ORDINARY MEETING

of

Council

AGENDA

Supplementary Reports

Time: 9:30 am

Date: Wednesday, 1 April 2026

Venue: Greater Wellington Regional Council,
34 Chapel Street, Masterton

MEMBERSHIP

Mayor Bex Johnson (Chairperson)

Councillor Craig Bowyer
Councillor Gary Caffell
Councillor Waireka Collings
Councillor Brent Goodwin
Councillor David Holmes
Councillor Stella Lennox
Councillor Tim Nelson

RECOMMENDATIONS IN REPORTS ARE NOT TO BE CONSTRUED AS COUNCIL POLICY UNTIL ADOPTED

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7 REPORTS FOR DECISION

7.9 QUEEN STREET TREES

File Number:

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Authoriser: **Kym Fell, Chief Executive**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- This report seeks Council approval to increase the CBD Infrastructure Upgrade project budget by $435,475 to a total of $6,125,475, to fund tree replacement and garden bed works along Queen Street.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

1. Approves an increase in the project budget of $435,475 for street tree replacement, installation of tree pits and garden beds.
2. Approves an additional $40,000 to relocate the Ginkgo tree outside Strada to the town square.
3. Notes that if relocation of the Ginkgo is approved, there is a risk that the tree may not survive the process. Should the root ball fail to remain intact when lifted, the tree will not be viable for relocation, and the relocation will not proceed.

CONTEXT

On 5 June 2024 Council resolved to *"proceed with Council's preferred option to complete essential work to improve water and roading infrastructure in the Town Centre, with no other improvements to Queen Street for the 2024-34 Long-Term Plan with an estimated cost of $6.48 million which will be funded from depreciation reserves, rates and the NZTA subsidy".*

This was included in the LTP 2024-34: *"we will progress Council's preferred consultation option and complete essential work to improve water and roading infrastructure (including footpaths) in the Town Centre, with no other improvements to Queen Street. The 'look and feel' of the Town Centre will essentially remain as it is now."*[1] this indicated a project cost of $6.5 million.

A paper was presented to Council on 10 December 2025 seeking approval to award the infrastructure upgrade contract to John Fillmore Contracting.

This paper noted the following ancillary works and street improvements:

- Removal and replacement of trees on Queen Street. The replacements with be 2-3 metres in height, better suited to the environment and present lower risk of future damage to the new infrastructure.

Installation of small garden areas where appropriate and cost effective to improve Queen Streets look and feel.

- Removal and replacement of existing street furniture – seating, barriers, planter boxes, lighting etc.

The original project budget included $80,000 for planting. At the 10 December 2025 meeting Council agreed to allocate an additional unbudgeted expenditure of $200,000 for 'street improvements', on top of the contract value.

A further paper was presented to Council on 18 February 2026 seeking Council to pilot a Town Centre Improvement Fund to provide financial assistance and incentive to support local businesses in the Town Centre to enhance their premises. At this meeting Council:

- Approved the establishment of a pilot Town Centre Improvement Fund to support enhancements in the CBD.
- Agreed to earmark $100,000 of the funding allocated for town centre beautification, as part of the CBD infrastructure upgrade, to that Fund.
- Agreed to match that with an additional $100,000, bringing the total available for allocation through the pilot Town Centre Improvement Fund to $200,000.

The project budget for Queen Street planting is now $180,000 and the Town Centre Improvement Fund budget is $200,000.

ANALYSIS AND ADVICE

15 trees are being removed (four have been removed in Phase 1) from Queen Street during the three phases of the project.

An open trench system running along both sides of Queen Street was identified as the most cost-effective engineering solution for installing the new ring main. This approach minimises disruption to retailers, maintains public access to the CBD, and reduces impact on existing underground infrastructure (including power, fibre, and telecommunications networks). It also avoids the need for significant reconstruction of the courtesy crossings along Queen Street.

However, the trenching route passes through areas containing trees. Trenching will significantly affect the structural and notional root systems of the trees. We were advised that the trees will not survive the disturbance.

Replacement trees and planting

A landscape designer has been appointed to develop a cohesive planting scheme for the new garden beds and to advise on appropriate tree selection in collaboration with the project team.

Replacement tree locations have been identified through a joint assessment process, with the engineer evaluating underground infrastructure constraints and the landscape designer considering above-ground conditions and surroundings.

