

Auckland Transition Agency

# Regulatory improvements for the Auckland Council

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13 May 2010

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## Introduction

Almost every household deals with a council and its various regulations at some stage.

From relatively simple tasks like renewing dog licences through to larger interactions such as applying for building or resource consents, the regulatory work undertaken by councils touch most people at some point in their lives.

For businesses, council involvement can be significant, particularly when applying for resource consents and building permits. Council inspectors also uphold a wide range of community standards – from environmental health to the licensing of liquor outlets and the “grading” and monitoring of food outlets.

This paper describes the initiatives planned for the new Auckland Council to achieve a “step-change” in the delivery of regulatory services.

## Why is this change happening?

As a result of legislative change, Auckland is to have a new form of local government from 1 November, 2010.

The eight city, district and regional councils that make up Auckland will be replaced by a new, unitary, Auckland Council.

This has presented the opportunity to rethink the way services are delivered.

The history of how and why the Government is creating a single council has its roots in the 2009 report of the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance. That report identified that bold change is required to make Auckland the most exciting, vibrant metropolitan centre in Australasia.

Regulatory reform is central to achieving this.

Over a third of the thousands of submissions made to the Royal Commission commented on the regulatory functions of councils, many expressing “great frustration, anger, and even despair over the present situation”.<sup>1</sup>

Submitters complained about the costs of complying with different district and regional plans, standards, and other regulations across the region, the result being, as the Royal Commission identified,<sup>2</sup> “that citizens and businesses get poorer services than they hope for, at a higher cost than necessary. There is waste.”. Of particular concern are the regulatory blockages to the development of key infrastructure which, impacts on the growth and development of the region.

Moving to a single district plan for Auckland and rationalising the tangle of other plans and policies across the region will not happen overnight. There is much that can be done, however, in the immediate term, to answer the call for consistent processes and practices across the region for resource consenting and building in particular.

1. Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, Volume 3: summary of Submissions, page 131.

2. Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, Volume 1: Report, Page 289.

## The Changes

The creation of a unitary council is a great opportunity to address the lack of consistency within and between councils in Auckland.

The focus of regulatory improvements for 1 November 2010 has been on lowering fees and costs, and simplifying the paperwork. Further change is expected post November 1, particularly as the benefits of having a single district plan and simplified plans and standards across the region are delivered.

The headline improvements and the charges in building control, resource consenting, animal control and licensing are outlined below. But in short:

- Costs will be lower
- Citizens will receive better customer service.

## Costs

Fees and charges for core council services such as building control, resource consenting, dog registration, and charges for LIMs will be standardised across the region, generally at the lowest existing levels. Fees and charges currently payable in Franklin District have been excluded when identifying the lowest fees across the region, because of the comparative size of the district, its parallel reorganisation with the Waikato region and, in some instances, lack of data.

Applicants for building and resource consents currently pay fees based upon a deposit and full cost recovery, based on an hourly rate. This model will continue with the Auckland Council. Work has been done however to simplify the number of charge categories, to drop hourly charges to the lowest across the region (excluding Franklin) and to adopt the current lowest deposit rates charged across the region.

The cost for individual building and resource consents varies depending on the particular features of both the project and the site being developed. For simple consents, for example a garage in a residential zone, the processing costs should be lower.

This is illustrated in the table below, which compares the rates currently charged for a planner, a building consent processing officer, and technical team leaders with that proposed for the Auckland Council.

	Proposed Rate	ACC	ARC	MCC	NSCC	PDC	RDC	WCC	FDC
Processing Planner	120	148	135	121	135	140	150	150	117
Building consent processing officer	110	133	N/A	121	110	126	120	109	112
Team leader technical building	135	164	N/A	142	155	N/A	160	135	N/A
Team leader technical Resource Consenting	140	164	N/A	153	155	N/A	160	140	N/A

Key: **ACC** = Auckland City Council    **ARC** = Auckland Regional Council    **MCC** = Manukau City Council    **NSCC** = North Shore City Council  
**PDC** = Papakura District Council    **RDC** = Rodney District Council    **WCC** = Waitakere City Council    **FDC** = Franklin District Council

Building inspections are also charged at an hourly rate. At the moment a standard inspection can cost up to \$178, as the table below shows. In future the standard hourly charge for inspections will be \$110 across the region.

