

THE LOCAL Te Aro

TE KARERE O TE ARO

WELLINGTON'S HEART TO START BEATING AGAIN



Fences, dust and detours have plagued Te Ngākau Civic Square for years, but change is finally in sight. After a long redevelopment, the square is set to reopen in March 2026. For businesses that stayed open through the disruption, it's been a test of patience and survival. Now, with people expected to return to Wellington's heart as the library and gallery reopen, there's cautious optimism that Pōneke may finally feel whole again.

Read more on page 2. [➤](#)

What's this?

Welcome to your new community newspaper for Te Aro – it's free and available every month.

Find out more inside!



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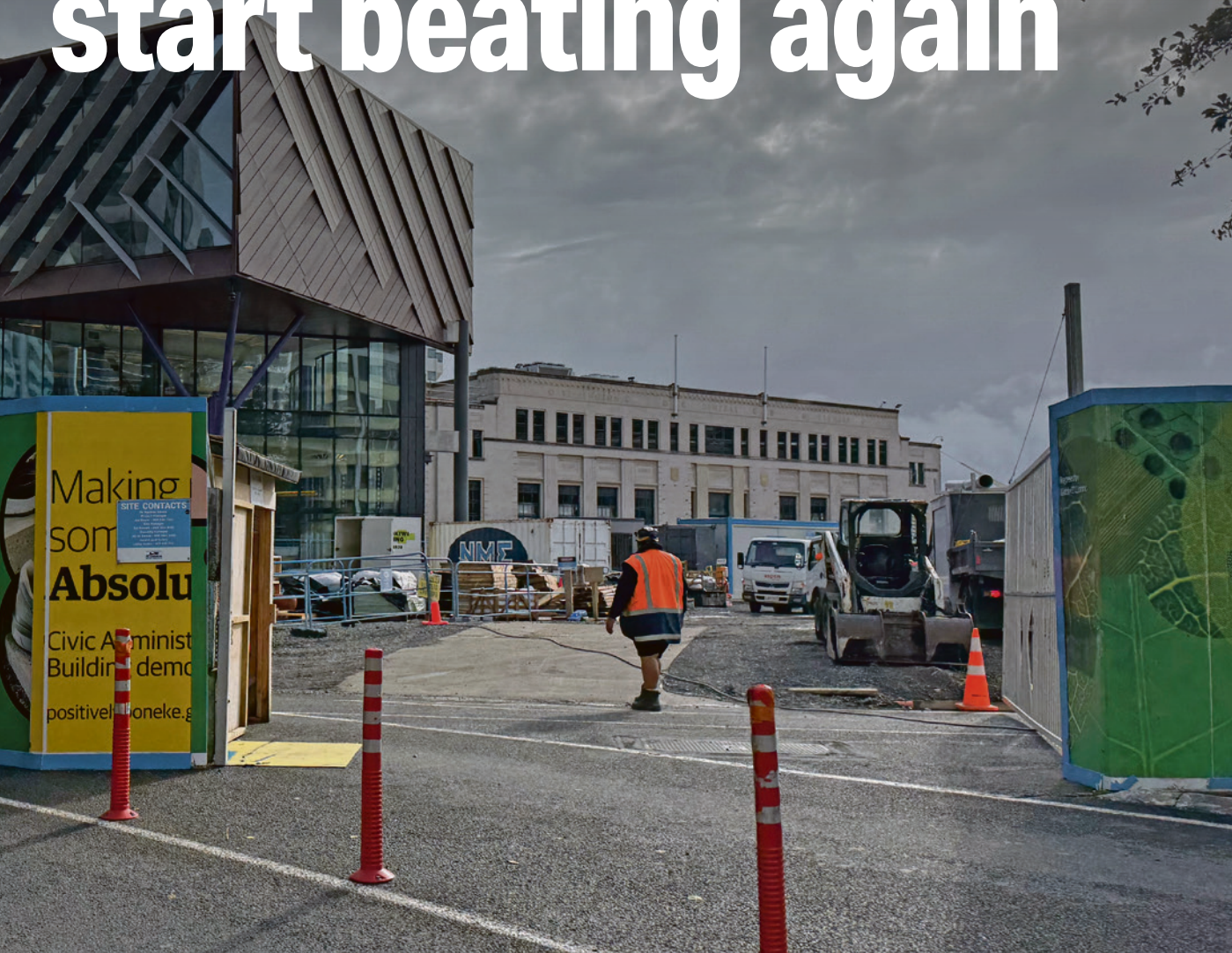
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Wellington's heart to start beating again



The re-opening of Wellington's central library is the first stage of seeing Te Ngākau Civic Square come back to life. **Kerry Meadows-Bonner** spoke to businesses and organisations that have endured nearly a decade of disruption.

