

THE LOCAL Te Aro

NGĀ KARERE HAPORI O TE ARO

APARTMENT OWNERS DEMAND CHANGES TO 'UNFAIR' INSURANCE LAW



A group of apartment owners are hoping to get traction with a law change that would bring their insurance bills down.

Currently the law dictates that apartment owners must insure to their building's "full insurable value" – which is usually taken to mean replacement

cost, and can sometimes be much more than the building is worth.

But politicians and political parties are warming up to the idea of change – could there be relief on the horizon for apartment dwellers facing high insurance premiums? **Read more on page 3.** ➔

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Apartment owners demand changes to 'unfair' insurance law

Apartment owners say it's unfair they are forced to insure to a higher level than other residential owners, as **Alex Brocklehurst** reports.

Wellington apartment owners are calling for changes to a law to stop them paying too much for insurance.

Under the banner of the Unit Titles Act Insurance Working Group, Wellington apartment owners have been campaigning on this issue for the last few years.

The Act requires the body corporate, which brings together all the owners in a building to manage it collectively, to insure the building to its "full insurable value".

This term isn't clearly defined, but it's generally taken to mean "replacement value". This reflects the cost of replacing a building entirely if it has been destroyed, rather than say its market value, or indemnity value, which aims to cover a policy holder so that they're no worse off.

The working group's latest paper said the cost of actually replacing a multi-unit building in many cases would be far greater than its market value. So replacement would often be uneconomic.

And for some residents, replacement may not be a good option anyway. Many, including older residents, would likely prefer to take the market value of their home and move on, rather than wait the many years it would typically take to fully rebuild.

The working group noted replacement insurance policies generally say that, if a building is not actually replaced, only indemnity value will be paid out.

Apartment owners say they're not just paying higher premiums for a policy that may not suit them – they're paying for a policy that, if it came to it, would probably never fully pay out, as in practice the building wouldn't actually be replaced.

Wellington apartment owner and working group member Prue Flacks said the current law was unreasonable. "No other category of homeowner has insurance requirements mandated through the leg-

islation...you accept that there's perhaps a bit more complexity with multi-owners and maybe some regulation is appropriate, but not to this extent."

The working group has drafted amendments to the Act, to give more flexibility to apartment owners to agree an acceptable level of cover, while ensuring there is a minimum, to avoid the risk of under-insurance.

They're encouraging apartment owners to raise the issue with parliamentary candidates ahead of the general election.

As it happens, National Party MP Katie Nimon has put forward a Bill that would allow a body corporate to insure buildings to a partial value rather than full insurable value, with a minimum threshold to cover demolition costs. The bill remains in Parliament's biscuit tin for now.

The Local canvassed candidates standing for the Wellington North electorate in the upcoming election.

Opportunity candidate Jessica Hammond said her party would look into changing the law. "It seems reasonable that owners should have the flexibility to choose indemnity or custom cover, just like freestanding homeowners do – acknowledging there may be challenges when owners have different views on the right kind of insurance."

National Party candidate Jonathan Pitts said he was "100% behind the proposed changes" to the insurance provisions. "The high insurance premiums combined with the rates increases over the last few years have resulted in apartment dwellers in Wellington being massively squeezed financially, so if we can help them by passing this legislation then we should."

Labour candidate, and current list MP, Dr Ayesha Verrall said she wanted more Kiwis to be able to own a home and "encouraging more medium and high-density housing in the inner city is part of that solution".

"We support easing the liabilities apartment owners face, including the shift to proportional liability in the building sector ... [A]ny changes need to get the balance right so bodies corporate aren't left underinsured."

The Insurance Council of New Zealand (ICNZ), which represents insurance companies, said the current provisions in the Act could create uncertainty, and were "not always well aligned with insurance practice".

"A key consideration in any reform is balancing affordability and flexibility against the risks of under-insurance. Alternative approaches, such as indemnity or lower fixed-sum cover, may reduce premiums in some circumstances, but they can also lead to more complex claims outcomes, greater uncertainty in settlements, and situations where there may be insufficient funds to repair or rebuild a building following a significant loss. **TL**

Apartments need to make sense

If you check TradeMe you'll see there are around 100 apartments in Te Aro for sale, and 127 available to rent, and the prices seem pretty decent. Right now, it's a buyers' and renters' market, if you fancy living in an apartment.

Apartment living has a lot going for it – apartments are usually warm, modern, low maintenance and often come with good views.

But as our lead story explores, there can also be some unpleasant surprises that come with apartment buildings, such as high body corporate fees and/or insurance costs.

It sometimes feels like Aotearoa hasn't really matured when it comes to residential accommodation that is anything other than a stand-alone house. Body corporate issues, insurance, earthquake standards and leaky building problems worry prospective buyers.

But if Wellington wants to retain and indeed grow its population, we need to get better at apartments and denser living. As a city, we don't have an abundance of land that can be built on, so we need to make

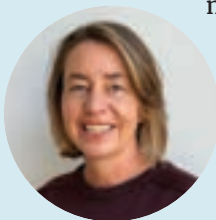
the most of what we have – and living in apartments is definitely part of that solution. Less sprawl is also better for the environment and saving money on infrastructure.

But having myself once lived in an apartment, I see the drawbacks – a lack of communal space, nowhere to put your bike, nowhere to dry your clothes. There are a raft of practical improvements that could make apartments much more liveable.

More important though, is cost and confidence. Apartments should be an affordable option, particularly for younger people and for retirees looking to downsize. Instead, crippling insurance costs can make them into a burden for unsuspecting buyers.

And we should have confidence that the rules for apartment owners aren't going to keep changing when it comes to earthquake resilience or any other regulations.

The challenge affects all New Zealand cities, but getting it right will be particularly important for our city to grow and maintain its inner city population, along with the vibrancy Wellington is famous for. Let's hope our politicians are listening, as the election rolls around. **TL**



Jane O'Loughlin
Editor

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWS

The Local is published monthly
by The Local News Limited.
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Deliveries and Distribution

The Local is distributed to Te Aro letterboxes and local cafes monthly (except January).

If you missed out on your copy, want extras or would prefer not to have a paper copy delivered, contact us at: editor@the-local.co.nz

Subscribe to the electronic edition via our website: the-local.co.nz

Original Design: homestudio.nz

Councils propose 'super city' merger

Wellington City Council has joined three other councils in putting forward a proposal for a Wellington 'super city' made up of all six Wellington region councils: Wellington City, Hutt City, Upper Hutt, Porirua City, Kapiti District, South Wairarapa District, Carterton District and Masterton District.

The proposal is not supported by Carterton and Masterton councils, who want a separate Wairarapa council, nor does it have the support of Upper Hutt and Kapiti.

Councils around the country were given a short deadline to come together and come up with amalgamation arrangements, otherwise the Government will make its own decisions.

The Government will make an 'in principle' decision about whether to accept the proposals in September, but a final decision won't be made until May 2027. **TL**



Wellington voted number one Australasian city

Wellington has been ranked the #1 City in Australia and New Zealand in the 2026 Travel + Leisure Co. World's Best Awards.

