

Democracy and Community Participation

Democracy has been described as “government by the people, for the people” - direct or representative.

The participation of citizens is important in the governance and decision-making processes, at community, local government and national level. It is also important that citizens exercise their right to elect representatives and that their concerns and opinions are heard and considered by those representatives.

This chapter highlights the following key issues:

1. **THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM**
2. **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS**
3. **COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION ON COUNCIL, COMMUNITY BOARDS, SCHOOL BOARDS OF TRUSTEES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS**
4. **SENSE OF COMMUNITY – CONTACT WITH NEIGHBOURS, COMMUNITY STRENGTH AND SPIRIT, CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIC ISSUES, AND PARTICIPATION IN COUNCIL DECISION-MAKING**
5. **VOLUNTARY WORK**

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KEY INDICATOR

34% of residents say they have a reasonable or good understanding of the Council's decision-making process (from a survey of a sample of residents in May 2000, with an approximate margin of error of +/- 5%).

This indicator highlights the extent to which residents are able to participate in local Council decision-making. If residents have an understanding of the process, they are likely to know how to get involved. In the same survey, 32% of Waitakere residents surveyed said they had a slight understanding, and a further 32% said they had no understanding.

This indicator recognises the importance of community participation in civic matters including voting at elections, getting involved in projects that ask for community feedback or celebrating local events.

A subsequent survey in 2002 indicated that 81% could identify at least one valid means of communicating with the Council in order to influence the Council's decision-making.

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Table 1: Local, regional and national representatives for Waitakere City

| Representative organisation | Representatives | Population in each electorate |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Central Government | 4 members elected to represent general electorates that fall within the boundaries of Waitakere City: New Lynn, Waitakere, Te Atatu, and Helensville However many members who are resident in Waitakere City and elected on party lists 2 Maori members: Te Tai Tokerau (representing Cape Reinga to Henderson) and Tamaki Makaurau (representing Bethells to Manurewa) | Eligible voting population aged 18 years and over in 2002: New Lynn 41,510, Waitakere 41,880, Te Atatu 43,490, Helensville 41,680. |
| Auckland Regional Council | 2 members representing Waitakere City | In 2001, Waitakere City's population was 168,750 compared with the region's population of 1,158,891. |
| Waitakere City Council | 1 mayor and 14 Councillors representing 4 wards: (4 in New Lynn, 4 in Massey, 3 in Henderson, and 3 in Waitakere) | Ward populations were: Massey 51,369 New Lynn 49,845 Henderson 40,086 Waitakere 27,450 |
| Community Boards | 24 Community Board members representing 4 wards: (6 in Massey, 6 in Waitakere, 5 in Henderson, 5 in New Lynn) | Ward populations were as above. |

..
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In addition to the election of representatives to the City Council and Community Boards every three years, the community is able to participate in Council and Community Board decision-making processes. The key decision making process that occur at Waitakere City Council are set out in the Local Government Act and include producing an Annual Budget each year and a Long Term Financial Strategy and Funding Policy every three years.

Each year's Annual Plan (or Annual Budget) sets out the range of projects covering all the different services and functions that the Council intends to carry out in the coming year. The Council then consults and seeks feedback on the projects and issues outlined in the Plan. The number of submissions received by the Council is an indicator of community participation in the democratic process. The number of submissions on the Council's draft Annual Plan in recent years is set out below:

Table 2: Submissions received for draft Annual Plan 1996-2002

| Year | Number of sub- missions received | Number of issues |
|------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1996 | 84 | |
| 1997 | 205 | |
| 1998 | 916 | |
| 1999 | 964 | 2,934 |
| 2000 | 807 | 3,386 |
| 2001 | 374 | 1,124 |
| 2002 | 739 | 2,092 |

2. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

Over three years, voters have the opportunity to vote twice: once for national elections, and once for the combined regional and local elections. Voter turnout at elections is an indicator of residents' interest and awareness of democratic processes. Voter turnout gives an idea of residents' desire to contribute to representative governance.

- NATIONAL ELECTIONS:**

59.5% of the eligible voters in Waitakere electorates voted at the general elections in 2002.

