

ŌTARA TOWN CENTRE EVALUATION AND PROPOSAL

WERKITS
MAKING LIFE EASY

INTRODUCTION

Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board (OPLB) wanted to assess the impact of COVID-19 on Ōtara Town Centre. OPLB appointed Werkits Ltd to evaluate business and community needs and opportunities following the lockdowns and develop a three-year recovery plan for the town centre; gather a database of business owners (BID members) and key community groups and contacts.

OUR APPROACH

We've designed this process in consultation with key stakeholders. We've reviewed local demographics, strategic plans, financial reports and community stakeholder research.

We've conducted face-to-face interviews with 70% (51) local businesses in the Ōtara Business Improvement District (BID) territory, which has helped develop a database. We've surveyed Town Centre visitors and held a discussion group with Town Centre businesses.

As a result of this research, key themes emerged, and from this we formulated a proposal.

HE TANGATA — THE PEOPLE

The Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board area includes Ōtara, Papatoetoe, East Tamaki, Puhunui and Manukau Central. At the 2018 Census there were 85,122 usual residents in Ōtara-Papatoetoe area, an increase of 9,459 people since the 2013 Census. This represents a 12.5% increase between 2013 and 2018.

ŌTARA FIGURES

(2018 Census)

13,749 Residents

At the 2018 census, the number of usual residents in Ōtara was 13,749.

Median income of \$20,450

The median income is \$20,450 with 3.7% earning over \$70k.

Compared to the Auckland Region median income which is \$34,000 and 19% respectively

Median age of 25

Ōtara has a relatively young population, with a median age of 25.

32% speak Samoan

After English, Samoan is the most common language, spoken by around 32% of people

Ethnic groups:

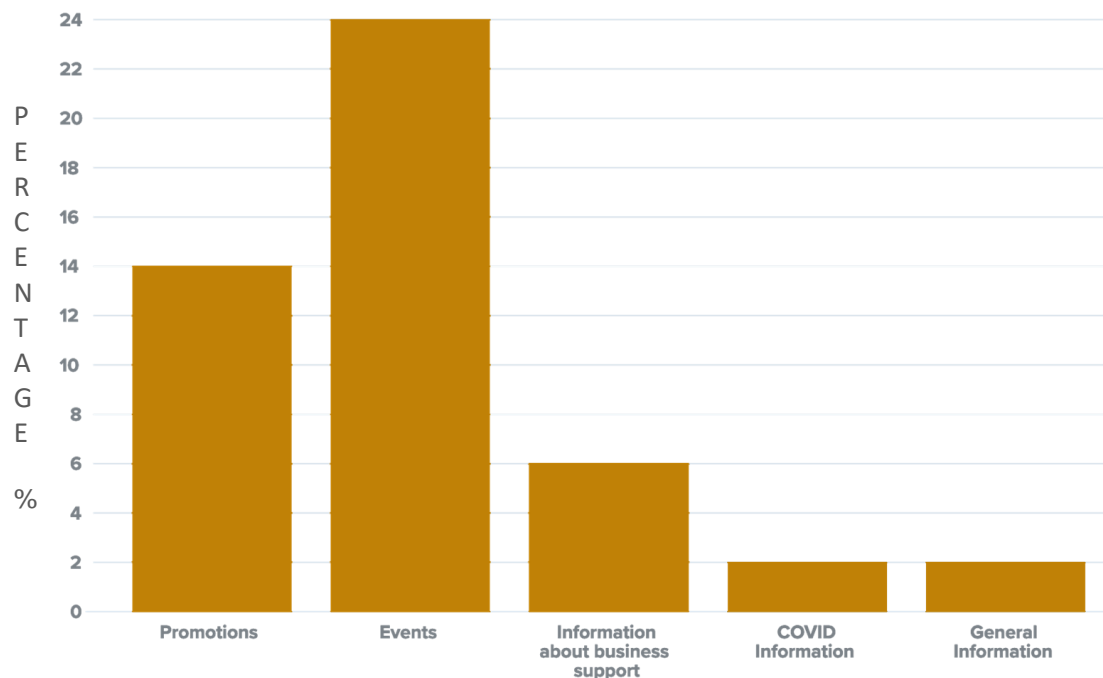
78.9%	Pacifica peoples
22.35%	Māori
10.18%	European
5%	Asian
0.3%	Middle Eastern, Latin American or African
0.28%	Other

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Small businesses are struggling. Foot traffic and sales have declined due to changes in consumer behaviour following COVID-19 and business owners are experiencing staffing and supply issues. COVID19 has highlighted the lack of collaboration with the Ōtara Business Association (OBA) and key stakeholders within the community which has hindered the recovery of the town centre.