The annual awards are decided by travellers, with more than 207,000 readers casting over 661,000 votes across destinations, hotels, airlines, and experiences worldwide.

According to the travel publication, the results reflect the places that continue to inspire visitors through exceptional experiences, authentic character, and a strong sense of place.

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/worlds-best-awards-best-cities-11952492> **TL**



Fast track for SH1 improvements despite no funding

NZTA is lodging an application for a Fast-track Approvals with the Environmental Protection Authority Te Mana Rauhi Taiao for the consents and approvals for SH1 Wellington Improvements.

This is despite NZTA recently revealing that funding for the project is not currently available, and that that the agency is stopping detailed design work.

The designs being submitted for fast tracking have been updated following public feedback.

You can see more at the SH1 Wellington Improvements page at <https://nzta-sh1wellingtonimprovementserd.cmail19.com/t/t-l-wuuljy-thijkkdkw-j/> **TL**



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ULTRA report kept under wraps

Damage caused by the ULTRA festival to Waitangi Park meant it was off limits for weeks.

Alex Brocklehurst tries to go behind the headlines of an economic impact report.

The Wellington agency that has celebrated the result of a report into the benefits of April's ULTRA festival to the economy isn't going to make it public.

In July, WellingtonNZ announced that an event economics report by Fresh Info Ltd had found that April's ULTRA dance music festival resulted in \$5.4 million of "new visitor spend" for Wellington.

It said the report "revealed that 40% of event attendees were from out of region, and confirmed an average of 2.43 nights per visitor, \$575 spend per visitor, and an impressive 93% event satisfaction score, the latter recognising the city's status as Aotearoa's events capital".

It added that the event had exceeded all expectations, and promoters were working on "something even bigger" next year.

But the council-funded development agency is refusing to release the report.

When *The Local* asked to see the report, WellingtonNZ said: "Due to the commercially sensitive nature of the information within the report, we are unable to provide the document in full. Releasing the report in its entirety would risk disclosing confidential commercial information and could prejudice ongoing commercial arrangements."

WellingtonNZ also declined to share excerpts from the report with sensitive information redacted.

The Local was curious to know if the report took

any account of the negative impacts faced by local residents and businesses, such as loss of access to Waitangi Park and parts of the waterfront, and constant noise as the site was set up and dismantled.

For example, *The Local* understands Circa was forced to cancel several scheduled performances because the concert noise was audible in the theatre.

But WellingtonNZ said these negative impacts were considered separately, under the resource consenting process.

A spokesperson for the Wellington City Council said resource consent "was applied for and approved as per usual process, and no monetary value is applicable post event, but we have taken feedback into consideration for future events".

An Oriental Bay resident whose apartment overlooked the festival site, and who did not want to give their name, told *The Local* they were pleased the event was deemed a success, but wondered why the report couldn't be released with commercially sensitive information redacted, or whether its authors had sought views of affected residents: "This would surely give a more balanced picture on the impact of this event."

They also were concerned at the suggestion that ULTRA will be bigger next year.

"Waitangi Park was not designed to be an events venue, its primary purpose is a public park.... ULTRA is a huge commercial musical event and needs a much larger auditorium, purpose built with features for the safe delivery of equipment etc that Waitangi Park does not provide." **TL**

Courtenay Place building height limits may be lifted

Buildings around Courtenay Place, Allen, Blair and Tory Streets could go higher in future, if proposed heritage changes go ahead, as Jane O'Loughlin reports.

The Government is consulting on whether to modify heritage provisions in the Wellington District Plan at five locations, including the Courtenay Place Heritage Area, following a request from the Wellington City Council.

An investigation commissioned by RMA Minister

Chris Bishop has now recommended changes, and these are open for consultation.

The changes would lead to height restrictions being removed from non-heritage buildings within the Courtenay Place Heritage area, which is centred around Blair, Allen and Tory Streets. Currently all buildings in the area are constrained to heights of 18–25 metres.

Removal would allow higher development for 14 parcels of land, or 7000 square metres, within the precinct.

Other proposed heritage changes would affect the former General Headquarters Building on the corner of Taranaki and Buckle Streets, Karori Tunnel, the Kelburn Viaduct, and the Miramar oil tank at 139 Park Road.

The former GHQ is an historic Edwardian Baroque-style military administration building dating from 1912. It is recognised as the oldest surviving military administration building in New Zealand, and is owned by the New Zealand Defence Force. The site is surplus to Defence requirements and is currently being disposed of, with the first right of refusal process with the Wellington Tenth Trust underway.

The building has been vacant for many years, and it meets only 9% of the National Building Standard for earthquake resilience. Due to the potential risk posed by falling masonry during a significant earthquake, the NZDF has placed containers along the adjacent footpaths to provide protection for pedestrians.

The Miramar Tank is the last remaining bulk storage tank associated with the former British Imperial Oil Company installation, located at 139 Park Road, Miramar. The tank is a steel structure, approximately 12 metres high and 36 metres in diameter, and was constructed around 1925. Since 1966, the tank has been adapted for a range of uses, including as a garden centre, café, and most recently as part of a film studio.

The report also recommends removing the Karori Tunnel and Kelburn Viaduct from the list of heritage items in order to reduce the costs and complexity associated with ongoing maintenance and enabling potential future upgrades, for example to accommodate double decker buses.

Consultation on the proposals closes 19 August. **TL**

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Coming soon: A greener Te Aro

Solomon Lee checks out the plans for a new park in Te Aro.



After years of planning, construction for the newest central city park, Frederick Street Park, began in early August on the corner of Frederick Street and Taranaki Street.

The 1400 square metre space is part of the Wellington City Council's Green Network Plan to help increase green spaces in the dense, urban Te Aro precinct.

With very few public recreational spaces in the city, this marks the first of two proposed parks under the Green Network Plan, and the first Council-built park since 2006.

Concepts for Frederick Street Park began in 2023, and the council reported public feedback showed 96% of respondents were very supportive or supportive of the endeavour.

Respondents from the community said the space could possibly be used to relax, eat, socialize,

Thematically, the park will represent "Te Mara" (The Garden) and the fertile lands and water sources that provided for the people.

exercise, read, walk dogs, and more. Hopes for the area included the park being well-lit, upkept, accessible, and open.

Proposed amenities include an open lawn area, trees, lawn seating, lunch/activity tables, raised planters with integrated seating, swing seating, a rain garden, table tennis, outdoor gym equipment, a drinking fountain/bottle filler, public toilets, bike racks, limited parking, and more.

Inside the park, the Chinese Mission Hall will remain in place and developers plan to engrain the historic relationship the Chinese community has in the old Chinatown area in park designs.

Local artist Kerry Ann Lee worked with the council to help create a design that reflected the Cantonese Chinese community and their connection to the site.

Similarly, designers Len Hetet and Manukorihi Winiata from Wai Whenua Design Co Ltd helped incorporate Māori elements into the space as well, honouring the cultivation lands of Te Aro Pā.

Thematically, the park will represent "Te Mara" (The Garden) and the fertile lands and water sources that provided for the people. Other design elements will include Rau Kumara weaving patterns that reflect the value of manaakitanga, to welcome or be hospitable, as well as Wharikitia te Whenua, a woven mat that binds people to the lands and waters.