For close to a decade, Te Ngākau Civic Square has been stuck in a construction twilight zone. The redevelopment wasn't just planned as a visual enhancement project, but as a response to seismic safety concerns following the 2013 Marlborough and 2016 Kaikōura earthquakes, which triggered engineering assessments across the precinct.

Those assessments led to a string of closures. Te Matapihi Central Library shut in 2019, removing a major source of daily foot traffic. The Town Hall closed for strengthening, City Gallery Wellington relocated during its own seismic work, and former council office buildings were vacated and later demolished. Long before the square itself closed, surrounding streets felt quieter and uncertain.

In January 2025, Civic Square fully closed so contractors could strengthen the basement structure beneath the plaza. That work is now being followed by repaving and landscaping, with the square scheduled to reopen to the public in March 2026. By then, many nearby businesses will have traded through almost 10 years of rolling disruption.

For close to a decade, Te Ngākau Civic Square has been stuck in a construction twilight zone.

For Timothy Tracey, owner of Pickle & Pie on Lombard Street, the impact has been both visible and measurable. “For three years we’ve been about 30 to 35 percent down on revenue,” he said. He described operating beside constant works in plain terms. “It’s hard, slow, disruptive, dirty,” he said. Communication has been another frustration. “Yeah, no communication,” he said.

Despite the losses, Tracey still ties hope to the square’s recovery. “The dream would be to be back to 2023 numbers,” he said. For him, reopening is not about an immediate boom, but about stability and the return of people.

On Victoria Street, Man to Man menswear shop owner Robyn Clareburt has watched the changes unfold from 35 years in business. Access and parking have been among the most damaging impacts, she said.



“I think the biggest thing is the parking, because we’ve lost all of Wakefield Street.”

She said customers have simply driven past. “A lot of our customers have just waved and gone past, and that’s been heartbreaking,” she said. “And the loss of foot traffic as well.”

Construction has also affected daily operations. “We’ve had to close the door quite a bit,” she said. “They do put the hose on, but sometimes when the hose is not on and the wind is strong, the dirt and the dust that comes in, and we’re a little way back, so we’re always constantly cleaning.” While conditions have improved as surface works progressed, the noise and disruption have lingered.

However Clareburt is hopeful about the future. “Once the council get into their building down Harris Street, that’s a lot of people there. And when the library opens, that should bring a lot of people. We’re just happy that it’s coming to an end soon,” she said.

“This area is beautiful, and once they do the city centre, I reckon it will bring a lot of people.”

Another missing drawcard for visitors has been the City Gallery, which has been operating out of the National Library in Thorndon. Ringatohu Toi Director of Art and City Gallery Wellington, Charlotte Davy, said the team was looking forward to its return later in the year.

“While we’ve been away from home, City Gallery Wellington – Te Whare Toi – has continued to bring art to Wellington in new locations, in partnership with our arts whānau across the region. We’re looking forward to re-opening the gallery in October with a ground-breaking exhibition from Cornelia Parker, one of the most significant artists of the 21st century, and we are thrilled to be returning to a future-proofed building and playing a role in revitalising the cultural hub of our city.” **TL**

“This area is beautiful, and once they do the city centre, I reckon it will bring a lot of people.”

Te Ngākau Civic Square, along with the Central Library Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui (The Window to the Wider World) are both reopening on 14 March 2026.

Community news in Te Aro

Welcome to the first edition of *The Local Te Aro*.

When you live in the country's capital city, there's plenty of news and commentary about the big issues our nation faces.

What sometimes gets lost is the smaller stories, about communities and people.

That's where *The Local* comes in – we're a community newspaper operating at a hyper local level – your suburb.