The research identified 68% uptake of the first wage subsidy among businesses interviewed in Ōtara. The remaining businesses either didn't know about the subsidy, were not eligible, or did not respond.

OBA provided the Werkits project team with a list of services and activities they offered members after and during COVID-19 lockdowns - promotions, events, information about the pandemic, support programs, and services. The majority (70%) of Ōtara businesses indicated they did not access any of these services. The services businesses' accessed are presented in the following graph:



The general mood of businesses in Ōtara was pessimistic, with just under half (48%) of businesses just wanting to survive, 19% wanting to close, sell, or was unsure about their future. Only a third (33%) of businesses indicated they wanted to grow or expand.

BIGGER THAN COVID-19

While the face-to-face interviews were around COVID-19 recovery, it soon became apparent that there were other issues and concerns businesses wanted to express, which were more profound.

The research identified more serious issues hindering the recovery of the town centre, which predated COVID-19.

Analysis of the businesses' responses revealed key themes. After speaking to businesses and community stakeholders, there is a **strong perception** that the OBA is responsible for the town centre; therefore, the businesses and community stakeholders frustrations were channeled at the OBA and are highlighted under the following themes:

- **Engagement**
- **Membership / activation / promotion / event**
- **Collaboration & partnership**
- **Safety**
- **Environment**
- **Advocacy**
- **Change in consumer behaviour**
- **Corporate decisions**

Changes in consumer behaviour and corporate decisions are considered outliers as they are outside the control of the OBA. Loss of jobs has led to a decrease in disposable income, which, in turn, has led to reduced spending and foot traffic. The closure of major organisations such as Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) and banks has also reduced visitor numbers.

ENGAGEMENT

Business owners and community stakeholders reported poor communications from the OBA and experienced barriers to engagement. There is also a lack of knowledge among several businesses about what OBA does and a perception that the manager of the OBA only appears when an AGM is due. Businesses and community stakeholders had also reported the OBA is unresponsive to queries or new ideas. A few businesses and two community stakeholders provided positive feedback about the OBA.

"I don't know what they do. I have not come across anyone from OBA. I've been here for a month."

"No support from OBA. We hardly see Rana or have contact with him. Charlie pops in to say hello, how's the business?"
"The business association is a waste of time."

"We support OBA events. Our guy attends meetings. If we require support, we use OBA through that connection. If there is rubbish, they take a picture and send it to the council."



MEMBERSHIP

Business owners reported poor communications from OBA around the membership process and are unsure who the executive committee is. Businesses also perceive that the manager only appears when the AGM is due and that the OBA is unresponsive to members' or community stakeholders' queries or suggestions.

"I sign their forms. I'm not an active member. Sometimes their meeting times are not suitable for my work. I don't have a friend to go with. I need a buddy. I think I might be lonely there."

"The BA plays games. They tell us we need to register to vote at the AGM and we can only take our registration forms to Rana in person from 9-10am on a certain day. And then that place is closed and Rana isn't there, so we can't register. That's playing games."