The table below shows the numbers of those who were eligible to vote, enrolled to vote and actually voted at the general elections in 2002 from electorates in Waitakere City:

| Electorate | Eligible voting population | Enrolled on general and Maori roll | % enrolment | Voted on general and Maori roll | % voting of those enrolled | % voting of eligible population |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| New Lynn | 41,510 | 39,025 | 94.01% | 25,764 | 66.02% | 62.07% |
| Te Atatu | 43,490 | 40,173 | 92.37% | 24,153 | 60.12% | 55.54% |
| Waitakere | 41,880 | 38,203 | 91.22% | 24,347 | 63.73% | 58.14% |
| Helensville | 41,680 | 38,711 | 92.88% | 26,117 | 67.47% | 62.66% |
| Total | 168,560 | 156,112 | 92.62% | 100,381 | 64.30% | 59.55% |

- REGIONAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:**

46% of eligible voters in the Auckland Region (which includes Waitakere City) voted at the Regional Council elections in 2001.

The table below shows what the turnout at elections has been in the past, and how the Auckland region compares with other regions.

Table 3: Proportion of voters participating in regional council elections (%) (1992, 1995, 1998)

| REGIONAL COUNCIL | 1992 | 1995 | 1998 |
|------------------|------|------|------|
| Auckland | 43.8 | 34.1 | 45.8 |
| Wellington | 49.5 | 46.4 | 51.9 |
| Canterbury | 47.3 | 38.0 | 53.7 |
| Rest of NZ | 51.1 | 51.9 | 48.1 |

Data Source: Department of Internal Affairs

• LOCAL ELECTIONS:

38% of eligible voters in Waitakere City voted at the City Council elections in 2001.

The table below shows what the turnout at elections has been in the past, and how we compare with other cities:

Table 4: Proportion of voters participating in local body elections (%)

| City | 1992 | 1995 | 1998 |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| Auckland | 43.1 | 49.0 | 50.8 |
| Manukau | 38.6 | 39.0 | 40.7 |
| North Shore | 46.0 | 46.0 | 45.2 |
| Waitakere | 44.7 | 41.4 | 45.4 |
| Wellington | 53.1 | 52.7 | 49.2 |
| Christchurch | 51.5 | 49.9 | 52.2 |
| Rest of NZ | 51.8 | 54.1 | 57.5 |

Data Source: Department of Internal Affairs

In the 2001 elections, voters elected their 3 area representatives on the Waitemata Health Board.

3. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION ON COUNCIL, COMMUNITY BOARDS, SCHOOL BOARDS OF TRUSTEES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Local Government New Zealand states that "local government is local democracy in action" and "local democracy is about having the right mix of people ... to best represent a particular community". But what does "the right mix of people" mean? For some it means trying to reflect the diversity of a community on councils, community boards and school boards of trustees.

The elected representatives on the Waitakere City Council represent the general community. The elected representatives on the community boards represent the community in a particular ward. There are other formal structures that represent different segments of the community. For example, Te Taumata Rununga is a standing committee of the Council to represent the views of Maori.

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Te Taumata Rununga is made up of representatives from iwi, marae, urban Maori authorities, and key Maori organisations. It participates in the Council decision-making process and also helps ensure that the needs of Waitakere's Maori citizens are fed through to the full Council.

The Council also has a Pacific Islands Advisory Board and a Secondary School Youth Council. These groups assist the Council in communicating and understanding the needs of these sectors of the community. As well as such formal representation, there are many informal groups and organisations throughout Waitakere City to which residents choose to belong.

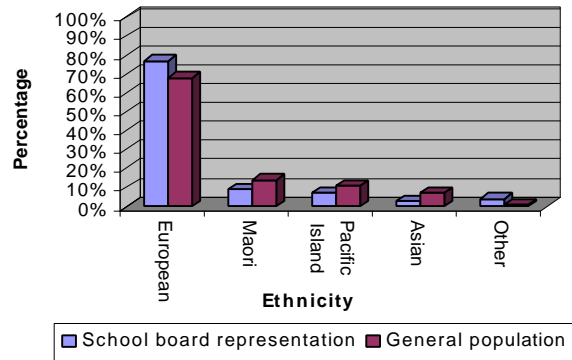
- COMPOSITION OF COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY BOARDS:**
 Data on the ethnic identity of elected representatives at local Government level is not collected. However, a quick overview of members of Waitakere City Council and its Community Boards shows that Europeans are disproportionately represented, in relation to the ethnic population of Waitakere City. Similarly, data concerned with age is not collected, but young people are clearly under-represented. Representation by men and women is about equal.