The Local has been delivering community news in Mt Victoria for the past two years, and now we're here in Te Aro. We've assembled a great team of writers who care about local news, events, arts, culture and businesses, and we're looking to play a useful role in the life of those who live, work and play in Te Aro.

As a paper that champions local, you won't see us promoting businesses that send their profits overseas. We're about supporting homegrown artists, entrepreneurs and businesses – people that are grounded in Aotearoa, and more importantly, our patch in Pōneke: Te Aro.

We're collaborating with Inner City Wellington, the residents' association working hard to represent the issues and improve the lives of those living and working in the inner city. Check out their work on page 9.

I'm excited about our mix of news, information, features, fun and reader-generated content. There is something for everyone, whether you are a business owner, a resident, or just passing through.

I believe a good local paper is an essential part of a community. It tells us stories about ourselves, recounts our history, and gives us a place to record and debate issues of the day. So put down your phone and pick up a paper – it's a far more enjoyable experience!

If you're in a position to support us through advertising, please get in touch to learn about our opening deals. Supporters can also make a donation – see the details below.

If you have thoughts and ideas for features or news you would like to see included in *The Local*, feel free to send an email.

We look forward to getting to know you. **TL**



Jane O'Loughlin
Editor

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWS

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City to Sea bridge upgrade agreed

Work to upgrade the City to Sea bridge and associated structures is expected to begin in April.

This follows a decision by the Wellington City Council to put \$15 million towards maintenance work on the City to Sea Bridge and minimally strengthen and upgrade the former Capital E building.

The council had previously voted to demolish the bridge due to seismic risk, however public outcry and an impending legislative change to earthquake strengthening rules led to a last-minute reprieve.

The basic upgrades to the Capital E building would mean it can be leased out to tenants, although they will have to do their own fit out. **TL**



Golden Mile review just started

It may be the middle of the year before the Wellington City Council decides what to do with the controversial Golden Mile project.

Although councillors agreed in November last year to commission an independent review of the proposal and its costs, a tender was only posted in late January asking for consultants to deliver an independent desktop review of the Golden Mile Project.

“This Review will reassess the project’s Benefit–Cost Ratio (BCR), strategic alignment, value for money (VFM), and economic impacts in light of significant cost escalations.”

The review is expected to take between three to six months to complete and cost around \$200,000–400,000. **TL**

Gordon Wilson Flats still hereburger

The abandoned Gordon Wilson Flats remain standing on The Terrace, despite Victoria University announcing in December last year that demolition would start that month.

According to a statement from the university, the building will be deconstructed in stages, in a process estimated to take around 12 months.

The university got the go ahead to take down the 11-storey residential complex after RMA Reform and Housing Minister Chris Bishop pushed through an amendment to the Resource Management Act with a section specifically targeting the Gordon Wilson Flats, and requiring the Wellington City Council to remove its heritage status and permit demolition.

The Minister then declared the heritage protection ‘goneburger’ and promised Wellingtonians that the building was “unlikely to mar our beautiful city’s skyline for too much longer.”

Despite opposition from heritage advocates, and a plan from the Architecture Centre to restore the large residential complex, the university said restoration was not financially viable.

The building had deteriorated over the last decade, since the University bought it in 2014. “The structures suffer from extensive rot, asbestos, seismic issues, and other critical problems that make restoration too costly,” Vice-Chancellor Nic Smith says. **TL**



Safe to swim?

To work out where it is safe to swim this summer, use the Land Air Water Aotearoa website lawa.org.nz/explore-data/swimming. **TL**

Creating a community food hub at the push of a button

Community groups wanting to help people to access fresh, lower cost produce are getting help from a new software platform, as Kerry Meadows-Bonner has discovered.

In current economic times, where food prices keep climbing with no clear end in sight, a quiet shift has been taking place through garages, church halls and community centres across Wellington. No, it is not being powered by a new supermarket chain or a flashy startup, but by a software platform designed to connect communities directly with local growers.

CoShop is a platform that takes the guesswork out of selling fresh, locally grown produce back into neighbourhoods. It is designed to support groups already doing the work on the ground, rather than replacing them. CoShop founder Ira Bailey: “CoShop is a software platform that’s designed to support community groups to buy directly from local farmers. It’s designed basically to be a kind of pop-up system to just make it easy.”