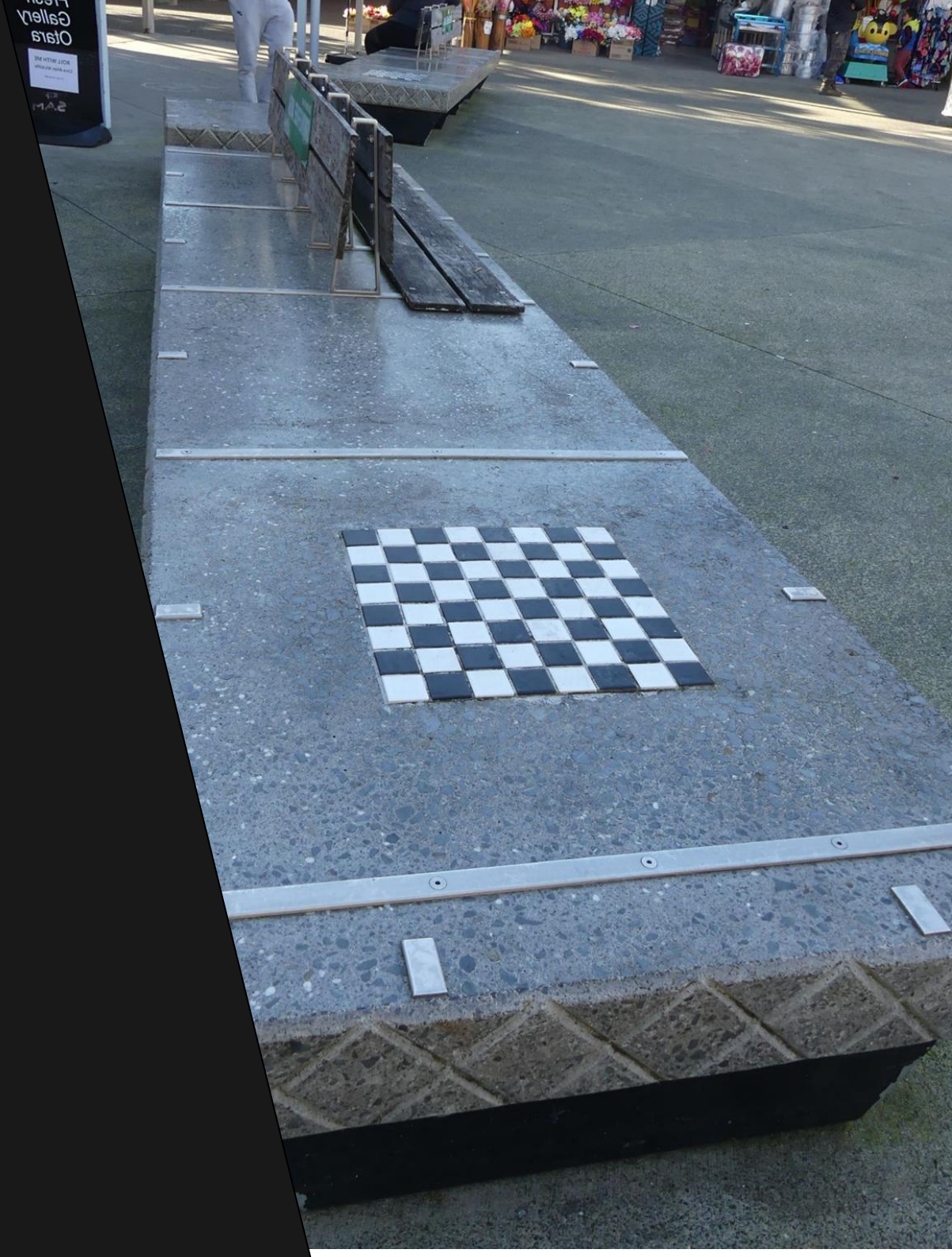
"How do we become a member?"

ACTIVATIONS, PROMOTIONS, EVENTS

Businesses would like to see more promotional activities, events, and activations in the town centre square. The activations held during Ōtara Market Day are usually the most successful, and free health check events provided by local community health providers draw in visitors to the town centre. Several businesses mentioned that activations and events put on by Kai Village were great as they also attract people to the town centre.

“Have more events in the middle of the shopping centre and promotional activities to get more people into the town centre.”

“We need to promote individual shops and the town centre. We could draw more people in from the markets. Most events here are church things. Three or four events/promotions per year.”



COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIP

Several businesses and community stakeholders have a strong desire to collaborate and form partnerships with the OBA. Unfortunately, OBA has created barriers for collaboration, creating frustration and causing missed opportunities.

“The BA puts up barriers and red tape so we decided to approach businesses directly.”

“Partnering would attract more people into the town centre.”

“We’d love the BA to be involved.”

SAFETY

There has been an increase in homelessness, begging, and antisocial behaviour such as drinking in public areas outside the playground and TAB/Pokies shop. The town centre ambassadors had a positive and culturally appropriate impact on behaviour, but they are no longer present. Although there is a Māori warden, her effectiveness to curtail antisocial behaviour is questionable as she is elderly.

Businesses say CCTV and police are ineffective and have concerns of retaliation if they address the antisocial behaviour. Young people riding bikes in the town centre, shoplifting, snatching bags, damaging cars, and intimidating people are issues forcing businesses to come together and support each other.

"We miss Sam. Sam was a father figure to many of the young people who are causing the problems and now he has gone."

"Ambassadors are better than cops because cops have other things to do."

"I provide them something to eat and ask them to move on which they are happy to do, because my customers are too afraid to come in."



ENVIRONMENT

The majority of businesses reported a rodent infestation in the area, which needs addressing. Businesses also want to improve the physical appearance of the town centre and shops, with beautification projects, clean up and maintenance programs. Several also expressed that there is a lack of diversity in the shops, saying “there are too many \$2 shops and takeaways.” More lighting would be great, particularly heading from the town centre to the main car parking area opposite the old Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) campus, and better use of the town centre's common areas.

“The place needs to be cleaned up and the rats are a problem.”

“Clean up the environment as it is terrible.”