Work is expected to take seven months with the projected opening of the park in March 2027. **TL**

POLITICAL PROFILE

The ambition to be a politician started at least 20 years ago for National's Wellington North candidate – but an influential person told him to get a career first.

Jane O'Loughlin reports.

Johnathan Pitts got to know Prime Minister John Key at an event for Rotary scholars in the early 2000s. He asked the Prime Minister how to get into politics.

“He said, ‘Nah, don’t go into politics. Get a career first. And then when you’ve got a career and you’ve got something to fall back on, then you can go into politics.’”

Pitts took heed, going on to become a lawyer, but retaining an interest in the National Party. Now, the stars have aligned for him to make his move.

Pitts and his team think they have a chance in the newly created electorate of Wellington North, due to the boundary changes.

“We think it’s in play. We think it’s very much winnable. There’s a lot more bluer areas in there.”

Priority issues for him start with education and law and order. “We need to get those fixed. That’s going to save a lot of money in the future. And there’s also things like getting early access for children with disabilities, increased funding for getting people with neurodiversity issues seen as soon as possible. That’s something I’m pretty passionate about as well.”

For Wellington, he says getting the second Mt Victoria tunnel done is important for decreasing congestion, improving transport times and reducing fuel use.

Another issue he’s heard a lot about from potential voters is parking and the controversial topic of bike lanes – where he’s interested in influencing council policy.

“A lot of people I talk to say they are not happy about the lack of parking. I have no issue with bikes, I bike around. I love biking. I rent an e-scooter from time to time, but I feel like the balance [has shifted] too much to bikes and e-scooters. So I think we need to dial it back a bit.”

Pitts was born in the UK, and partly educated in Japan due to his father working there. Going to International school with an American curriculum had a lasting impression: he can still recite all the names of US presidents, their vice presidents and who they beat in the in their respective elections.



Pitts takes a pop

Family holidays were spent in a camper van in New Zealand where he developed a love for the place. He eventually returned here in 1997, with the aim of being a pilot. While he didn’t make the Airforce’s officer selection, he stayed anyway, and his parents then followed.

Except for one year back in the UK, he’s lived in Wellington since 2005, in a variety of places: Newtown by the hospital (“every time a helicopter would land, the house would shake”) Mount Victoria for two years (“I lived on the corner of Brougham Street, in Elizabeth Street, above the dairy. It was actually one of my favourite flats”) and then in Mount Cook for until 2014. Currently he lives in Khandallah.

He’s a lawyer for Chevron, where his work includes dealing with the fallout from some of the oil transport issues currently affecting the Middle East.

He has two boys, 8 and 10. Helping with school activities keeps him busy as well as some unusual hobbies. He’s a keen guitar player, owns seven guitars, and can play guitar behind his head (“I used to be in a punk band when I was at school.”)

He’s also an avid Lego collector, and keeps an eye out for rare Lego sets. He recently had to invest in a new cabinet to keep his Lego in.

But right now his time is being spent on the campaign trail, finally getting the chance to fulfill his long held aspiration to try his hand at politics. **TL**

This is the second in a series of political profiles and articles *The Local* is running in the lead up to the general election in November.

Practice Makes Perfect



On a bitter winter's night in St Peter's Church, **Indy**

Radcar sat in on a rehearsal of the Ekta Ethnic Choir and discovered that all the heaters had been turned to face the singers. By the end of the evening, she had learned something else: there is more than one way to sing in harmony.

The Ekta Ethnic Choir is the brainchild of Manjit Grewal, a central figure at Ekta, a community organisation supporting migrants in Wellington. Initially, Manjit planned a full instrumental ensemble, but soon realised the skills required created a barrier to entry – and barriers are not what this project is about. So, he pivoted to a community choir, bringing in his musically minded son-in-law, Arindan Sen, along with fellow musician Jolene Baldivino to manage logistics.

“I mined the Ministry for Ethnic Communities’ website and looked through their database,” says Arindan. “I basically sent an invite to every minority community organisation I could identify.”

The response was overwhelming. Singers of Asian, Middle Eastern, African, Indian, Jewish and Pākehā backgrounds signed up — many of them having never sung in public before.

With only eight rehearsals before the final performance and an ambitious repertoire drawn from the members’ shared heritage, linguistic divides had to be bridged fast. For the small group of singers who speak only Mandarin, translators are on hand, singing from the sidelines so they can step in whenever needed. Arindan transliterated the lyrics using ChatGPT so the sounds of one language could be written using the alphabet of another. Meanwhile, Jolene produced tailored reference videos on YouTube for members to study between rehearsals, and Kathryn Ennis-Wilson, the pianist, painstakingly learned unwritten folk tunes by ear.

While the choir’s repertoire celebrates cultures

from across the world, its greatest achievement lies not in representing communities, but in creating one.

At first, the organisers weren’t sure how it would work. “But then they showed up the next week,” Arindan recalls. “And by the fourth week, they were hugging. Outside of the music, it’s actually about those relationships.”

Having moved to Aotearoa from Malaysia after getting married, Ishvin found herself without friends of her own, so she joined the choir to make some.

“I didn’t have my own friends here,” Ishvin says. “Most of my social circle was my husband’s friends, who are mostly boys. I thought, ‘Let’s give it a shot.’ And I ended up meeting people from Singapore and Malaysia right away.”

For others, the choir’s sense of belonging offers a welcome respite. Before moving to the capital, Thabile spent three years in Wānaka – an environment she found isolating because of its lack of diversity. She finds Wellington friendlier by comparison, simply because it is more culturally diverse.

As the session got underway, Manjit good-naturedly grumbled that the choir only sang the same songs.

“They’re practising, Uncle,” Arindan gently chided.

Manjit is a graceful, sixty-something Sikh man whose countless acts of service through Ekta have helped sustain Wellington’s vulnerable communities. His eyes lit up as he explained that Ekta means “oneness.” While this accurately describes the choir’s official mission, it obscures its true value: an unapologetic celebration of difference. All that diversity of experience and perspective gathered in one place felt exuberant, spilling into lively break-time banter – as Manjit force-fed people, regardless of whether they had already eaten.

In a political climate increasingly deaf to the benefits of immigration, this room offers a strong counterpoint: one delivered in song, with thirty different voices from thirty different places – all singing in the same key. **TL**

Thirty years of Capital Blues

It's time to celebrate three decades of blues in Wellington.

Thirty years ago, a few musicians who had been playing the blues together wanted a more regular event. So, they and a few friends decided to form a blues music club. This meant that they could approach a bar for a regular gig, they got to play more often, and invited other musicians to come along and join in. Capital Blues was formed.

Over the subsequent years, Capital Blues has had a number of homes: Hotel Bristol, Jack Hackett's (now Gibbons Hotel), The Underworld on Pirie St, and this year, Lynott's Irish bar on Blair St.

In that time, the group has hosted hundreds of acts and countless performers. Most are locally based Wellington players, but it has also attract musicians from all over Aotearoa New Zealand, and even internationally acclaimed players like Chris Cain.

