

DEB MAIR

Rates

We acknowledge that Regional Council rate increases have been amongst the lowest in our region, however, local government rates are increasing in excess of CPI. Ratepayers are in a cost-of-living crisis. Growth cannot be an excuse as it is simply a factor you will have to deal with.

How will you manage Rates increases?

1. Prioritising essentials
2. Smarter spending
3. Long-term planning

Comments (200 words max):

I recognise that many households are struggling with the cost of living, and any increase in rates adds real pressure. Waikato Regional Council has worked to keep rate increases comparatively low, but I agree that we must do more than rely on growth as a justification.

If elected, I will focus on three things:

- 1 Prioritising essentials – ensuring funding is directed to core services like flood protection, freshwater quality, and climate resilience, rather than lower-priority projects.
- 2 Smarter spending – improving efficiency in how council delivers services, leveraging technology, and seeking partnerships with iwi, community, and industry to share costs.
- 3 Long-term planning – investing early in infrastructure and natural systems restoration to avoid larger, more expensive fixes in the future.

Managing rates responsibly means balancing affordability for ratepayers today with protecting the health of our environment and communities tomorrow. My commitment is to evidence-based decision making and clear accountability for where every dollar goes.

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Debt

Debt has been the easy option for local government entities to resort to in order to hold rates down in the face of inflation, growth, and a need to be re-elected. Councils such as Hamilton and others have had rating downgrades pointing to a failure by Councils to prudently manage their finances.

How will you deal with debt?

1. Prudent financial management - exploring shared services to reduce costs.
2. Long-term planning
3. Prioritisation of essential projects, investing strategically in infrastructure.

Comments (200 words max):

In order to meet the costs of infrastructure, new works and other projects with long term benefits, the council has in place an external borrowing programme. At 30 June 2025, the council has borrowed \$49 million from the Local Government Funding Agency.

The council has outlined its borrowing programme to 2024- 2034 Long Term Plan. Current and projected debt levels are compliant with the borrowing limits set out in the financial strategy. Debt has often been the easy option for local councils to keep rates low amid inflation, growth pressures, and election cycles. Rating downgrades in councils like Hamilton show the risks of relying too heavily on borrowing.

To deal with debt, councils need a combination of prudent financial management, long-term planning, and prioritisation of essential projects. This includes investing strategically in infrastructure, exploring shared services to reduce costs, improving revenue collection, and being transparent with communities about the trade-offs between rates, debt, and service delivery.

In short, debt should be a tool, not a crutch, used only when it supports sustainable outcomes for residents and future generations.

Amalgamation

The amalgamation of some or all of Waikato Councils has been an issue the Chamber has been canvassing for some years. Auckland has been amalgamated, and the net result is seen as positive for their community with little diminution of democracy.

"For the 2025/2026 rating year, Auckland Council has announced a total rates increase of 5.8%, equating to approximately \$223 per year for the average residential property."

What is your considered position on Amalgamation?



For amalgamation



Against amalgamation

If in favour of change, how would you implement it?

1. Efficiency
2. Representation
3. Resilience

Comments (200 words max):

Amalgamation is a complex issue, and I don't believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution. While Auckland's super council has delivered some efficiencies, it has also created distance between decision-makers and local communities.

Our region is diverse, with rural, urban, and iwi priorities that need strong local voices at the table. I understand there are a large number of councillors across the 11 territorial authorities and 7 Joint Management Agreements, along with many mayors. Some change may be required, but any reform must be carefully considered and focused on delivering better outcomes for our communities.

My position is that before any discussion on amalgamation, we need clear, evidence-based analysis of the costs, benefits, and risks. The focus should be on:

- Efficiency – whether shared services or joint planning can reduce duplication without full amalgamation.
- Representation – ensuring communities, especially smaller towns and iwi, do not lose their ability to influence decisions.
- Resilience – making sure councils can deliver on water quality, flood protection, transport, and climate adaptation in a coordinated way.

I am open to exploring collaboration where it makes sense and saves ratepayers money, but I do not support amalgamation simply for the sake of it. Strong local democracy and effective regional cooperation should come first.