- COMPOSITION OF SCHOOL BOARDS OF TRUSTEES:**
 School Boards of Trustees play a significant role in the governance of schools and the relationship between the school and its students' families. The composition of school Boards of Trustees (primary and secondary state schools) is another indicator of public involvement in decisions that affect them.

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The graph below shows the percentage of each ethnic group on school boards of trustees in Waitakere City. This shows an over-representation by Europeans and “Other” ethnic groups on school boards of trustees when compared to the ethnic makeup of the City as a whole.

Ethnic composition of school boards of trustees in 1999



Data Source: Ministry of Education and Statistics New Zealand 1996 census data.

There have been approximately equal numbers of men and women serving on boards of trustees in Waitakere City during the period from 1996 to 1999 (Data Source: Ministry of Education).

- OTHER ORGANISATIONS WITH REPRESENTATION PROCESSES:**
 There are many groups and organizations within Waitakere City that are involved in democratic processes and represent communities of interest or neighbourhoods. The following table shows a selection of these:

Table 5: Representative Groups within Waitakere City

| REPRESENTATIVE GROUP | WHAT IS IT? |
|---|---|
| Te Taumata Runanga | Te Taumata Runanga is a standing committee of the Waitakere City Council. Its role is to help ensure that the needs of Maori citizens are addressed. Te Taumata Runanga includes representatives from iwi, marae, urban Maori authorities, and key Maori organisations. In addition to Te Taumata Runanga, Waitakere City Council has formal and informal arrangements with local iwi and pan-tribal organisations. Further information about Maori structures and processes are set out in the Tangata Whenua chapter. |
| Pacific Islands Advisory Board | The Pacific Islands Advisory Board operates under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Council. The board consists of representatives from the different island groups in Waitakere City. |
| Waitakere City Secondary School Youth Council | The Secondary School Youth Council has representatives selected by each of the secondary schools in Waitakere City. |
| Te Roopu Rangatahi | Te Roopu Rangatahi (Maori Youth Council) has representatives selected by each of the secondary schools in Waitakere City. |
| School Boards | These are elected by parents and have a very important role in managing schools. |
| Residents and ratepayer groups | These are groups of residents from a particular neighbourhood. Examples are the Whenuapai Residents and Ratepayers Association, and Piha Ratewatch group. |
| Issue groups | These groups focus on a particular issues such as the environment, safety, etc. Examples are Waitakere Ranges Protection Society, Forest and Bird Society and Safe Waitakere. |

4. SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Communities are groups of people bound together by something in common – for example, family or whanau, culture, age, gender, religion, political beliefs or locality. ‘Community’ is a difficult concept to directly define or measure, as it can hold different meanings for different people. The values and reasons that traditionally brought communities together are no longer the same, and today we acknowledge that our communities are less cohesive than they were in the past.

... Waitakere residents do form strong community ties with people in their own neighbourhoods.

Through historical settlement patterns and demographic changes, there are many communities to which residents of Waitakere City belong.

• **UNITY OF THE COMMUNITY**

From a survey of residents in May 2000, residents indicated whether they considered that the social network or group that ‘matters most’ to them was mainly based around where they live (their local neighbourhood) or was based on other factors such as ethnic grouping, interests or beliefs (*The survey specifically asked respondents to exclude work and family when answering the question. The results have an estimated margin of error of +/- 5%.*). The results were:

| | |
|------------|--|
| 22% | <i>Belong to the groups and networks where they live.</i> |
| 51% | <i>Belong to the groups and networks based on interests, ethnicity, beliefs, lifestyle or social interests.</i> |
| 27% | <i>Belong to no particular community.</i> |

In the May 2002 survey 67% of respondents indicated that they had “some” or “a lot” of positive contact with their neighbours. This suggests that Waitakere residents do form strong community ties with people in their own neighbourhoods.

Availability of information through such channels as the Internet

The Internet is becoming an increasingly important worldwide source of information that can be used to provide and obtain information that affects individuals and communities.

