

Submission on DCC 9 Year Plan 2025–2034

From: Bex Twemlow

Kia ora koutou

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to the draft 9-Year Plan. As someone deeply committed to the future of Ōtepoti Dunedin and actively involved in business, community and governance, I've taken the time to consider the proposals carefully. While I support investment in critical infrastructure, I'm concerned about the scale of the proposed rates increases, rising debt and the lack of clear strategic prioritisation.

Here are my thoughts on some of the key proposals:

231 Stuart Street – Strategic Asset

I support retaining 231 Stuart Street as a strategic asset under the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy. It has heritage and civic value, and while its future use may change, the community should have a clear say in what happens next. This is not the time to quietly dispose of significant buildings. In fact, this moment calls for a full and transparent review of all DCC-owned assets. Ratepayers deserve to know what's owned, what condition those assets are in and how they align with the city's long-term goals. A strategic plan for asset retention, repurposing or release should be developed with public input and used to guide future decisions — not ad-hoc budget pressures.

Entry Fees at Toitū and DPAG

I support a \$20 entry fee for international visitors. It's standard practice elsewhere in the world and creates a practical way to generate revenue without burdening locals. That revenue should be ringfenced to maintain and grow public access to these taoka (treasures).

Smooth Hill Landfill

I do not support proceeding with Smooth Hill as proposed. There are serious unanswered questions about environmental impact, killing of our protected wildlife, process transparency, unnecessary capital investment and long-term operational costs. Public confidence in this project is low. At the very least, Council should pause and initiate an independent review before committing any further funding.

Rates and Debt

A 10.5% rates rise, especially on top of the economic pressure already felt by whānau (families), is simply not sustainable. What's worse is that this level of increase is not just a one-off. The forecast shows further steep rises in the following years, including 10.2% in year two and 10.1% in year three, with only modest easing after that. These projections reflect a Council that is wildly out of step with the current economic reality faced by everyday Dunedin residents and businesses.

While households are tightening their belts, the Council appears to be operating in a bubble, pushing through rate increases without showing meaningful reductions in spending elsewhere. This disconnect is eroding public trust.

Council must urgently focus spending on core infrastructure and essential services, cut or pause non-urgent projects and prove to the public that every dollar is being spent wisely and with purpose. This plan, as it stands, does not give that assurance. It reads like a budget built in isolation from the lived experience of those footing the bill.

Cycleways and Climate Action

I was disappointed to see projects like the Dunedin Tunnels Trail and further climate action pushed aside. These are not luxuries. They are necessary investments in resilience, accessibility and the wellbeing of future generations. I'd support revisiting the capital works pipeline to bring these back into focus.

Business and Economic Development

While it's good to see some investment in events and cultural life, the draft plan lacks any serious focus on economic development. Dunedin's businesses are struggling. We need more than vague strategies and passive references to growth – we need action.

The Council must actively support our people by enabling the creation of jobs, training young workers and keeping money circulating in our city.

Dunedin's business community has been sidelined for too long. Council must stop treating economic development as something that happens elsewhere and start seeing it as core to the city's well-being and resilience. This work is also critical to supporting rangatahi (young people) and a future-focused regional sustainability.

Te Tiriti Partnerships

I fully support the development of Te Taki Haruru (the Māori Strategic Framework) and the role of Te Pae Māori (the mana-to-mana forum) in Council decision-making. The partnership with mana whenua (tribal authority) must be backed with action, resources and clear pathways for accountability. This is long overdue and should remain a priority.

Water Services

Council control of water services is important, but whether they remain fully in-house or shift to a different model should not be predetermined. What matters most is transparency, accountability and ensuring the best outcomes for Dunedin residents. Before any decisions are made, there must be a thorough review of all options, including costs, service quality and long-term sustainability. Most importantly, any change must come with a clear mandate from the community. Ratepayers deserve to understand the implications and have a real say in how such a critical service is managed.

This is a plan that asks a lot of our residents. If Council wants to rebuild public trust, it must be willing to prioritise the essentials, listen to its communities and commit to financial transparency and performance accountability. We need to see smarter choices, not just bigger bills.

I do wish to request an opportunity to speak to this submission please.

Ngā mihi

Bex Twemlow

Ōtepoti Dunedin resident, business owner and community advocate.