“I don’t like walking around here at night because it’s too scary.”

ADVOCACY

There is a perception among businesses that the OBA does not advocate on their behalf with various agencies to deal with local issues. For example, working with the Auckland Council to deal with the rodents, fixing the Kew Lane gate managed by the council and the police in helping stop individuals from drinking in public.

“Kew Lane gate has been broken for almost a year. Nothing has been done even though several attempts have been made to get OBA to sort it out.”

“Approached OBA about drinking and broken bottles but nothing has been done.”

“We had to pool with three other businesses to remove illegal dumping. Council didn’t respond and the BA didn’t help.”



A WILLINGNESS FOR CHANGE

Businesses and community stakeholders are eager for change. They want to see the town centre thrive again with people coming back to use their services and buy their products. However, there appears to be little appetite among most businesses to get involved with the OBA to affect change. In contrast, several community stakeholders have demonstrated a great deal of energy and eagerness to participate and drive change in a collaborative approach. What is evident is that there is undoubtedly a strong sense of community which the OBA needs to harness.

"I see this place can do more. Get us out there."

"We want to have a thriving town centre again. We want people to come to the town centre and to use it."

"Better inclusion and transparency with the business association will help us recover."

VISITORS' PERCEPTIONS

Data was collected by Manukau Institute of Technology - School of Social Work and Sport research assistants (third-year social work students) and analysed by their data analyst. It highlighted three significant components of visitors' experiences: shops, social interaction, and safety issues which are themes brought up as concerns among businesses interviewed.

The project team surveyed 31 people in the Ōtara community and interviewed 60 visitors to Ōtara Town Centre in June 2021. Twenty-five of the 31 participants go to Ōtara town centre, but less than half are regular visitors. Two go there every day; nine go there 2–4 times a week. Many of the participants hardly ever go to Ōtara town centre, or only go there if necessary. Of the 60 people interviewed in Ōtara town centre, 31 live in Ōtara and come to the town centre daily, while 45 come once a fortnight.



SHOPS (ENVIRONMENT)

Visitors to the town centre spoke about the lack of a variety of shops. Of those visitors spoken to, 25 people specifically talked about the need for a Pak'nSave. They mentioned the poor quality of products and services and lack of healthy places to eat. They expressed a wish for a cleaner environment and said an upgrade is required. They would like to see the image of the town centre lifted, and someone deals with the rodent issue.

"I was driving through Ōtara today from Ormiston to MIT, and the changes went from flash to old and forgotten. I grew up in Ōtara and the signs are still the same at some of the council parks, the playgrounds don't accommodate the tamariki and whānau, the shops have a liquor store next door. We have beggars sitting outside these shops – let's employ them to keep Ōtara and Papatoetoe clean and vibrant"

"I don't particularly like going to Ōtara town centre because the shops in Ōtara sell low-quality items, [and] the service is not good. The only store I support is Kan's shoe store. The other stores don't sell good stuff. I live in Ōtara but shop elsewhere"

"Build a Pak'nSave or Countdown in Ōtara"

"Supermarkets – cheaper, fresher and will create employment. Less 2-dollar shops, clubs and bottle stores, and vape shops, and finance/loan shark companies"

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Those surveyed said the town centre is a good place to meet people if you live locally and an excellent place to meet other Pacific Islanders as there are many good Pacific Island food outlets.

“Easy access for residents and people who work around there.”

“Good place to enjoy Island food.”

“Locals in Ōtara have been engaging with the community for a while now through the Ōtara Kai Village, which is amazing. They have that face-to-face engagement.”