Current President, Andy Haddleton, says he loves working with Capital Blues. "We have so many talented players and many young ones coming through. For example, we had a 20-year-old guitarist just this week. One of the regulars said, 'This is the most



captivating show I've seen since Marcus Miller at The Opera House in the Wellington Jazz Festival."

"We have musicians of this standard most weeks. All this talent right in the middle of town, and so easy to get to!"

For the 30th anniversary celebrations, Capital Blues has created five sessions of different styles of blues, over four days, starting with a high energy Rock 'n' Roll burst, moving through stories, strings, roots and rhythm, and ending with a Sunday session that brings it home. Two of the founders are still playing and are in the opening act on Friday.

Capital Blues 30th Birthday Weekend 20-23 August at Lynott's Irish Bar 21 Blair Street. Entry \$20. More info: <https://www.capitalblues.co.nz/events/> 

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DEC 13th

Spotlight on a Growing Vintage Market Scene



A recent event at Meow Nui was a window into the Pōneke vintage market. **Felix Clark** was there.

"We packed out Meow last time, so we decided to upsize," says Che, market organiser and owner of @CheMoFinds, speaking over a garage track from DJ Kev.Danger. He's almost dancing between the racks as he negotiates sales and chats with the community – you get the sense he put his own stall next to the speakers on purpose.

In late July, Meow Nui filled with vintage sellers, accompanied by the beats of Aotearoa DJ Academy graduates. Pictured above are four of the scene's youngest entrepreneurs:

Hendrik from @CorporateVintage started small. "I was just looking for clothes for myself. If something didn't quite fit, or I didn't end up liking it, I'd sell it on Depop."

Eventually he went looking for a supplier overseas. "The big corporations ship their old and out-of-date stock to developing countries, so those markets end up flooded with the rest of the world's cast-offs. I work with buyers in those countries, sourcing largely from rag houses, and together we dig out the gems and

bring them back to Wellington."

"Most of that happens on long video calls, with the supplier sorting through piles of old clothing on camera while we pick out what's worth taking. What arrives is a selected bundle, not random stuff."

Anneke helps run the stall and prices the clothing. "Clothing today isn't made for longevity," she says. "The pieces we stock are made from higher quality materials, built to a higher standard, and finished with intricate details you don't get on modern clothes."

To an outsider, reselling looks mentally exhausting. A department store runs on economy of scale and can afford to waste stock; a reseller can't afford a single dud. Everything bought has to sell. Set aside the physical labour of sorting, shipping and hauling a stall to

market, and an average week is still hundreds of tiny financial decisions – weighing what a garment costs against a guess at what it will resell for, a number nobody knows until the sale actually happens.

The more seasoned sellers are blunt about how hard the space is to enter. "I'm taking my stall up to Auckland after this. It'll be past midnight when I get there," says Trist Nguyen. "This isn't something you can do if you don't love it. But if you do have that love, it just happens. I had 300 pairs of sneakers by the time I started clearing out my closet in lockdown."

The Wellington vintage scene keeps growing, and it lifts more than the resellers – the DJs, barbers, tooth gem artists and craftspeople who have found a niche here, and the street fashion you see around town because of it. If you missed this one, check @CheMoFinds on Instagram for the next. **TL**

"The pieces we stock are made from higher quality materials, built to a higher standard, and finished with intricate details you don't get on modern clothes."



Felix Clarke was out and about on the streets of Te Aro checking out some outfits.



Casey: Camel coat with a shearling collar over a brown floral maxi, lace collar peeking through, plaid crossbody bag. Seventies layering with real conviction - every shade of brown talking to the others.



Marina: @Marina_Suban turns heads in pink ruffles - chiffon blouse, tiered mini, lace-trim socks - grounded by tan butterfly-tooled cowboy boots. She describes her style as her Thai/kpop influences meeting her love for whimsy/fairycore.



Oscar: @oscarislameas is never someone that's been afraid of being himself. Neon florals top to toe, rainbow check bucket hat, knitted scarf and candy-coloured sneakers. Photographed here picking up rare vintage pieces from the market to add to his collection.



River: @River.g.johnson, "I'm an actor that sees clothes as costumes. My closet can seem to be a contradictory chronicle of items, but it also means I can create entire worlds to help me navigate the journey of the day."

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Kerry Meadows-Bonner looks at some of the highlights coming up in August and September.

LIVE THEATRE, MUSIC & VISUAL ARTS

Atomic!

The Opera House | 14 August 2026 | ticketmaster.co.nz
A celebration of the past, present, and future of women in music, *Atomic!* Is a collective of Aotearoa's top female musicians for one night only. Led by vocalist and musical director Julia Deans (Fur Patrol) the show features Boh Runga, Dianne Swann, Vera Ellen, and Jazmine Mary, and an all-female band. Expect massive hits from Blondie, Eurythmics, Pretenders, Kate Bush, Florence + The Machine, Madonna, and more.



Dita Von Teese – Nocturnelle

The Opera House | 28–29 August 2026 | ticketmaster.co.nz
The Queen of Burlesque– Dita Von Teese returns to Wellington with *Nocturnelle*, a glamorous new production that uses sophisticated striptease, theatrical illusion, and old-Hollywood elegance in an incredible adults-only performance.



Tofiga – Fresh Since Ages Ago

The Opera House | 21 August 2026 | ticketmaster.co.nz
Comedian Tofiga Fepulea'i returns to Wellington with *Fresh Since Ages Ago*, a show full of classic characters, fresh material, and music. Bringing back favourite characters like Auntie Tala, Uncle Sam, and Kung Fu Master Tavita, Tofiga also teams up with a social media creator, Laban Miller to introduce new characters.



LIVE MUSIC

Suzanne Vega – Flying With Angels Tour 2026

St James Theatre | 6 September 2026 | ticketmaster.co.nz
Known for songs including *Luka*, *Tom's Diner*, and *Marlene on the Wall*, singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega returns to New Zealand, performing a huge set of her classics with songs from her latest album, *Flying With Angels*.



Mel Parsons – Castle Hill Tour

The Opera House | 5 September 2026 | Tickets at Plus1
Kiwi singer-songwriter Mel Parsons brings her *Castle Hill* album release tour to Wellington, with her unique blend of indie folk, alt-country, and storytelling. Recorded live in the South Island with her band, *Castle Hill* includes songs, *Post High Slide*, *Brick By Brick*, *Be*

Here Now, and *Grain by Grain*. Mel is known for her phenomenal live performances and harmonies.



The perfect play for political tragics

Photo: Rebecca McMillan Photography

Circa's election satire will have you laughing or crying at the state of politics in Aotearoa, says Jane O'Loughlin

The upside of an election year must surely be the chance to see Public Service Announcements put on an election satire and this year is no different.

The writing and performance group has been providing savage political commentary every triennium since 2011, making this is the sixth time the team has come together to ridicule our politicians and political parties.

There's no shortage of material this time around, with Te Pati Maori implosions, Green Party distractions, New Zealand First outrageousness, Act Party weirdness, Labour's lack of commitment and the National Party's general bumbling.