He said the platform grew out of a partnership with Wesley Community Action, a Wellington-based organisation that has been running food co-ops for more than a decade. “CoShop is working with the Wesley Community Action Group here in Wellington who have been around for 10 years. They’ve got roughly 42 pickup sites around the Wellington region and for the past 10 years they have been taking payments but only through a bank transfer. So, CoShop is trying to support them in a partnership relationship to take online orders and just smooth that kind of ordering process.”

It wasn’t long before other non-profit organisations became involved, drawn to a model that prioritises affordability, access and collaboration over profit. “We’ve got funding from Te Toi Mahana (Wellington Social Housing Management), we have some funding from Wellington City Council, we’ve got some funding from Department of Internal Affairs, Health NZ, and Wesley Community Action. We’ve also done some projects with Kaibosh.”

The system relies on a distributed approach that keeps things local and flexible. “The way it works is that we’ve got packing hubs that are kind of distributed around Wellington and each of those packing hubs are run by different groups,” Bailey said. From there, food is packed and sent out to nearby pickup sites. “Waiwhetu in Lower Hutt, they do around 220 bags a week, which is roughly three and a half, four thousand dollars worth of food.” The impact continues to grow.

The idea for CoShop did not come from a business plan or a retail strategy, but from observing how people around the world adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic. “It came from kind of living through COVID and seeing in China where they had 500 apartments... people were using WeChat and other kind of apps to just buy directly from local farms.”

With a background in large-scale software projects, including work on major banking infrastructure, Bailey said he began thinking about how those skills could be used for social impact. “I was like well okay, where do I put these skills into something that will have an impact? And for me improving the food system seems to be ticking off the food affordability, climate resilience goals, and building up and supporting local producers in the Wellington region.” What has become increasingly clear is that CoShop is not being used by just one type of person. “It’s for everyone basically,” Bailey said.

“We’ve got people who are picking up in their BMWs... but the thing is, the more people we have from kind of all walks of life ordering, the bigger we can scale and the cheaper and fresher the food will be.” **TL**

“CoShop is a software platform that’s designed to support community groups to buy directly from local farmers.”





Festival season in Te Aro & beyond

As summer rolls into autumn, Wellington's festival season comes alive. From large-scale arts showcases to much-loved local fairs, the coming weeks are packed with opportunities to get out, explore the city and celebrate creativity, community and culture. **Emily Callam** checks out what's happening across Te Aro and nearby neighbourhoods.

NZ Fringe Festival, 13 February–7 March

The NZ Fringe Festival is a vibrant open-access celebration of bold, daring and diverse performance. With artists free to register events, the programme is shaped entirely by the creative community and spans theatre, comedy, dance, music and experimental work. Events pop up across Te Whanganui-a-Tara, from established venues like The Hannah and The Gryphon to unexpected spaces such as car parks, gardens and even the zoo. A standout moment is PARK(ing) Day on 28 February, when Cuba Street car parks are transformed into creative public spaces. Tickets available: tickets.fringe.co.nz.

Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts, 24 February–15 March

Celebrating 40 years of the extraordinary, the 2026 Festival spans three weeks where audiences can experience world-class theatre, dance, cabaret, music and conversation, blending iconic works with bold new commissions. This year also sees the opening of the newly renovated Tāwhiri Warehouse Festival Hub in Newtown. Highlights include Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds and Macbeth by the Royal New Zealand Ballet. Tickets available: festival.nz/festival-info/ticketing.

Newtown Festival, Sunday 8 March

Now in its 32nd year, the Newtown Festival is a free, family-friendly celebration filling the streets with live music, food stalls, markets and community activities. A beloved Wellington tradition, it's a joyful day out showcasing the creativity and diversity of the suburb.

Wellington Pride, 6–22 March

Wellington Pride returns with the theme "Honouring the past, building for the future and celebrating the now." Events across the programme include the Pride Parade (7 March), Pride Youth Ball (14 March), Pride Hikoi and Out in the City (15 March), and the Pride Picnic (22 March). Pride is a time to connect, celebrate and stand proudly with rainbow communities.