SAFETY

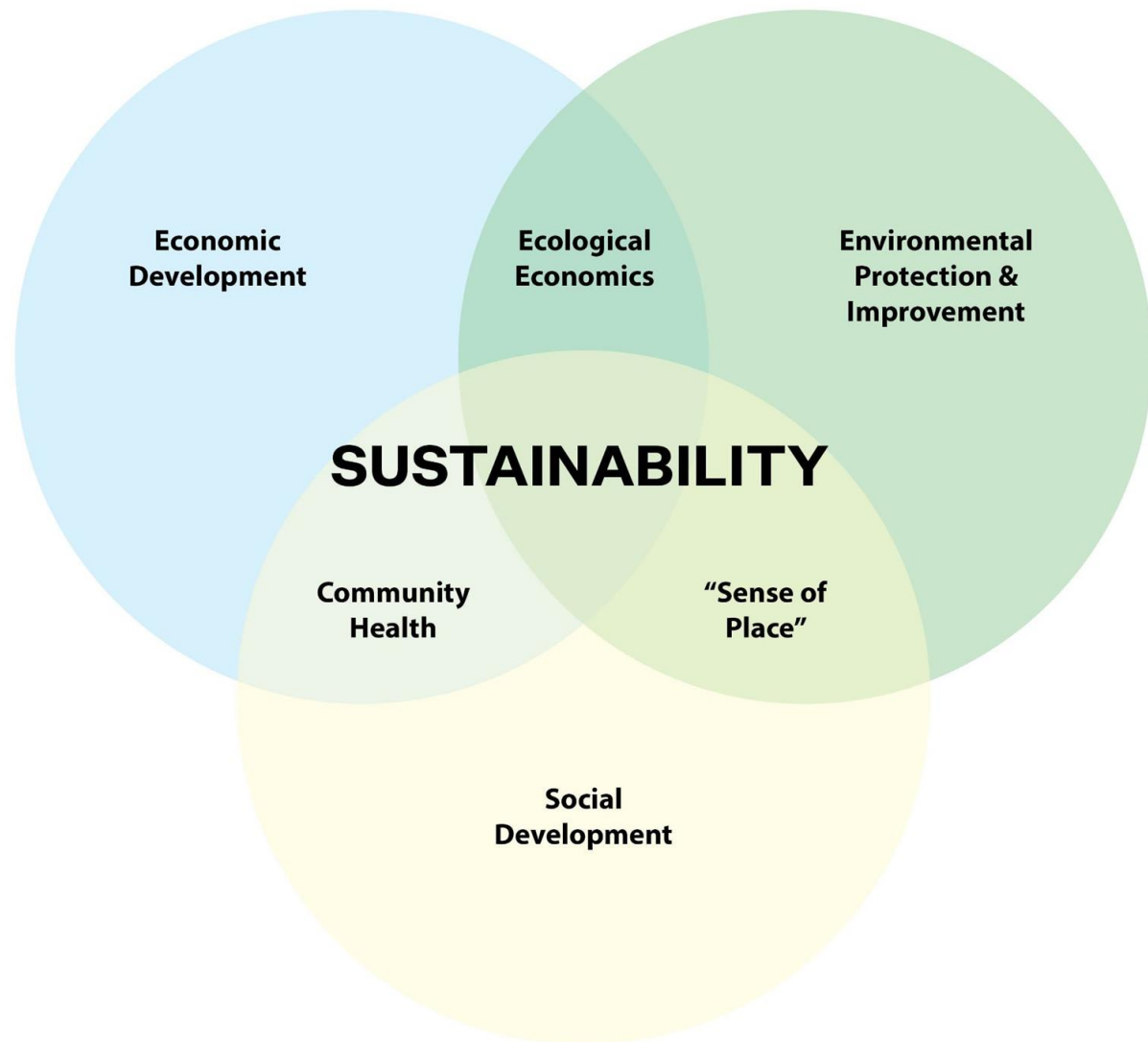
The main reason mentioned for not going to Ōtara town centre was safety. Many interviewees said there is a real need for security. Most people have a negative impression of the town centre and are frustrated with crime and social issues in the area. Homelessness is also a concern. Two of the respondents identified themselves as homeless and spoke about their situation and the number of people they see struggling and using the area to socialise.

“Please can you do something about the town centre, the TAB machines are mostly played by beneficiaries and people that are not working, adults are drinking and sitting around, and kids are playing at the park left by parents so they can go play pokey machines inside the TAB. The town centre also has too many takeaways and mice are running around like pets – so unhealthy for our growing generations.”

“Ōtara has a reputation for being unsafe.”

TOP 4 PRIORITIES FOR BUSINESSES

1. Engagement
2. Activations, Promotions & Events
3. Clean, safe, and secure
4. Collaboration, Partnership and Membership



WHAT DO BUSINESSES CARE ABOUT THE MOST?

Locals deserve better: Let's improve the way the town centre looks and feels.

Transformation: Let's create a collaborative functional environment with the OBA to rebuild for a sustainable future and to get value from targeted rates.

Promotion and collaboration: Let's build on the sense of community.

Civic amenities and services: Let's address safety, advocacy, lighting, and rubbish.

WHAT VISITORS WANT TO SEE CHANGE:

Visitors would like to see reasons to bring people together with family-friendly events. A more comprehensive range of stores, including coffee shops where people can meet, would be appreciated and events and activities, including cultural entertainment, which reflects the community. Most visitors would also like to see anti-social behaviour dealt with, such as homelessness, begging, drunkards, and petty crime.

"Activities will bring together the older generation and the younger generation, making them work collectively in a group."

