



Wellbeing  
Waikato  
TOIORA O WAIKATO

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2026

# Local Government Alignment

Summary



## Purpose Statement:

This mahi, led by the Waikato Wellbeing Project, aims to create more affordable housing in the Waikato.

## Prepared for:



## Prepared by:



# One Market with Invisible Boundaries

## Local Government in the Waikato

The Waikato is made up of eleven local authorities and one regional council. Each local authority has its own District Plan, its own rules and standards, its own teams, and its own set of quirks to navigate on the journey from an idea to a roof over someone's head.

But the private sector does not see these boundaries and they don't want to. For most, the Waikato is a single market and even then, parts of the region will fall into others. For example, the high growth area of Pokeno is served by a range of developers and builders out of Auckland. Within the Waikato, Places like Morrinsville, Hamilton, Cambridge, Paeroa, and Huntly are a short drive from one another but are in different Councils. The private sector simply want to get on and deliver the best housing they can, at a price the market can sustain and do not see the invisible boundaries of Territorial Authorities or Regional Councils.

Yet in each district they may encounter a different definition, a different interpretation, a different process, a different cost. The requirements may shift at every boundary even though some are just 10 minutes drive from each other. A raft of different requirements to build a house.

How the private sector looks at delivering houses in the Waikato Region



What the delivery is actually like



# Regional Variations

## The Status Quo

Councils in the Waikato have already taken meaningful steps to improve regional consistency and alignment, particularly through CoLab, the establishment of water CCOs to standardise three-waters planning and delivery, and the FutureProof partnership, which coordinates growth, land use, transport, and infrastructure planning across the sub-region. There is, however, still significant inconsistency and variation that naturally comes with having 11 different councils.

Each local government authority in the Waikato operates under its own District Plan. While appropriate for addressing local character and community aspirations, this results in significant variation across the region. Every District Plan sets its own expectations and rules for infill and greenfield residential development including different minimum lot sizes, levels of assessment, maximum building heights, height-in-relation-to-boundary controls, setbacks, and consenting pathways.

Each council also applies development contributions differently. At one end of the scale, a home with more than three bedrooms in some parts of Hamilton City can incur development contributions of over \$100,000. In contrast, that same home in Ōtorohanga District may attract a charge of less than \$2,000. And while both Hamilton City and Ōtorohanga District apply lower development contributions to smaller (two-bedroom) homes, most other Waikato councils do not distinguish development contributions by dwelling size or bedroom count. There are often genuine reasons for such variance but inconsistency adds time, risk, uncertainty, and cost.

There are also inconsistencies in things like pre-lodgement support. Some councils such as Matamata-Piako District Council and South Waikato District Council offer free pre-lodgement meetings to encourage early engagement and ensure alignment before consents are lodged. However, most Waikato councils do not provide a standard fee waiver for pre-lodgement, creating further variation in both cost and process.

Notably, none of the Waikato local authorities currently offer a specific development contribution waiver for affordable housing, despite every council in the region having formally acknowledged the need for more affordable homes in their districts.

Consent fees also vary considerably whether for land use (resource consent), subdivision, or building consents.

There are many other examples of variation across the development process from the timing and availability of inspections to how individual councils interpret the same regulations. Each difference on its own may seem minor, but together they create a complex and inconsistent development environment across the Waikato. And this is for a region of only around 500,000 people, roughly one third the size of Auckland City yet with far greater complexity than a single housing market should ideally face.



# Enhanced Alignment

What greater alignment could look like

- Central government are in the process of leading significant reform of local government, planning and resource management, and the efficiency of the building sector. This includes regional spatial planning. This includes standardised planning zones and standards.
- Much of this work could be initiated at a regional level, providing a regional response to housing affordability in the Waikato.

Discounted charges and fees that recognise the wider benefit of delivering affordability

- Reduced development-related charges (or future development levy equivalents) for qualifying affordable homes, within the national framework.
- Fixed consent/approval fees for standardised affordable typologies to give price certainty and reward the use of repeatable designs.

Faster, simpler approvals for genuine affordable homes

- Prioritised consenting, inspections, and approvals for developments that meet defined affordability and design criteria.
- A dedicated approvals / consenting unit to triage, coordinate and de-risk planning, engineering, and building requirements for affordable projects.
- Pre-agreed “fast-lane” pathways (published service standards and checklists) for specific subdivision and housing typologies that meet the criteria. Where possible, provide prioritised inspections or private certification of affordable homes. This takes advantage of new national liability framework being promoted allowing risk to be shared.
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Planning rules that enable smaller builds

- Enable smaller minimum lot sizes in targeted zones and support build-then-subdivide pathways while still ensuring good built-form outcomes.
- Align subdivision and minor-unit provisions with the new national level granny-flat exemptions so these small, standalone homes can be streamlined under the new settings.
- Simplify small scale infill projects (1–3 new dwellings) with clear, effects-based rules and standard information requirements and align with the MDRS style standards.

# Opportunities

We recommend the following is considered as priority joint initiatives, all of which will support the delivery of more affordable housing stock.

- A consistent approach to development contribution incentives for affordable housing.
- Free Pre-lodgement meetings for projects that incorporate a minimum of 10% affordable housing.
- Planning standards review, to identify and refine those planning rules that are holding back affordable housing types. For instance, this includes minimum section sizes at 500sqm in areas of Cambridge, Thames, South Waikato, Ōtorohanga, Waitomo Districts. Review of other key planning standards such as a common minimum building coverage of 35% in Te Kuiti, Paeroa, Matamata. These planning standards result in higher cost homes.
- A dedicated building consenting authority, who provides a coordinated and streamlined approach to affordable housing projects across the region.
- Specific regulatory and approvals unit to triage, coordinate and de-risk consenting and infrastructure needs.
- Fixed consenting and regulatory fees to reflect the wider public benefit of affordable housing projects.





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