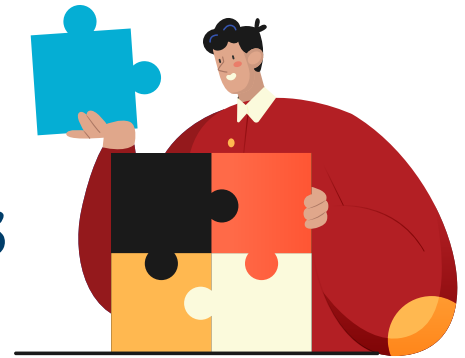
What they mean for Waitoa residents and property owners



Te kaunihera ā-rohe o
matamata-piako
district council



About this booklet



Late last year, a group of Waitoa residents came together as a Community Panel to work through a big question:

How should drinking water be supplied to Waitoa in the future?

This followed Fonterra’s decision to step away from providing water to the settlement, and many years of discussion without a clear path forward. The Panel didn’t rush it. They took time to understand the situation, explore the options, hear from experts, ask hard questions, and talk through what different choices would mean for people in different circumstances across the village.

At the end of that process, the Panel made a set of recommendations to Matamata-Piako District Council.

Council considered those recommendations and agreed with them in principle, acknowledging the time, care, and deliberation the panel brought to the process.

Because Council water services are funded across the district, a decision to connect Waitoa to a Council water supply wouldn’t just affect Waitoa residents and property owners. It would also affect other households who pay for water across the district. For that reason, Council is required to consult more widely before making a final decision.

That district-wide consultation is happening from 30 April until 21 May.

This booklet forms part of that. It focuses on the Community Panel’s process and recommendations, and explains what those recommendations could mean in practice for people living in Waitoa.

How this booklet fits with the wider consultation

As part of the current consultation, Council has released a Change Proposal for the whole district. The Change Proposal sets out the proposal (to connect Waitoa to a Council water supply) at a high level and explains why feedback is being sought.

This booklet play a different role. It is intended specifically for Waitoa residents and property owners, and provides:

- the Community Panel's recommendations, and
- practical information about what those recommendations could mean for people living in Waitoa.

The aim is to share more detail on the things that matter most to the people who will be most affected, even if you're not able to attend a drop-in session.

Council has not made a final decision.

Your feedback - whether you support the recommendations, have concerns, or want to highlight impacts or other considerations - is an important part of the process. The following sections walk through each recommendation and explain what it could mean in practice, to help you decide what feedback you'd like to share.

Some key details (like final costs, delivery timeframes, and how the project would be prioritised) can only be worked through if Council decides to progress the recommendations.

Further information

If you'd like more detail, you can read the Community Panel's full recommendations report, the Council resolutions responding to that report, and the background information provided to the Panel at:

mpdc.nz/waitoacommunitypanel

Information on how to provide feedback, and what the consultation covers, is included later in this booklet and at **mpdc.nz/letstalk** from 30 April.





About the Community Panel and their process

The conversation about Waitoa’s drinking water had been going on for years, but recent changes in water legislation brought it to a head. Fonterra’s decision to step away from supplying water, combined with new drinking water regulations, made it clear the current arrangement was no longer viable.

To help move the issue forward, Council helped establish a Community Panel made up of Waitoa residents. Waitoa residents and property owners were invited to register an interest in being part of the panel and an independent company selected the panel to ensure the group was broadly representative of the Waitoa community.

The Panel’s role was to consider how drinking water should be supplied to Waitoa in the future and to make recommendations to Council on behalf of the community.

The Panel included 17 local residents who met over three full-day sessions and one evening session, across seven weeks. Panel members came from different households and situations, bringing a range of perspectives to the discussions.

What the Panel was asked to do

The Community Panel was asked to make recommendations to Council on how drinking water should be supplied to Waitoa in the future.

To do this, Panel members were asked to:

- explore the realistic water supply options available to Waitoa,
- understand the costs, risks, responsibilities, and long-term implications of each option,
- and consider what support the community might need to transition to a new water supply.

Their role was not to make a final decision, but to provide informed recommendations to Council based on what they believed would best serve the Waitoa community overall.