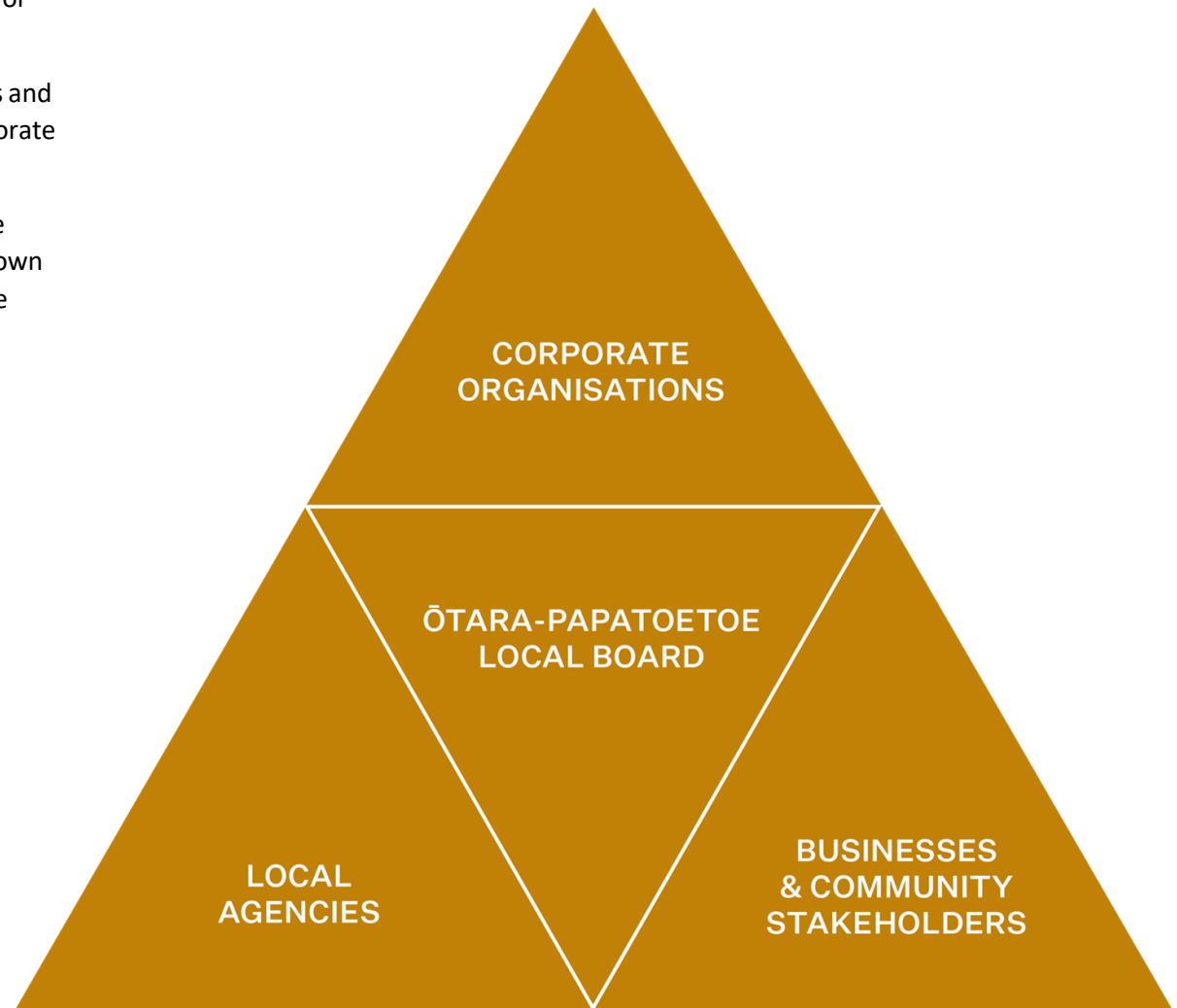


SHAPING THE FUTURE

After approaching several agencies, i.e., Auckland Council, Eke Panuku, and Auckland Transport, Werkits identified no plans for the redevelopment of the Ōtara town centre in the future.

Werkits proposes the OPLB advocates on behalf of businesses and community stakeholders by lobbying local agencies and corporate organisations to:

- Develop a beautification strategy for the Town Centre
- Build major retail and supermarket outlets in Ōtara Town Centre such as Food Stuffs - Pak N Save or Progressive Foods – Countdown.



WE HAVE TO GET THIS RIGHT – A CALL FOR ACTION

From the perspective of businesses and community stakeholders, the OBA is not fulfilling its stated purpose:

Develop local business improvement and economic development based on the Auckland Council targeted rate for core funding, using powers under the Local Government (Rating) Act 2002.