41% of residents have access to the Internet through a home computer (*Statistics NZ 2001 Census*).

83% of businesses have access to the Internet (*from a postal survey of a sample of businesses in November 2000, with an approximate margin of error of +/- 5%*).

In the context of more information and services being provided on the Internet, access is an important issue for democracy and participation. In describing the New Zealand government’s “e-government” strategy, the Minister of Finance Michael Cullen commented (*reported in the PSA Journal, November 2000, p. 5*):

“It’s about making sure governments are more relevant. It’s about governments delivering better information and services. It’s about people using modern technology so they can have more of a say in the way things work. In other words e-government is about the future of democracy.”

Waitakere City Council is responding to this trend through the development of its own e-government strategy and cooperation with other local authorities in the Auckland region. Currently, the Council has an Internet site, which provides information on policies, issues and events. In addition, the public can send e-mail messages to the Council, make submissions on the Annual Plan on line, and access documents on the site.

5. VOLUNTARY WORK

People’s willingness to be involved in voluntary work in the community indicates a desire to ‘give something back’. It is a reflection of people’s belief that they have something worthwhile to contribute.

Many of the organizations and groups referred to elsewhere in this chapter rely on volunteer support for their continued involvement in representation/democratic processes. A national time use survey conducted in 1999 (*Time Use Survey: Labour Market Results 1999, Statistics New Zealand*) indicates a general pattern that time spent on unpaid work is on the decline. Further information on the results of this survey is in the chapter “Work and Income”.

From census information, 49% of Waitakere City residents over the age of fifteen undertook voluntary work over the four weeks prior to the 1996 census. The categories of voluntary work and percentages for Waitakere City are set out below (*people could indicate more than one activity in which they had engaged. Percentages do not add up to 100% as residents could have engaged in more than one activity*):

- Caring for children not living in the same household as the caregiver (39.1%)
- Household work such as cooking, repairs, gardening, or caring for the elderly (34.7%)
- Training and coaching (29.0%)
- Attending meetings, such as for a group, church or marae (35.3%)
- Fundraising (15.0%)
- Other (12.7%)

People’s willingness to give time for voluntary activity ties in with other indicators of community cohesion such as social networks and neighbourhood interaction. It is one factor that is likely to affect the level of involvement in community decision-making.

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CASE STUDY

SWANSON 2000 COMMUNITY GROUP

The Swanson 2000 community group is an informal group of residents whose first project was to preserve the old Avondale railway station, which was to be destroyed. In 1993 the group took responsibility for transferring the station building to Swanson and preserving its heritage character. The local community got behind the project with fundraising projects and provided heritage advice and voluntary labour. The group obtained the cooperation from the City Council and received funding for the maintenance of the building. The Swanson station is fully restored and a café operates from the building.

“
The participation by Swanson residents has created a sense of achievement and ownership of these projects.”



Upgraded Swanson Railway Station, 2001

The group has initiated many community projects (such as the Swanson Village Market Days and Car Boot Sales) and has received funding from various sources, including Infrastructure Auckland and central government. The participation by Swanson residents has created a sense of achievement and ownership of these projects.

WHAT THE COUNCIL IS DOING:

- The Council consults with the community on significant decisions as required by law. The Council also consults beyond its statutory requirements (for example, the Harbourview consultation and the Auckland Region Water Review).
- The Council is committed to involving local communities in significant planning in their area, for example the charettes underway in the NorthWest area, the ongoing design work in New Lynn, the West Coast Plan, and the design of an eco hospital and eco school.
- The Council supports some community initiatives and community groups, for example, Keep Waitakere Beautiful, Pasifika festival.
- The Council can act as catalyst, co-ordinator and partner to encourage and support community initiatives, for example Trees for Babies, the Karekare Shellfish Rahui and the Tag Out Trust.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Vote at local, regional and national elections.
- Visit Waitakere City Council's website and read the Council's newsletter to become aware of issues affecting you and the city.
- Find out about decision-making processes you can get involved in such as making a submission to the Council's Annual Budget.
- Participate in decision-making processes that affect you and the community such as local structure plans and service reviews.
- Participate in community projects and events.
- Stand for election on a school board, Community Board, Council, or Parliament.

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Participate in decision-making processes that affect you and the community
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