The stage setting is apocalyptic – the Beehive a blackened shell and Parliament's columns broken – what is going on? It emerges that as we approach the election there's a crisis brewing, with warships out in the 'Strait of Cook' – was it something to do with Kash Patel and the bucket fountain? What do the Americans want? And where's Winston?

The storyline is convoluted and nearly superfluous, as the fun is simply watching caricatures of our politicians coming to life.

Thanks to MMP, we do have a weird and wonderful bunch of characters in our Parliament, and the PSA team made the most of capturing and sending up their peculiar quirks which had the audience hooting with

recognition. The Act Party is shown with a cultish leader and a fawning set of MPs, the Greens are behaving like kids at a rave, and Te Pati Māori is in thrall to a Voldemort-like party president.

I had too many favourite characters to list them all but special mention should go to the haughty Nicola Willis and her cheekbones, Ginny

Anderson's manic energy and unusual range of talents, David Seymour's nerdy weirdness, Casey Costello's constant smoking, Nicole McKee's gun-slinging, and Chris Hipkins' desperate need to be loved.

None of the parties were spared – even Opportunity makes a Mean Girls appearance. The media were in there too: notably the mellifluous John Campbell, played to perfection by Cohen Holloway.

Every single one of this hard-working six-person ensemble cast was fantastic. Between them, the very versatile Anya Tate Manning, Cohen Holloway, Jamie McCaskill, Andrew Paterson, Kali Kopae and Brayden Cresswell seemed to inhabit dozens of characters. I was genuinely surprised to realise there were only half a dozen people on stage.

Don't let the ridiculous costumes and wigs make you think this is amateur hour; these actors have spent some serious time studying the oddities of our leaders and their talent for imitation is skilled and hilarious.

It's no exaggeration to say I was fully engaged from the moment it started to the end. I could have watched this for hours. My only sadness was that there was not some kind of singing and dancing finale.

Do you have an interest in politics? Or put another way, call yourself a Wellingtonian? Then waste no time in booking a seat for Election Meltdown, the funniest show you will possibly see all year. **TL**

Election Meltdown is at Circa 1-29 August 2026.

Celebrating a year of being volunteer-run



Saved from closure by volunteers, The Free Store celebrates a milestone, and Felix Clarke went along to the celebrations.

A visit to The Free Store feels like finding a candle of human kindness burning through a particularly cold Wellington winter. All you have to do is show up at 5.15pm in the open courtyard behind St Peter's Church on the corner of Willis and Ghuznee streets with a shopping bag – and they'll fill it with the best of Te Aro's cafe cabinets.

This month The Free Store Wellington (TFSW) marked one year since it became an official community organisation, entirely volunteer-run. Pictured above are some of the volunteers who chip in a little time each week and, between them, rescue tonnes of food every month.

A Free Store has existed in various forms since at least 2014, but running one takes experience in the not-for-profit world, and keeping it open has been a responsibility passed between already overstretched social workers and clergy for the past decade. Most recently it was shared between Kaibosh, Blueprint Church, and the clergy of St Peter's, which has been the effort's home base for a decade and change.

Relying on social workers' spare office hours was never going to last. Social work burnout rates rival those of emergency responders for a reason. On 17 July 2025, Jean Malcolm of St Peter's (middle right), Susie Robertson of Kaibosh (far right), and Sister Sue Cosgrove (middle left) of the Compassion Sisters stepped back, becoming mentors instead of managers. In their place, volunteers like Enid (far left) now run a fully fledged, legally independent community organisation.

The giant cake came from the bakery at New World

Chaffers, and volunteers toasted the year with L&P in paper cups and ate as much as they could. They barely made a dent, so in true TFSW fashion it was sliced up and shared with anyone and everyone.

"About half the rescued food goes to people with big families, five kids and up. So a lot of it goes straight to hungry kids," volunteer Matt says, warmly. Then, out of the side of his mouth: "It was my birthday on Thursday. I didn't tell anyone, I just did my trolley run. Sometimes it feels better to help people without recognition."

"They need good food, we need more hands to push the trolleys. I would really like to get more students involved if possible."

There's no roster and no minimum commitment – volunteers come when they can, and enough hands make light work. But since the more visible original site closed, the stream of new people has slowed. Enid is particularly keen to bring students back, connecting what she's read about student diets buckling under the cost of living with the store's own need for hands. "They need good food, we need more hands to push the trolleys. I would really like to get more students involved if possible."

So, next time you want to be reminded why Wellington is consistently rated as one of world's most "liveable cities", come down to St Peter's in the afternoon, and connect with the crew who feed thousands out of a church basement. Just don't forget your shopping bag! 



Kia ora Te Aro!

Let's talk about our community.

Get in touch about any local issues or if you need support. I'm here to help and would love to hear from you!

Tamatha Paul
MP for Wellington Central

E: wellington.central@parliament.govt.nz
P: (04) 3891290

Auth by Tamatha Paul, Green Party MP.
Parliament Buildings, Wellington. Funded by Parliamentary Services.



ULO ? Unidentified Local Object

Identify the mystery object – something in Te Aro – to win a \$20 book voucher.

Email your answers to us at editor@the-local.co.nz. If there's more than one correct answer, the winner will be selected at random. Congratulations to Geraldine Murphy who identified the July ULO as an exposed fireplace on the side of a building on Ghuznee St.



Who Put Those Flowers There?

Jill Wilson from Inner-City Wellington says one of the nicest things about looking after inner city planter boxes isn't actually the gardening. It's the conversations.

Almost every time Inner City Wellington (ICW) volunteers are out weeding, planting, or watering the planter boxes in Blair and Allen Streets, someone stops to chat. People admire the flowers, share memories of gardens they once tended, or simply pause to enjoy the colours. For a moment, strangers become neighbours through a shared love of plants.

It often begins with a simple question: "Who looks after these planter boxes?"

Many assume they're maintained by Wellington City Council. In fact, for the past two years a small group of ICW volunteers has been caring for these planters, keeping them colourful and welcoming throughout the year.

The Council's gardening team does a great job with hardy shrubs and greenery that can withstand Wellington's wind, dry summers, and busy streets. Our contribution is different.

We enjoy adding flowering plants. They need more care, but they're worth it—because flowers make people smile. They soften the concrete and glass of the inner city, brighten grey winter days, and provide food for bees and butterflies. They remind us that nature still belongs in the heart of Wellington.

Thanks to the Fringe team, the planter boxes also surround beautifully painted bench seats and tables. It's lovely to see people sitting amongst the flowers, eating lunch, catching up with friends, or taking a quiet break. One local restaurant even uses the mint and coriander we've planted.

Growing the project

We've recently begun planting the boxes in Egmont Street. It's a challenging site, with strong winds and

large trees. But something even better is happening: people in the street are getting involved. The Volco Café team keeps the planters outside their café watered and they store our watering can. A local resident has adopted the planter outside their front door, adding plants and care. Ideal Electrical Supplies used its forklift to help us move heavy planter boxes into position, while the owner of Laurenique Hair waters the plants near her.

It's exactly the neighbourhood partnership we hoped the project would inspire.