Aro Valley Fair, Saturday 14 March (Rain day: 15 March)

The Aro Valley Fair brings the neighbourhood together for a relaxed community celebration. Known for its friendly atmosphere, local stalls and entertainment, it's a great way to support local makers and enjoy a laid-back day close to home.

CubaDupa, 28 & 29 March, Cuba Precinct

CubaDupa transforms the Cuba Precinct into a free, all-ages festival with 210+ acts, 220 performances and 70 food vendors. Expect street music, theatre, dance, immersive experiences and the iconic Street Feast. Highlights include Paige, NOÉ, and large-scale activations developed with NZ Fringe and the Cuba Street Summer Series. More info: cubadupa.co.nz. 

Upper hand for renters as flat listings surge

At the start of the university year, **Noam Mānuka Lazarus** checks out the competition for flats.

For many years competition for apartments and flats in Te Aro and surrounds has been fierce for those wanting to live in the heart of New Zealand's compact capital.

But the times have changed and the long queues out the gate of flat viewings seem to be a thing of the past.

Instead, the fight to find a room has become the fight to fill one, as landlords offer sweeteners to entice tenants, and many renters are now finding themselves with more choices.

Lucy Watson has lived in three different Te Aro flats with her friends since 2023. She said her group loved city living, but decided to make a change to the suburbs.

"It was relatively easy looking for a new flat, there were a lot more options in comparison to looking for flats a few years ago. Just a lot more properties on the market and less competition."

"Our new flat is much better quality, no dampness, mould or ripped wallpaper," she says.

"Renters in Wellington at the moment have a bit of the upper hand. You still have to do a good search for a quality flat – there's so many terrible ones out there – but it's a lot easier now."

With 258 listings available in the area on Trade Me, the site reported the highest inventory of empty homes since 2014.

Increasing flexibility for Kiwis to work from home has likely contributed to people moving out of cities (like Wellington) into more affordable areas with commuting distance, according to a StatsNZ report last year.

The report revealed that 8.9 percent of people living in Porirua in 2023, and 7.4 percent in the South Wairarapa district had lived in Wellington city in 2018.

Local DJ Gabe Stuart said his group of friends were successful in acquiring the first flat they applied for, an apartment-style rental on Cuba Street.



"I choose to live in Te Aro because it's convenient for me. It's close to where I work and where I study."

Despite what Stuart described as quite an easy flat hunting process, he believes the condition of flats has still not improved.

"I feel like most of the flats in Wellington are pretty poor, especially when it comes to insulation. I'm looking at a hole in the roof that we have, that leaks water every time it rains."

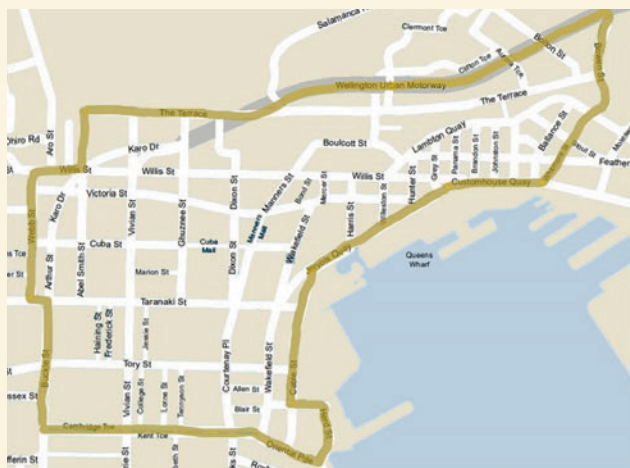
Stuart said the city's rental market is progressing sideways.

The national average weekly rent fell 1.8% from 2024 to 2025, despite consistent growth since 2015, said new realestate.co.nz data.

Wellington's rent fell the most, with a 9.7% decline, from \$693 to \$626.

Realestate.co.nz's spokesperson Vanessa Williams said the fall reflected a more balanced rental market with the increase in listings providing greater choice for prospective renters.

The falling prices could present better deals for new renters, but did not guarantee relief for all renters, said Williams. **TL**



Kia ora from ICW. This is our patch – Te Aro and Wellington Central – and we're the residents' association for the area.

Around 17,000 people call the inner city home, most of us living in the vertical streets we know as apartment buildings. Our community is dense, diverse, and changing fast.