Information and expert input

To support their work, Panel members received detailed background information and heard directly from experts with technical, regulatory, and local knowledge. They were able to ask questions and explore issues in depth.

This included information on individual self-supply options (such as rainwater and private bores), community-managed water supplies, and Council water supply options, as well as drinking water regulations, compliance requirements, costs, maintenance, fire fighting capacity, and long-term responsibilities. Examples from other communities were also considered.

Options considered

The Panel explored two main options:

- Individual self-supply, including rainwater tanks and private bores
- Council supply

A community-managed bore supply was also investigated. After considering the costs, administration, compliance requirements, and long-term responsibility involved in running such a system, the Panel decided not to progress this option.

This left individual self-supply and a Council supply as the two remaining options. While acknowledging that some households already have self-supply, the Panel concluded that self-supply could not meet the needs of the whole Waitoa community due to space constraints, regulatory requirements, cost, and ongoing maintenance responsibilities.

What this means for the recommendations

The recommendations that follow reflect:



- the information the Panel received,
- the trade-offs that were discussed,
- and the Panel's collective judgement about what would best serve Waitoa in the long term.

While Panel members did not begin the process with the same views, discussion and consideration of the information led to a shared understanding. **The final recommendations were unanimous.**

The following sections step through each recommendation in the same order as the Panel's report and explain what they could mean in practice for Waitoa residents and property owners.

Recommended Option: Council Supply



The recommendation

The Community Panel recommends that Waitoa connect to Council supply, on the understanding that Waitoa property owners would be liable for 15% of the project cost.

This recommendation is based on the information the Panel received, the discussions held, and the trade-offs considered throughout the process.

Why the Panel recommended this

In weighing up the options, the Panel considered what would provide the most safe, reliable, and sustainable long-term water supply for Waitoa as a whole.

The Panel concluded that a Council-managed supply:

- provides a reliable and safe drinking water source that meets legal standards,
- uses modern infrastructure designed to be fit for purpose over the long term,
- provides fire-fighting capacity, which is not available under individual self-supply,
- removes the ongoing responsibility for maintenance, monitoring, and compliance from individual households,
- is the most economically viable option overall when costs and risks are considered across the whole community,
- and supports the long-term wellbeing and value of the Waitoa settlement.

The Panel also noted that Fonterra's contribution toward project costs was a pivotal factor in making this option more affordable for Waitoa property owners and in gaining Panel support for the recommendation.

After weighing up all these factors, the Panel agreed that connecting to a Council-managed water supply was the option that best met the needs of the community now and into the future.



What this means

If Council supply is progressed, it would involve connecting Waitoa to the Council's existing water network in Te Aroha, which has been identified as the most cost-effective supply option.

This would require:

- replacing the existing Fonterra pipework, which does not meet the standards required for a public drinking water supply,
- building a new reticulation network through the settlement, and

- providing a water connection point to the boundary of each eligible property.

Some important points to note:

- The final route, design, and timing of any water network upgrades have not yet been decided.
- A community-managed bore or individual self-supply were not chosen as whole-of-community solutions, as they could not meet the needs of all properties.
- No final decision has been made on whether the project will proceed, or when.

More detail about costs, funding contributions, connection choices, and repayment options is outlined in the sections that follow.

Sub-recommendation 1: Funding contributions

Part A: Fonterra contribution



The recommendation

The Panel recommends that Council honour the original intent of Fonterra's contribution by applying the \$500,000 towards the 15% contribution cost for the impacted Waitoa residents.



What this means

- The \$500,000 contribution from Fonterra is not included in the current high-level cost estimates.
- If Council supply is progressed, this contribution would be used to reduce the amount paid by Waitoa property owners.
- The contribution was a pivotal factor in the Panel's support for the Council supply option.
- Final figures will depend on the confirmed project cost and number of properties in the defined area.