Earlier this year, ICW volunteers also helped Council staff to add plants around the Kent and Cambridge Terrace pedestrian crossing ahead of the Avatar world premiere to add a vibrant welcome for residents and visitors.

Bringing gardens into the city

Most residents in 'our patch' live in apartments and don't have gardens of their own. Looking after planter boxes offers a chance to get your hands in the soil, meet neighbours, and help make our streets more attractive.

Currently only a small group of volunteers looks after the planter boxes, but we welcome more people. There are many ways to contribute: sharing gardening knowledge and spare plants, or simply helping with planting and watering. If you know of a street, lane, or public space that could use a splash of colour, we'd love to hear from you.

Every thriving city depends on people who care about the place they live. Sometimes that's helping a neighbour. Sometimes it's picking up litter. And sometimes it's planting flowers that make someone pause, smile, and enjoy their walk through the city. After all, the best gardens aren't just made with plants. They're grown by communities. 



GET INVOLVED:

innercitywellington.nz/planter-boxes-group
innercitywellington@gmail.com

The Week the Power Went Out

In a city that can sometimes feel transient and anonymous, I've come to realise how quickly people can become community when circumstances ask them to.



In the second instalment of this series of tales of living in inner city Wellington, **Pulotu Tupe Solomon-Tanoa'i** describes a dark but friendly time.

People say Wellington has as many cafés and restaurants per capita as New York. I have no idea whether that's actually true, but living in Te Aro, I can believe it.

There's something so exciting about living here. Every weekend when I leave my apartment for a walk, I somehow find myself in the middle of something unexpected – a protest, a food festival, a parade, live music in the street, or crowds gathering around performers. There is always something happening.

I've lived in Te Aro for over three years, most of that time on Cuba Street. It's a vibrant part of town – an eclectic mix of old and new, upmarket boutiques and op shops, office workers, artists, students and long-time residents all layered together.

When I first moved into my apartment building, a very kind woman approached me warmly and said, "Congratulations!" I wasn't entirely sure what I was being congratulated for, but I smiled back at her genuine excitement. "Congratulations on getting into the building," she said, patting my shoulder.

I still didn't quite understand. I had chosen it for its proximity to both my work and former spouse. It was important that our daughters could move between our apartments easily. So, I had seen the choice as a convenience rather than something to celebrate. I later learned that alongside owner-occupiers and those paying commercial rent, there were also a handful of

Kāinga Ora tenants in the building. She had mistaken me for one.

What stayed with me afterwards was not the misunderstanding itself, but the reminder that the things we take for granted, like secure housing, in a safe and central part of the city, can represent stability, relief, or even a long-held dream for someone else.

A while ago, the power in my apartment building was cut for almost a week. Suddenly the practical realities of apartment living became very real. Elevators stopped working. The building went dark. Food spoiled in fridges and had to be carried carefully down dim stairwells. You don't realise how dependent you are on electricity until it's gone. Suddenly you are taking cold showers, surviving off data, and making sure you are safely upstairs and inside your candle-lit apartment before dark.

But something else happened too. People who had previously only exchanged polite smiles in the elevator started checking in on one another. People who were strangers just days before invited one another into their apartments for updates, conversation, and room temperature water.

Someone discovered a working power socket in the building, and residents gathered around it to charge devices, boil kettles, and share information. People helped elderly and vulnerable neighbours carry groceries and laundry up endless flights of stairs.

In a city that can sometimes feel transient and anonymous, I've come to realise how quickly people can become community when circumstances ask them to. It's one of the things I've appreciated most about living here. **TL**

COMMUNITY NOTICEBOARD

Community notices are free for local groups and not-for-profits.
Get in touch if you would like to include your listing in *The Local*.

Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui Central Library

Film Night. Every Tuesday, 5–7pm. Enjoy a free weekly screening of indie films, documentaries and art-house favourites from the library's collection. Suitable for adults.

Between the Lines: Outsider. Thu 27 Aug, 5.30–6.30pm. A free evening of chamber music and literary discussion exploring the theme Outsider, presented by the New Zealand String Quartet and partners.

Youth Creative Writing Workshop in Spanish. Sat 29 Aug, 3–4pm. A free creative writing workshop in Spanish for young people aged 13–18, celebrating Spanish Language Day.

Compassionate Conversations About Life and Death. Sun 13 Sep, 10.30am–12pm. A free facilitated discussion offering a safe, supportive space to talk openly about death and dying.

Assisted Dying in NZ Aotearoa. Sun 13 Sep, 12.30–2pm. A free information session explaining assisted dying services in New Zealand, including eligibility and the process.

Cultural Panel – Traditions, Rituals, Religion. Sun 13 Sep, 2.30–4.30pm. A free panel exploring cultural and spiritual perspectives on death, dying and grief, featuring leaders from Māori, Samoan Presbyterian, Islamic and Hindu communities.

Ekta Community Kai Service

Ekta has been serving free community meals every Saturday for several years, helping bring people together over food and conversation. Join them at St Peter's Church at 10am or on Manners Street at 4.30pm. The weekly kai service welcomes everyone and aims to foster connection, inclusion and greater social equity across Wellington's communities, including the CBD, Aro Valley, Mt Victoria and Mt Cook.

THISTLE HALL

when i sleep. Tue 25–Sun 30 Aug, 10am–6pm. An interactive installation and exhibition of paintings by Grace O'Brien exploring memory, home and belonging.

The Clothes Swap. Sat 29 Aug, 10am–12.30pm. Refresh your wardrobe by swapping up to 10 pre-loved garments. Check in clothing between 10–11am. Tickets are \$20.

Divine Connections: Clairvoyance & Cacao. Sat 12 Sep, 1.30–4pm. Explore clairvoyance, palmistry, bone reading and more at this spiritual wellbeing event. Individual readings can be booked in advance.

Zeal: Stories Espresso Cafe

Stories Espresso Café at 40A Cuba Street, Te Aro is operated by Zeal Wellington, combining quality coffee with opportunities for young people entering hospitality. Through a 15-week barista programme, participants gain hands-on café experience, workplace skills and confidence in a supportive environment. Every purchase helps support Zeal's training programme and future employment pathways for local youth.

DCM Wellington

We work at the sharp end of things and are the leading social service working with people who are experiencing homelessness in Wellington. Our services range from free dentistry through to Housing First. If you know of someone rough sleeping who may need support, contact 04 499 4444. To learn more: dcm.org.nz

Keep Wellington Beautiful

Keep Wellington Beautiful holds regular community clean ups. Want to get involved? Follow Keep Wellington Beautiful on Facebook: Keep Wellington Beautiful Instagram: [@keepwellingtonbeautiful](https://www.instagram.com/keepwellingtonbeautiful)

Next event is Sunday 16 August from 10:30–12 meeting at the Evans Bay Marina parking lot.

LISTINGS

Advertise your business or service with *The Local*. Check out our affordable rates at the-local.co.nz/advertise. Contact us at sales@the-local.co.nz

Antiques wanted

GOLD, SILVER & COSTUME jewellery wanted & coins, scrap and alluvial. Small to large lots. Highest ever NZ prices paid. 0800 559922 for free no obligation appraisal.