	Proposed Rate	Current Rates Charged							
		ACC	ARC	MCC	NSCC	PDC	RDC	WCC	FDC
Hourly Rate standard inspection	110	110	N/A	141	110	135	150	178	112
Hourly Rate final inspection	110	180	N/A	141	110	185	150	178	112

The impact on revenue of applying the current lowest fees charged in the region (excluding Franklin District Council) has been modelled. This analysis suggests that the reduction in Council revenue will be offset over time by reduction in Council expenditure. Areas for cost savings include management costs, the use of consultants and contractors, legal costs, and other operational expenditure.

There are currently a bewildering number of different fee categories across the region – 60 categories in total – for registering, impounding and adopting dogs. The amount charged for registering a dog depends on where the dog lives, whether it is desexed or not, whether it is a working dog, and whether it is owned by a superannuitant or by someone who has undertaken a responsible dog owner course.

In future there will be half the number of fee categories for dogs. And in each fee category, across the board, charges will be dropped to lowest levels (excluding Franklin). Charges for the most common registration category – desexed dogs whose owners have not gone on the approved course – currently vary across the region from \$70-\$100. This charge will be set at \$70 across the region in future. This addresses the simple principle that it should cost no more to register a dog in one part of Auckland than another.

## Forms

There are currently large numbers of duplicated forms and templates across the region. For example, every council has its own resource consent application form and its own template for reporting to customers.

From November 1, applications will be easier to complete, and will be available on the Auckland Council website. Over 850 forms currently used by councils will be reduced to 120 simplified forms, to be used consistently across the region. This means that North or South, wherever a person is building in Auckland, the consent application will be the same.

Public information will also be easier to access, from service centres throughout the region, and the Auckland Council website. Over time, the information brochures and guidance available now from councils will be simplified. This will save customers time and money.

## Building

At the moment there are seven district and city council building authorities, each with their own processes and procedures. By the end of 2011, the Auckland Council is required to be accredited as a single Building Control Authority. It will be well positioned to do so, given the significant work undertaken over the last year to adopt common building consent processes.

From Day 1, Auckland will have:

- Standardised lodgement acceptance criteria - a major improvement for customers and technical specialists. Criteria will be supported by common checklists which will mean there is much more consistency around lodgement/rejection decisions.
- Standardised building control policy and technical interpretation across the region. This will help building control staff interpret key regulations and legislation and make consistent decisions about whether proposed solutions are acceptable.
- Centralised registers for products, contractors, and author statements to avoid duplication across the region.
- A consistent approach to temporary building works – a bonus for those working on events planning.

## Resource Consents

The Government has instituted a number of changes to the Resource Management Act 1991, aimed at cutting red tape and making councils more responsive. Moving from eight councils should make the system easier to understand and use, particularly for customers who work across the region.

Improvements identified for resource consenting include:

- Developing a common procedures manual. This will provide a framework for consistent practice on how the Auckland Council will undertake resource consent work.
- Developing consistent practices for reviewing applications and deciding on them.
- Ensuring that hearings arrangements are in place so that decisions can be made efficiently.

Other tools to ensure a more collaborative approach with customers will include providing dedicated case managers for complex applications at formative stages.

The design for regulatory services also includes a Major Projects team which will co-ordinate the passage of projects of importance to the Auckland region. This will help get Auckland moving.

## Pre-lodgement

Better advisory services will be available to applicants before resource consent and building consent applications are lodged.

Pre-lodgement services are currently available at Auckland City Council. This model will be introduced in other areas, so that applicants across the region are able to meet with Council staff and experts to talk about building and resource consent components of a project at the same time, smoothing the way for lodgement and processing.

Being clear about the rules and processes from the outset will help customers get off to the right start and make council processing faster. The tree house restaurant in Rodney District, approved in just two weeks, is a good recent example of a council collaborating with the customer. Examples of best practice like this will underpin the Auckland Council attitude and approach.

## Locations and service delivery

It will also be much easier to physically access Council services, including regulatory services. The ATA has approved a service delivery model based on the following principles:

- No interruption to existing customer and community services.
- Local service delivery will be maintained or enhanced.
- Recognition of the key role of Local Boards.
- Legacy systems including call centres remain in current locations.
- Clarity of service access for all citizens.
- Improved access to accountable decision makers.

Front line staff numbers will not be reduced – this is important for customers. However smaller and tighter top management will save costs and provide greater ability to drive improvement and consistency across the region.

Local knowledge will be valued, but differing local practice will be avoided by active region-wide management and focus.

Whilst some decisions on staff location are still to be made, the ATA has determined that the Head Office of the Auckland Council will be located in the Auckland CBD.

There will also be four types of service centre for the use of the public. These are: full, local, neighbourhood and specialist.