Part B: Waitoa Hall sale proceeds



What the panel recommended

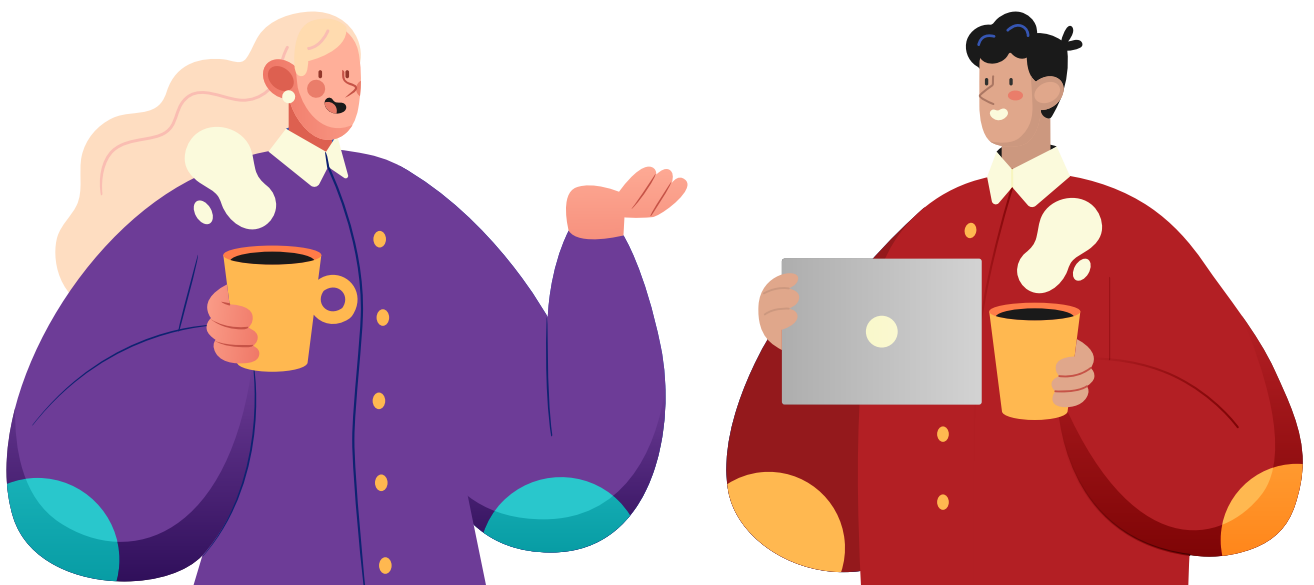
The Panel recommends that the pro-rata proceeds from the sale of the Waitoa Hall be considered to further reduce project costs for households affected by the transition to Council water supply.

The Panel recommends Council allocate the pro-rata funds from the sale of the Waitoa community hall, of \$386,000 toward reducing the project costs for those households affected by the transition to Council water supply (130 out of 209 residents). Applying the funds on a clearly defined pro-rata basis—distributed only among the residents impacted by the water supply change—ensures transparency, fairness, and continuity in how historic community contributions are used.



What this means

- Any decision to use hall sale proceeds would require further consultation with all the ratepayers who previously paid a targeted rate for the Waitoa Hall contributors.
- Use of these funds would be subject to Council approval.
- If agreed, the proceeds would be applied to reduce the costs for affected Waitoa properties, not spread across the wider district.
- At this stage, this option is not confirmed and forms part of the wider consultation.



Sub-recommendation 2: Get the process moving



The recommendation

The Panel recommends that Council move with speed to begin the design and tendering process to reduce the effects of inflation on cost and reduce impacts from the transition to Waikato Waters Ltd.

The Panel would like Council to consider the most economic and strategic route including the benefits that the route via SH26 may provide to the wider district and the Waihou community if they were to also migrate to Council supply.

Why the Panel made this recommendation

During their discussions, the Panel consistently returned to the risks associated with delay.

In particular, Panel members noted that:

- construction and infrastructure costs tend to increase over time, meaning delay could make the project less affordable,
- delays reduce the benefit of fixed contributions, such as the Fonterra contribution, as costs continue to rise over time,
- discussions about Waitoa's water supply have already been ongoing for many years, contributing to frustration and uncertainty in the community, and
- the upcoming transition from Council to Waikato Waters Ltd introduces additional uncertainty around timing and project prioritisation.