Nor do they feel that the Business Association is achieving its stated objectives which are:

- Placemaking
- Business to Business Event and Networking
- Business attraction programs
- Marketing and Promotion
- Strategic Vision (and planning)
- Stakeholder and Partnership Development
- Advocacy
- Safety
- Governance



THE RECOVERY PLAN

Based on the evidence from the research and strong perception among business owners and community stakeholders that the OBA is responsible for the Town Centre, Werkits Limited proposes the OPLB considers the following three options to assist with the recovery of the Town Centre. In addition, an overview of the OBA's responsibilities, businesses involvement, and the BID program is provided.

The themes deemed as priorities identified by the stakeholders surveyed and interviewed are:

- Engagement
- Activations, Promotions & Events
- Clean, safe, and secure
- Collaboration, Partnership and Membership

**MOVING
FORWARD**

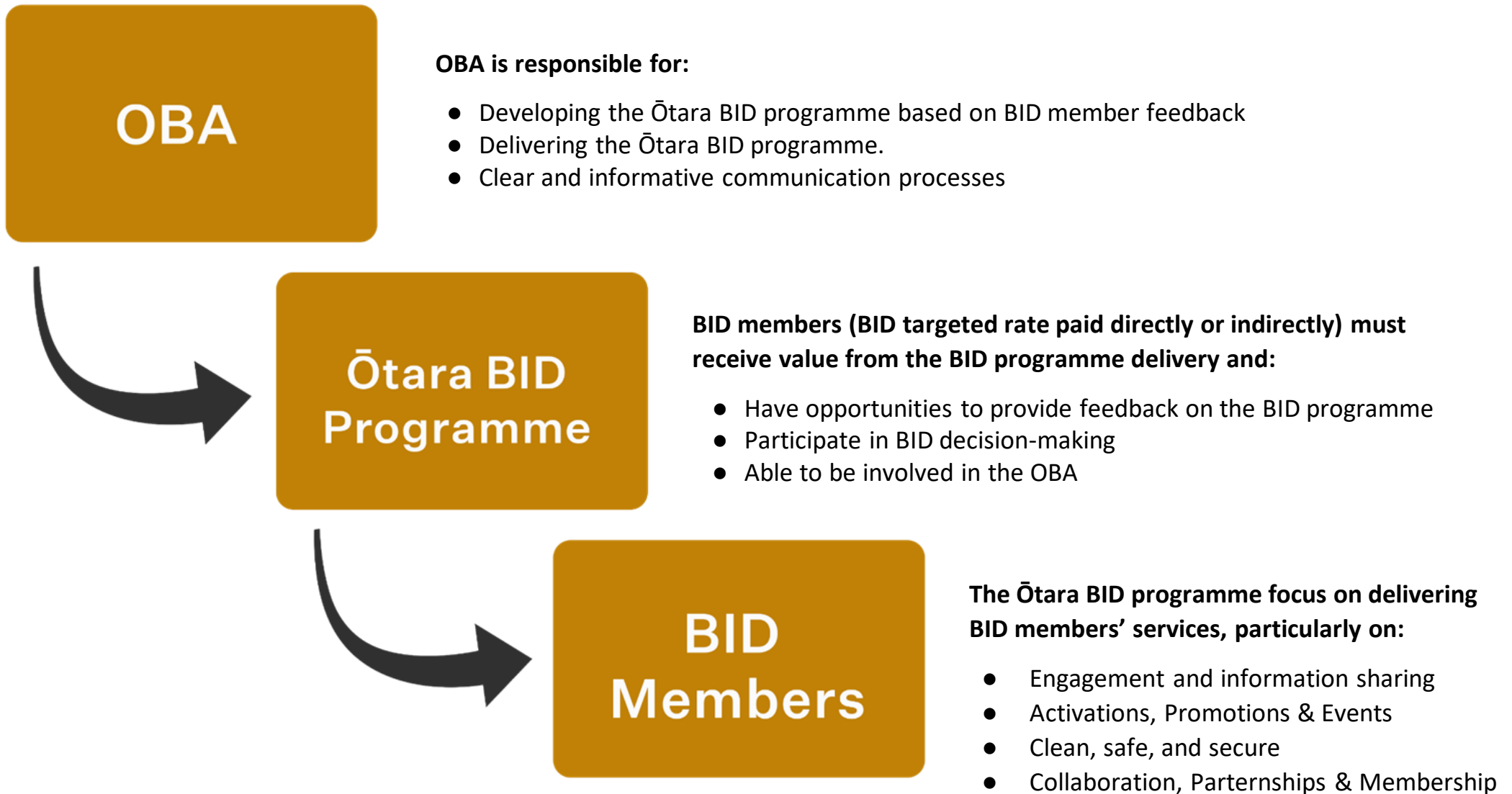


OPTION ONE: REBUILD

1. Encourage the Ōtara Business Association to address governance and management areas they are responsible for.
2. Support and or assist the Ōtara Business Association to achieve BID programme outcomes that align with the priority themes identified from the survey:
 - Engagement
 - Activations, Promotions & Events
 - Clean, safe, and secure
 - Collaboration, Partnership and Membership