A total of 15 trees will be planted across the three project phases:

- 3 in Phase 1
- 8 in Phase 2
- 4 in Phase 3.

Replacement trees are currently being considered and will be selected based on the following characteristics:

- Appropriate mature size
- Frost hardy
- Wind tolerant
- Able to cope with urban conditions, including restricted water and nutrient availability, weather extremes, pollution, and vehicle emissions
- Evergreen or minimal leaf fall
- Fast growing
- Easy to maintain
- Resilient to routine maintenance, including pruning, crown lifting, and canopy reduction
- Availability of stock

We will plant the biggest trees that budget, space (above and below ground) and availability of stock allow for.

Tree pits

Each tree will be planted in a tree pit. A tree pit is a structural soil vault system consisting of an underground matrix that is designed to provide space for soil and vegetation in urban areas where there is limited space for traditional landscaping and trees.

Soil vaults are made up of modular units that can be stacked on top of each other to create a multi-level structure. These structures are designed to provide adequate growing medium for plants and trees, while also providing stormwater management and infrastructure safety against tree roots, and other environmental benefits. See Appendix A for more detail.

Relocation of Ginkgo tree

All arborists that have formally and informally provided views on the Queen Street trees have identified the gingko tree in front of Strada as a high-quality specimen, and the only specimen worthy of investment and likely to survive relocation.

An arborist was engaged to assess the feasibility of relocating the ginkgo tree. The assessment confirmed that relocation is viable; however, the tree cannot be accommodated within a structural tree pit in its current established form. The tree will not tolerate its roots being manipulated into the tree pit structure.

It is proposed that the tree is relocated to the Town Square in the location of the current fountain. However, the arborist did caution there is a risk that the tree may not survive the process. Should the root ball fail to remain intact when lifted, the tree will not be viable for relocation, and the relocation will not proceed. The full cost would not be incurred in this event.

The estimated cost of the removal and relocation of the tree is approximately $40,000. This includes site preparation of the fountain site, traffic management and on-going monitoring for three years.

The arborist we consulted on the relocation is responsible for successfully relocating the 163-year-old heritage oak in Parliament Grounds.

Public concerns

In recent weeks, the removal of the trees along Queen Street has generated considerable public concern.

Public concerns are around tree removal and the perception that the trees are not being replaced or will be replaced by much smaller trees which will take many years to provide the desired canopy cover.

A 'Help Save Our Trees' petition (included as a separate item on this Council's agenda) has been submitted to Council, requesting that Council reconsider its CBD Street Tree Policy. While the petition does not explicitly reference the Queen Street removals, it is reasonable to infer that this is the subject of their concern.

Budget requirements

Central to the public concern is the expectation that replacement trees will provide comparable canopy cover within a reasonable timeframe. Achieving this outcome requires trees of a substantial size (above 3m) along with appropriate tree pits and garden beds. The current budget of $180,000 is insufficient to deliver this standard across all 15 tree sites and the various garden beds.

An extra $435,475 is required on top of the existing planting budget of $180,000 for landscape design, planting of garden beds, 15 tree pits and 15 trees of mature size.

The breakdown is below:

Landscape design	$ 50,000
Disbursements	$ 5,000
Planting	$ 90,000
Tree pits	$ 443,475
Trees (assume $1,800 per tree)	$ 27,000
Total	**$ 615,475**
Existing budget	**$ 180,000**
Extra funding required	$ 435,475

Cost of relocating the ginkgo

The estimated cost of relocating the ginkgo to the town square is approximately $40,000. This includes removing the tree, prepping the new site, relocation and traffic management, irrigation set up with soil moisture sensors, and ongoing monitoring for three years.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

A summary of the options considered is included in the table below.