For these reasons, the Panel emphasised that action to reduce the effects of delay should be prioritised, particularly where delays could increase costs or reduce the value of fixed contributions.



What this means

At this stage, no design work or tendering has been started, and no timeframe has been confirmed.

If Council decides to progress the recommendations:

- initial work would be needed to confirm design details, route options, and accurate costings,
- Council would seek to progress this work promptly, recognising the cost risks associated with delay,
- and the project would ultimately sit with Waikato Waters Ltd after the transfer of water services on 1 October 2026.

While Council would continue to advocate strongly for the project as a shareholder of Waikato Waters Ltd, delivery timing and prioritisation would not sit with Council once the transition occurs.

The Panel's recommendation reflects a desire to provide certainty for the Waitoa community and to avoid further cost increases driven by delays.

Sub-recommendation 3: Repayment plans



The recommendation

The Panel recommends that 4 repayment options be available: upfront (no interest), 3 years, 5 years, and 7 years.

The Panel also recommended that:

- any interest applied should be fixed for the chosen term, and
- Council clearly communicate what support options are available for households experiencing financial pressure, such as, rates rebates.

Why the Panel made this recommendation

Panel members recognised that households in Waitoa are in different financial situations, and that a single approach to payment would not suit everyone.

Some households may prefer or be able to pay upfront, while others may find it more practical to spread payments over time. Offering a choice of repayment options was seen as a fair way to reflect those differences and provide flexibility where possible.



What this means

If Council decides to proceed with a Council water supply:

- property owners would be able to choose a repayment option that best suits their circumstances,
- contributions would be collected through a targeted rate, not a personal loan,
- choosing a longer repayment term would result in higher total payments due to interest, and
- once a repayment option is selected, it would apply for the full term chosen – even if the home owner changes.

More detailed information about repayment options would be provided if the project progresses.

Sub-recommendation 4: Communication to the District



The recommendation

The Panel recommends that Council gives clarity in the wider district council consultation process about the history and specific issues faced by the Waitoa community. This must include the original intent of the Fonterra water supply system, why the system is no longer feasible, and the challenges to obtain safe and reliable drinking water for the Waitoa community.

Why the Panel made this recommendation

The Panel was very aware that Waitoa's water supply situation is unusual and complex, and that it could be difficult for people outside the area to understand why the recommended option is being proposed.

Panel members were concerned that, without this context, the wider district might see only the outcome – rather than the many years of discussion, the constraints the community has worked within, and the careful consideration given to different options.

The Panel felt it was important that wider consultation clearly reflect:

- why change is now required,
- that multiple options were explored,
- and that the recommendation is not based on a single factor, but on balancing safety, reliability, cost, and long-term impacts for the Waitoa community.

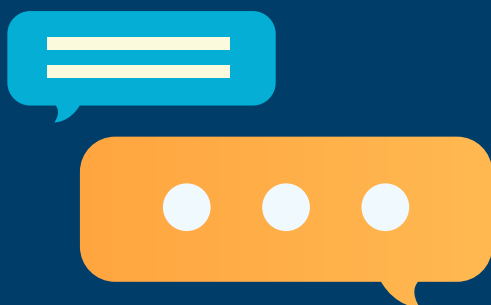
How this recommendation is reflected in the consultation

Council has taken this recommendation into account in designing the consultation approach.

The Change Proposal provides an overview of the proposal and explains why feedback is being sought across the district. This booklet sits alongside it and provides additional detail for Waitoa residents and property owners, including:

- how the Community Panel worked through the issue,
- the options that were considered,
- and what the Panel's recommendations could mean in practice.

The Change Proposal provides the framework for wider district consultation, while this booklet provides additional context for Waitoa residents and property owners. Together, they are intended to support you to provide informed feedback before any final decisions are made.



Thank you

We appreciate you taking the time to read this booklet.

Consultation is open from 30 April to 21 May, and feedback from both Waitoa residents and the wider district will be considered before any final decisions are made. Information on how to provide feedback is included at the back of the Change Proposal or online at mpdc.nz/letstalk

Further information about the Community Panel's work, including the full recommendations report and Council's response, is available at mpdc.nz/waitoacommunitypanel



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