WATCHES wanted, wrist and pocket style going or not, modern & old any considered 0800 559922

MASONIC LODGE items wanted badges, aprons, jewels and regalia all items considered 0800 559922

CAMERAS wanted, film type modern & old, Any considered Ph Ben 0800 559922

COINS & Banknotes wanted. Pennies, threepences NZ & foreign. All types. ph Ben 0800 559922

FOUNTAIN PENS Wanted. Conway Stewart & Parker Style. Any considered. Ph 0800 559922

MEDALS wanted. Military and sports medals. Any medals & badges considered. ph 0800 559922

MILITARY Items wanted. Books, badges, buttons & uniform. Ph 0800 559922

NZR New Zealand Railways items wanted. Badges, signs, uniforms. Ph 0800 559922

RUGBY Programs & badges wanted. Single items or whole collections. Ph 0800 559922

STAMPS First Day Covers, postcards & albums wanted. Any considered. Ph 0800 559922

RECORDS Wanted. 33s, 12s, 45s. Modern & old. Any considered. Ph 0800 559922

BOOKS Books Books Wanted. Fiction & Non-Fiction. Modern & old. Small – Estate Lots Ph 0800 559922

BOTTLES wanted, glass, marble, codd, stone & soda syphon types, NZ & Overseas Ph 0800 559922

BAYONETS swords and pocket knives wanted. Modern and old. Any considered ph 0800 559922

SCOUTS & Boys Brigade Memorabilia wanted Patches, blankets & uniform all items considered Ph 0800 559922

TYPEWRITERS wanted. Modern or old any considered. Ph Benjamin 0800 559922

TAXIDERMY wanted NZ – Exotic skins, heads, birds & mounted animals any considered ph 0800 559922

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT & Police Memorabilia wanted. Badges, uniform & equipment – any items considered. ph 0800 559922

FIRE SERVICE /Brigade items wanted. Badges, patches uniforms & equipment all items considered 0800 559922

SHEET MUSIC wanted modern & old small to estate lots Ph Ben 0800 559922

Squash Bucklers – Inclusive Squash in Wellington



Squash Bucklers is Wellington's new rainbow squash club, welcoming LGBTQIA+ players and allies of all ages and skill levels. We offer friendly social squash in a supportive and inclusive environment. Whether you're new to the sport or an experienced player, come along, meet new people, and enjoy a game. Learn more at squashbucklers.org

Probus Wellington Central July 2026 Update



The next meeting of Probus Wellington Central features Helmut Modlik, Chief Executive of Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira, as the speaker on Friday 21 August.

Probus usually meets on the third Friday of the month (Feb to Nov) at Prefab Hall, Jessie St, 10.00 am to noon. Membership \$50 per annum. Stay for buffet lunch at Prefab \$25.

More information: probussouthpacific.org/microsites/wellingtoncentral/

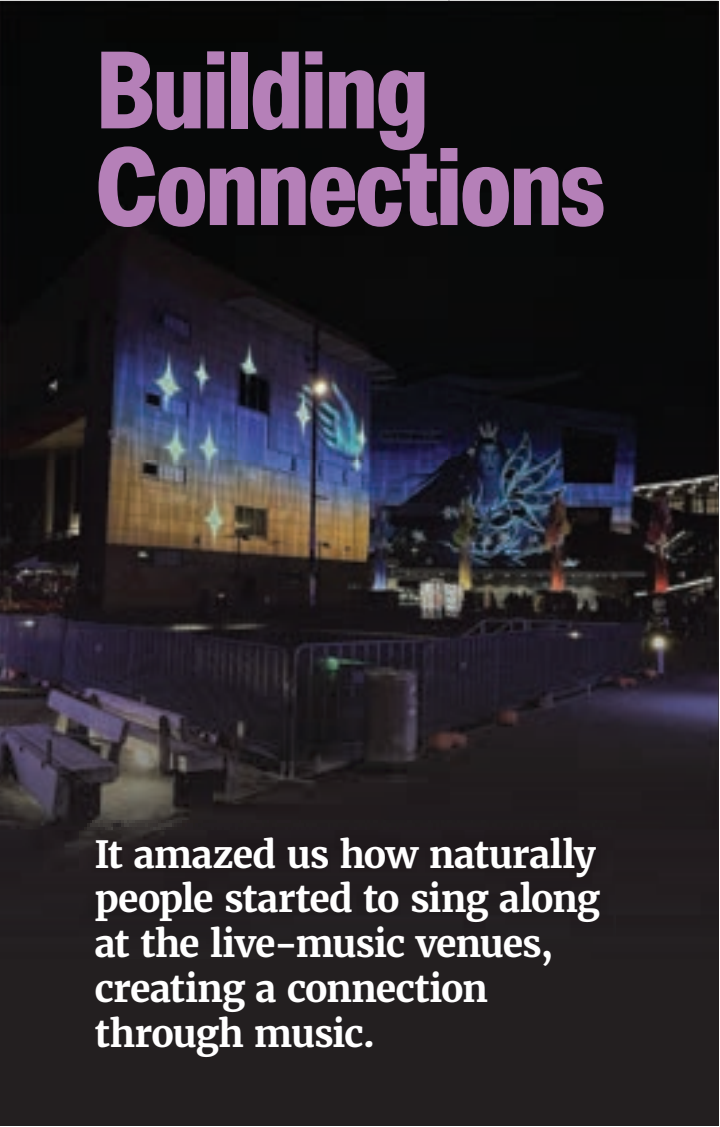
Yoga in Daily Life

YOGA IN DAILY LIFE 23 Jessie Street (opposite Prefab). Offering a variety of traditional yoga classes for beginners and for experienced yogis. Unpretentious and authentic. Early morning, lunchtime and evening classes. www.yogaindailylife.org.nz/locations/wellington



Have you got a story to tell? *My Night Out* is section where we feature contributions from readers about their interesting time out on the town. Published stories will get a \$50 book voucher. Find out more at tearo.the-local.co.nz/lifestyle

Building Connections



It amazed us how naturally people started to sing along at the live-music venues, creating a connection through music.

Henriette Busch has a memorable night out.

There aren't many places nor many days in which one can go from watching a sci-fi movie about giant pepper shaker-like aliens invading earth in the year 2150 AD in the afternoon, to celebrating the Māori new year with families, rugby-fans and the regular nightlife-crowd in the evening. But in Wellington you can.