## Full Service Centres

Full Service Centres will deliver all Auckland Council services and some Council-Controlled Organisation (CCO) services. The four full service centres will be located in:

- North (Takapuna)
- West (Henderson)
- Central/East (Central Auckland)
- South (Manukau)

## Local Service Centres

These will be located at:

- Orewa
- Waiheke
- Papakura
- Pukekohe

These offices will generally provide the services that are currently delivered out of them.

## Neighbourhood Service Centres

These will be at the existing locations of Warkworth, Huapai, Helensville, Great Barrier and Waiuku.

The services currently provided at these locations will continue.

Where a local board area includes an existing service centre(s) the most appropriate one will be utilised by the local board for meetings, constituent appointments etc.

Work is underway identifying suitable locations and premises for the balance of the Local Board areas that do not currently have a service centre presence:

- Orakei (covering the Eastern Bays, Meadowbank and St Johns),
- Maungakiekie-Tamaki (Glen Innes, Pt England, Onehunga)
- Mangere-Otahuhu
- Manurewa (including Weymouth and Wattle Downs)
- Whau (includes New Lynn, Blockhouse Bay and Avondale),
- Albert-Eden (areas such as Pt Chevalier, Balmoral, Mt Albert, Mt Eden and Epsom)
- Upper Harbour (which includes Albany, Greenhithe, Hobsonville and Whenuapai)

- Kaipatiki (Beach Haven, Birkenhead, Northcote and Glenfield)
- Waitakere Ranges (includes Titirangi, Huia and Piha)
- Te Irirangi (Howick, Bucklands Beach, Pakuranga and Botany)
- Puketapapa (Hillsborough, Lynfield and Three Kings)

**Note:** the suburbs mentioned above are not an exhaustive list of those within each Local Board area. The intention is simply to provide some geographical reference points as working assumptions for development of the service delivery model.

Services provided may include appointments with specialist staff, service requests (e.g. abandoned vehicles, graffiti etc) and rate rebate applications.

## Specialist Service Centres

Specialist Service Centres will operate as required. These include locations including the Auckland CBD (resource and building consents), Botany (building consents), Newmarket (Watercare) and an as-yet unconfirmed location for Auckland Transport.

## Licensing

Currently there is wide variation in licensing, partly as a consequence of the different bylaws in place for each council. These bylaws will remain in place for Day 1, which means the extent of change which can be secured is limited. Improvements that will be achieved include the following:

- Standard practices and procedures manual for the region (this may see some slight variation where necessary to reflect local bylaws and policies)
- A consistent approach for assessing and issuing of permits, subject in some cases to bylaw requirements
- A consistent approach to the implementation of policies. This will help staff, customers and key stakeholders (e.g. NZ Police) by providing the methodology around how we do business.
- Consistency in the assessment and grading of food premises
- Consistent delivery of District Licensing Agency responsibilities for liquor licensing.

## LIMs

The existing city and district councils in Auckland prepare Land Information Memorandum (LIMs) for customers. This contains all the information known to the Council about the piece of land in question.

From 1 November 2010, the Auckland Council will be legally required to include regional council information in all LIMs, something that has not been done previously.

This would include information on regional consents, e.g. for air and water discharges, and regional rates information which was not been provided previously to customers.

## Animal Management

There will be no changes for Day 1 to local dog control arrangements – the location of off-leash areas and so on. These arrangements have been developed with local communities over many years, and there will be no disruption.

At the moment, some councils contract out dog control and shelter services. Others employ staff directly to provide these services. No changes to this service delivery model are expected for Day 1. The aim is to ensure that good services continue to be available across the region from 1 November 2010, with customer service levels retained, and enhanced over time.

The ATA will align the expiry date for contracts for Auckland, Manukau, Franklin and Papakura so that the Auckland Council is positioned to run a public tender process for dog control services in 2011, or later if it so chooses. This will ensure ratepayer value-for-money.

## After Day 1

Beyond 1 November 2010, further changes to how services are delivered might include:

- Drawing together processing services in a smaller number of centres for greater efficiency and sharing of resources.
- Fully integrating regional and district resource consenting consistent with being one unitary council.
- Systems integration and greater use of on-line tools to respond to customer need.

These will form part of the recommendations made to Auckland Council for further investigation and action.

## Conclusion

Regulatory services are at the heart of council services. Changes to be delivered now and after 1 November 2010 are aimed at positioning the Auckland Council to deliver certainty and simplicity for customers, better and faster decisions, and cost savings.