Option		Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Do not agree to any budget increase (do nothing)	**Minimises cost** – planting budget remains at $180,000	• The cost of the three tree pits for phase 1 is now committed, as previously advised. This leaves approximately $100,000 for all planting. • Tree pits could not be installed in Phase 2 and 3. • Minimum planting in phases 2 and 3
2	Approve $435,000 for planting and tree pits	• **15 tree pits installed and 15 trees planted**, providing long-term canopy cover, shade, and visual amenity for residents and visitors. The trees will contribute to urban cooling, stormwater absorption, and improved air quality as they mature. • **Planting of garden beds** to enhance the appearance and character of the area, creating a more welcoming and attractive public environment. Garden beds also support biodiversity by providing habitat and food sources for pollinators, while helping to soften hard urban surfaces.	• The ginkgo tree is removed but not relocated
3	Approve $435,000 for planting and $40,000 for the relocation of the ginkgo	• As above in Option 2 • Ginkgo relocated to Town Square Park	None identified

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic, Policy and Legislative Implications

The CBD infrastructure project is a key strategic project for the Council. As part of the Long-Term Plan 2024-2034 Council agreed to a reduced programme of work, focussing on replacement of water infrastructure and resurfacing of road and footpath in CBD only.

All other work associated with the Town Centre Strategy, including entrances to the town, linkages within the town centre and developing our connection to the Waipoua river remain available for Council to re-prioritise.

There is high community interest in this project. The decision-making process, community consultation, planning and budget setting are governed by the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA). Council's Procurement Policy applies to all procurement activities relating to the project.

Significance, Engagement and Consultation

The level of significance has been assessed as high as there will be a high level of community interest and an effect on surrounding businesses and residents.

In recent weeks, the removal of the trees along Queen Street has generated considerable public concern.

Financial Considerations

Increasing the budget for this project will result in additional rates burden unless savings are able to be generated elsewhere e.g. via another project cancelled.

Whether the additional budget is funded via debt or reserves will have an impact on operating costs for Council in future outgoing years which would be required to be funded by ratepayers via additional interest cost (if debt funded) or lost interest income (if reserve funded) plus additional depreciation (to the extent additional spend is on depreciable assets).

This could represent at least an additional circa 0.1% to 0.2% in rates based on current funding model. Post the separation of the water assets, this is likely to represent a higher percentage due to lower rating dollar base and the ability to recover reserves may be impacted by potential future imposition of rate capping.

Implications for Māori

No specific implications have been identified for Māori as part of these contract works. The project team will seek opportunities to work with Iwi on the delivery or supply of garden areas and green spaces work, so mana whenua links are reflected in the future of Queen Street.

Communications/Engagement Plan

A detailed communication and engagement plan has been developed for the project. The project team have developed a database of owners and occupiers impacted by the works and are proactively providing information with as much lead time as possible. The contractor has a dedicated stakeholder liaison person who is actively working on the ground to understand any issues.

A project hub has been established at 156 Queen Street. The hub is a place where members of the public can pop in for a chat and find out what is happening.

Environmental/Climate Change Impact and Considerations

As part of the tender process for the CBD infrastructure project, the evaluation panel considered each contractor's commitment to waste minimisation and environmental controls. The contractor has developed an Erosion and Sediment Control plan to reduce the waste sent to landfill.

The benches and some of the bins removed from Queen Street are being re-used in the Town Hall Activation Space.

NEXT STEPS

If funding is approved the next steps are:

- Confirm design of garden beds
- Agree species of trees
- Source trees

Appendix A – Tree pits

Tree growth and fertility are strongly influenced by the compaction and composition of soil, as it affects the movement of air, water, and other nutrients required for trees to flourish. Effectively the 'architecture of the soil', it is the most critical element in the success or failure of urban trees.

Well-structured soil functions like a reservoir. It enables trees and their roots the ability to accept, store and transmit water, nutrients, and energy and provides room in which roots can propagate. Good quality soil allows the space required for life and the necessary biochemical exchanges for growth.

Urban trees are frequently planted in cramped pits with inadequate subsoil otherwise known as Structural soil, leading to stunted growth and root systems that explore the area beneath paved surfaces in search of nutrients. This can cause significant damage to the integrity of urban infrastructure, resulting in upheaval and safety hazards.

Soil vaults provide landscape architects, engineers, and arborists with the tools to create robust and structurally beneficial systems that accelerate healthy root growth and prevent infrastructure damage, fast-tracking the success of both urban tree planting initiatives and surrounding construction.

Uncompacted soil is vital for trees as it allows their roots to penetrate and expand more freely, establishing a robust root network crucial for stability and nutrient absorption. Loose soil promotes better oxygen and water movement, essential for root respiration, hydration, and nutrient uptake, fostering faster tree growth and development.

The image below shows the underground structure of the tree pit.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil