

## A Community Resilience & Safety Forum for Wellington and a potential Case Study of Local Democracy in Action - April 2021

### Who are we:

An Association that represents the Residents in the Te Aro and Wellington Central, while recognising 'our space' is also the space used by business, workers, and visitors. This area has become the largest residential suburb in Wellington in terms of population - on the smallest land area.

### Our purpose:

To be a progressive and influential voice for our members through engagement with the appropriate public authorities to enhance the wellbeing of those living in the inner-city.

### Area of interest:

To achieve a sustainable living environment in the inner-city through adherence to UN Sustainable Development Goals, and proactively working to enhance Democratic Resilience through co-design and civic engagement.

➔ **The Problem:** There are no existing formal cross-sector partnerships for community resilience and safety, disaster response or Covid Recovery in Wellington, and yet the community sector is repeatedly mentioned as a key partner in WCC and WREMO strategies addressing these issues. The organisations need to give immediate effect to their own strategies in respect to community participation.

### ➔ **Our Recommendation:**

*A community forum should be set up to*

- ✳ **create a formal cross sector partnership for community resilience and safety, disaster response and Covid recovery in Wellington;**
- ✳ **use lessons learned from cross sector Covid Response activities and current safety initiatives to inform a review and update of the Wellington Resilience Strategy, and**
- ✳ **contribute to WCC's Pandemic Response and Recovery;**
- ✳ **provide a case study for assessing the value of such a Forum and options for improving operational partnership between WCC and Community groups in future.**

This could be done well and quickly by creating the Community Forum as a sub-committee under the Steering Group for the Wellington Resilience Strategy. The inclusion of WREMO, Council Officers and Councillors creates a direct feedback loop between residents and response agencies. Pandemic recovery is new territory for all of us, natural disasters are not predicable in their scope or size, and safety, too, is broadening in scope. Having everyone in the same room creates agile problem solving.

The model will give a clear initial focus and purpose for collaborative working. It will also mitigate concerns from residents and the community sector around the lack of public engagement, the need for better communication during crisis response and recovery, and ongoing concerns regarding safety.

***Inner City Wellington (ICW) envisages the Forum would consist of the following representation:***

- ✓ Representation from three Residents' Associations at any one time, who would be nominated through the Wellington Residents' Associations Network (WRAN),
- ✓ Members of the Covid Response Working Group, and
- ✓ Existing Steering Group members.

The involvement of WCC and WREMO will be critical and other players such as Police could be involved as necessary. Community members can canvas information from and provide feedback to their own groups and formal reporting would be through the existing Steering Group for the Wellington Resilience Strategy.

The Forum should be set up with quarterly meetings for an initial 3 year period and a review at the end of this period to determine lessons learned. In this way, it can provide a case study of local democracy in action which will test the viability for a permanent version.

## **Rationale**

Volunteer-led Community Groups and Residents' Associations are recognised partners within Wellington's civic framework. Despite their mandate, currently WCC does not engage Community groups proactively in co-design or development of policy. Volunteer Wellington's last Annual Report estimates 403 active groups within the city.

They can give valuable intelligence and qualitative information to Wellington City Council to:

- identify and address gaps in community support provision and set priorities across policy areas, giving opportunities for partnership across sectors to address local problems accurately;
- inform commissioning for community-based and neighbourhood programming so that it is fit for purpose and value for money;
- help identify innovative ways community groups, resident's associations and spontaneous volunteers address sudden, local needs, providing examples of "best practice," respect for local cultures/vulnerable people.

In response to the Covid 19 Pandemic, volunteers from throughout the city stepped in to support neighbours and others, especially vulnerable and immunocompromised people, delivering food and medicine, checking in on people living alone, and all delivered respecting safety guidance.

To coordinate this work, an impromptu ***Covid Response Working Group*** was formed, supported by Volunteer Wellington and the Student Volunteer Army. It included some residents' associations and local voluntary/community groups. Its purpose was to share resources, collaborate on problem solving such as third-party payments, and address gaps in support delivery. The group's meetings were attended by City Councillors, members of the Wellington City Council (WCC) and occasionally WREMO. We understand this group remains active and now includes longer-term recovery support including, emergency food assistance, signposting residents to mental health services, council services and government assistance schemes.

A critical feature of the Pandemic response has been insight into the capacity and valuable intelligence that volunteer-led groups have to support and improve community resilience. This now needs to be formally recognised in communication loops between residents, the Council and

regional emergency management teams so that the budding relationships can be appropriately supported and enhanced.

A key issue here is that little to no *local data* (i.e. for each specific community) is readily available about issues that arose during the pandemic such as: food insecurity, loneliness, self-isolation, economic impacts on small businesses, household financial vulnerabilities (financial wellbeing), housing quality and discrimination. This gap urgently needs to be addressed.

At the same time the City is facing an increasing and wider range of safety issues where community involvement is critical. To this end, good current local data relating to safety, particularly perceptions and experience of safety, is essential to engender resilience. Yet current communication systems do not foster 'marrying' these issues and ways of resolving them.

We believe a Community Forum would greatly assist both WCC and WREMO in developing appropriate strategies and plans as well as providing the means for assisting in rapidly implementing strategies in emergency situations.

We hope WCC will give due consideration to this proposal and look forward to your response.



**Rev Stephen King**

**CHAIR**



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