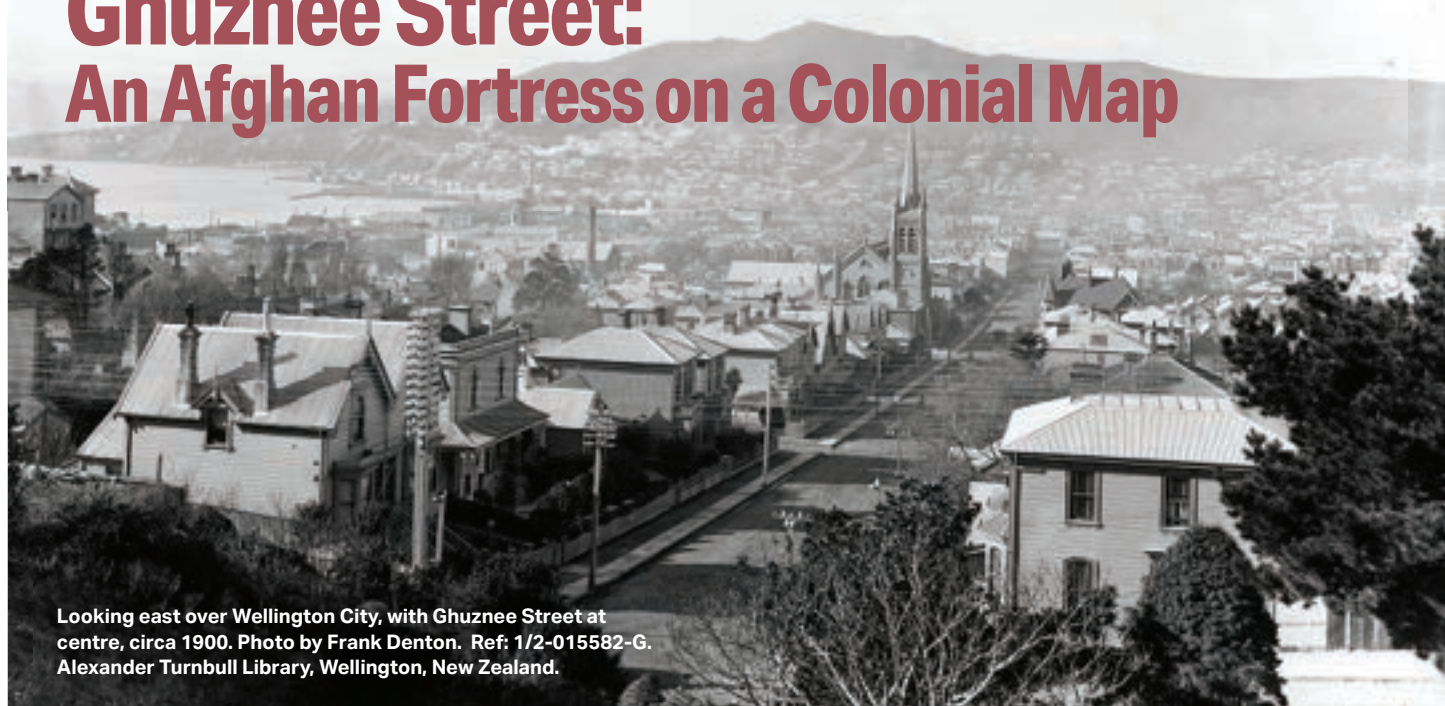
Leaving the cinema I went straight into Te Aro to meet up with A, another German traveller I met on a tinder-like app for friends. We had bonded a few days

earlier, eating pizza and ice-cream, talking about our experiences in Aotearoa. This night we wanted to join the festivities at the harbour, neither of us knowing what to expect. One thing we certainly didn't foresee was how many people were crowding the site despite the cold and the possibility of rain. It felt strange being there in the beginning, trying to figure out what certain venues were about, our senses bombarded with children's laughter, the smell of food and the sounds of the lightshows illuminating Te Papa and the Boatshed. We were observing but not taking part, too overwhelmed by everything. Consequently, we hesitated to accept the invitation from one of the volunteers to come and join in writing down our wishes for the upcoming year. We only joined after watching how naturally people reacted to the proposal, grabbing pens and scribbling on the water-stained banner.

Everyone seemed to be hoping for similar things: I read a lot about happiness and health. Both A and I chose happiness; I paired it with courage. Afterwards, both of us felt more relaxed with each other and with our surroundings. Watching children of all ages play Poi Rākau made us grin and inspired A to try to incorporate the game into the youth badminton class she trains back home. It amazed us how naturally people started to sing along at the live-music venues, creating a connection through music. It was there that we realized how at an event in Germany almost all adults would be naturally sipping some alcoholic beverage. Knowing that everyone was truly in the moment, one's senses not being altered, no one getting into alcohol-induced trouble, was refreshing.

It only took a five-minute walk to get transported back into the regular Wellington night. Families got replaced by scattered Rugby fans and a Gen Z to Gen Alpha crowd, in t-shirts, skirts and tank tops – almost no one sporting any kind of jacket – braving the cold on their way to the next party location. It always amazes me how some Kiwis' tolerance of the cold seems to differ so much from mine, resulting in my feeling overdressed in a winter jacket over a fleece sweater, with a neck warmer and beanie in place. A and I, who didn't know each other only five days earlier, part feeling connected to each other, to the city and the people who shared the evening with us. **TL**

Ghuznee Street: An Afghan Fortress on a Colonial Map



Looking east over Wellington City, with Ghuznee Street at centre, circa 1900. Photo by Frank Denton. Ref: 1/2-015582-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

A Te Aro street was named for a famous battle in the Victorian age, as **A D Paul** explains.

Walk along Ghuznee Street in central Wellington today, and you'll find espresso bars, craft beer pubs, and the hum of Cuba Street spilling into its corners.

Yet this busy strip, tucked into the heart of Te Aro, carries a name that echoes not the Pacific, but the rocky highlands of Afghanistan — a reminder of a battle fought nearly two centuries ago, thousands of miles away.

From Ghazni to Ghuznee

The original Ghazni — or Ghuznee, as the Victorians spelled it — is one of Afghanistan's oldest cities. A millennium ago, it was the proud capital of the Ghaznavid Empire, ruled by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, the warrior-king who raided northern India and filled his city with Persian poets and scholars.

By the time the British reached its gates in 1839, Ghazni was no longer an imperial capital, but a fortified Afghan stronghold.

That July, British and Indian regiments under Sir John Keane stormed the city's fortress in a daring pre-dawn assault, blowing open the Kabul Gate with explosives. Within hours, the Union Jack flew over Ghazni's citadel.

To the Victorian imagination, this became a moment of near-mythic triumph. Queen Victoria herself ordered a "Ghuznee Medal" struck in silver to honour the troops — one of the first campaign medals of her reign.

Meanwhile in Wellington

Half a world away, in a young colonial settlement called Wellington, surveyors were laying out neat rectangles of land for new streets. The settlers, many of them veterans or admirers of Britain's military exploits, borrowed names from the imperial vocabulary of the day — names that spoke of courage, conquest, and connection. Thus Ghuznee Street joined the city grid, its spelling frozen in Victorian orthography.

Lord Auckland's distant imprint

Though Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India, never set foot in New Zealand, his presence lingers in its geography.

It was his Afghan policy that sent British and Indian troops to storm Ghazni in 1839 — the same moment when colonial mapmakers were naming a new settlement at the other end of the world in his honour.

The northern city of Auckland celebrates his high noon of imperial confidence; the street called Ghuznee in Wellington recalls the campaign that brought him fleeting fame and eventual ruin. **TL**

Support our rough sleeping neighbours

Help provide **Crisis Accommodation** for people experiencing homelessness this winter.

dcm.org.nz

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