Lead	Description	Support
Ōtara Business Association (OBA)	Focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviewing management processes ● Creating opportunities for members to network, share information and participate in decision-making ● Developing effective communication and information sharing 	BID Team Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ OBA aligning their operation to the BID Policy 2021
	Ōtara BID programme - redevelop and relaunch with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engagement and communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All BID/OBA information is freely available ▪ Utilising online platforms, WhatsApp group, etc ▪ Developing a BID/OBA member information pack which includes agency information, signposting to help and contact details ▪ Including language options ● Activations, Promotions & Events - Develop and implement a marketing plan with a calendar of events that involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivering benefits to BID members/business owners ▪ Collaboration with community stakeholders ▪ Utilising social media and online platforms to promote all activities/events held in the town centre ▪ Using specialist providers to coordinate and run events ● Clean, Safe, and Secure environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working with stakeholders/agencies to Re-engage Town Centre Ambassadors and Māori Wardens in uniform which are active, age-appropriate, and easily identifiable. ▪ Working with stakeholders/agencies to address poor lighting, rodent infestation, and cleaning. ▪ Reviewing the effectiveness of CCTV ● Collaboration, Partnership & BID Membership services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders ▪ Creating a Call and care programme/ regular contact with BID/OBA members – drop-in sessions - meet the manager/executive committee ▪ Making it easy for business owners to sign up to the OBA, no barriers 	BID Team Connected Communities Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-establish a more focused BID programme delivery based on BID member feedback ▪ Provide improved value to BID members

OBA Responsibilities, Businesses Participation and The BID Program



OPTION TWO: REJUVENATE AND CONNECT

1. Harnesses the passion and energy of key stakeholders (identified through the survey) who are seeking change and a willingness to contribute to that change.
2. Establish a Ōtara Town Centre collective – ‘One Voice’

Lead	Description	Support
Ōtara - Papatoetoe Local Board	<p>Support the development of a Ōtara Town Centre stakeholder collective – to include representatives from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community stakeholders/groups • Ōtara Kai Village • Ōtara Health Charitable Trust • Ōtara Music Arts Centre • Fresh Gallery • Ōtara business owners • Ōtara Business Association • Residents/visitors/shoppers • Local schools • Ōtara Library • Police • OPLB <p>Assist the collective to develop a Ōtara Town Centre recovery plan which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on bringing more activity and heart back into Ōtara Town Center • Identifying and promote community events and activations • Linking wellbeing and support groups together • Identify and develop local pride, brand, or campaign • Lead and connect to ensure a clean, safe and secure town centre • Provide information in the development of the Local Board Revitalisation Town Centre’s programme • Identify opportunities for the community (youth – elderly) to meet and engage • Assist and foster the development of Ōtara Town Centre being the heart of the community <p>Empower the collective to form links and engage with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auckland Transport, Auckland Council, Eke Panuku etc • Be the collective voice for Ōtara Town Centre 	<p>Connected Communities</p> <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collective representation of the town centre ▪ Reference group with links into the wider community ▪ Provides opportunities for engagement and consultation ▪ To provide ideas and feedback for Local Board plans and work programme ▪ Share Local Board projects/funding opportunities with the wider Ōtara Town Centre community



OPTION THREE: REFERENCE

The Local Board to utilise the information and feedback collected from the research conducted to assist with:

- I. Identifying where the local board could focus their support and assistance.
- II. Assist with the development of the Revitalising Town Centres Programme 2021/2022
- III. Define the themes and categories for any future contestable funding Expressions of Interest process.

Who decides which path to take?



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Werkits Limited and Natia Tucker would like to thank and acknowledge the following individuals for their contribution in helping shape this recovery plan for the Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board.

Joan Ngati and Emeline Afeaki-Mafile’o, MNZM – Community Café (Focus Group Host)

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We would also like to acknowledge those business owners, visitors to the town centre, and community stakeholders who participated in our survey and focus group. Your insights were invaluable.

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini

My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective



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