In the beginning

On 17 June 2008, then up-and-coming politician Grant Robertson brought inner-city residents together to discuss forming a residents' association.

Lambton Ward City Councillors supported the idea. A few months later, former Mayor Mark Blumsky convened a Cuba Street businesses and residents meeting to explore a similar concept. With shared goals, the groups agreed to unite and, on 3 November 2008 at the Southern Cross Tavern, ICW was born.

Who are we today?

Since then, our patch has welcomed around 7,000 more residents. We are now a highly intensified inner-city community offering a compact urban lifestyle, where people of many cultures, backgrounds, and life stages live side by side.

ICW has changed too. Today we aim to be a practical, people-focused inner-city residents association, building a strong sense of community and connection.


For example, to keep residents in the loop, we regularly share hyper-local news and information on our website, Facebook and Instagram pages, and eNewsletters.

We also participate in council and community meetings to unpack the latest information so that residents be can part of related conversations and activities, and local decision-making

And, as well, we submit and advocate on some of the key issues that impact inner-city living – such as asking for more green space in the revamping of Te Ngākau Civic Square.

Lifeboat Buildings

One example of our work is the 'Lifeboat Buildings' project to help residents to make their apartment buildings more emergency ready.

We need contacts in every apartment building so that we can work together. Can you be a friendly contact for your building? Email us at innercitywellington@gmail.com. 





**LET'S GET OUR
BUILDING
EMERGENCY READY -
TOGETHER**

We need your help.

**Inner-City Wellington wants to assist inner-city
apartment building residents to be ready
if an emergency happens.**

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SCAN ME





Inner City Wellington
Residents Association
(ICW)



Wellington Regional
Emergency Office
(WREMO)



Neighbourhood
Support, Wellington

There's lots more to share and we'll be a regular contributor here. Meanwhile, you can follow us here:
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Wellington central's new social hub

Jane O'Loughlin checked out the newly-refurbished Gibbons Hotel.

Looking for a central city local? Gibbons Hotel might be the place for you. What was previously Jack Hackett's Irish pub has had a serious makeover, and is now the Gibbons Hotel.

Located within the historic 1916 Hope Gibbons building on the corner of Taranaki and Dixon Streets, the pub has leaned into its history, adopting the name of the family that founded the building.

With a fresh but classic pub look, it's now hoping to become 'a social headquarters for Wellington'.

Timber panelling, a long timber-clad bar, warm lighting and soft-leather booths create an atmosphere that is relaxed yet polished.

When I popped in for a meal on a weekday night, it was clear the venue could cater to all comers. A family with younger children were at a nearby table enjoying their meal, a work group was whooping and hollering in a corner function room, and regulars were chilling out with a quiet pint watching some sport.

Service was fast and friendly, and our meals were satisfyingly generous and tasty – just what you want from a pub.

What catches your eye is the enormous screen – a six-metre-wide LED. This is supplemented by other screens around the area, making this truly a place to enjoy the big game – really big.

Catching up with venue manager Brayden Holman, he explained that the point of the transformation

was to create a hub in Wellington that can suit a lot of different needs.

"We just looked at trying to make a good kiwi pub that offers great everything, and that's open throughout. We've got the food and beverage from daytime into the evening and then we cross over for a bit of sports. And then later on the live music. It's something for everyone."

The food is something that the team is proud of, said Holman.

"We've spent a lot of time working on our food menus. The focus is on good pub food, kiwi classics."

That means familiar favourites like burgers, fish and chips and chicken parma, with a bit more thought put in than your regular pub.

Continuing the tradition of Jack Hackett's, music is a feature. The line-up sees acoustics and soloists on Thursdays and Sundays from 7pm, and then live and local bands Fridays and Saturday's from 9pm – midnight. Fridays and Saturdays have DJs from midnight – 3am.

In other words, whether you want a quiet drink or a late-night dance, Gibbons Hotel has got you covered. **TL**



More scooters for Wellington

Scooter numbers on the streets of Wellington could double from March, as **Jane O'Loughlin** discovered.

Lime scooters have gained a contract to provide micromobility options in Wellington alongside Flamingo, the Wellington City Council has announced.

Since August 2024, Flamingo has been the only provider, after Beam's licence was suspended due to exceeding their e-scooter cap.

The council said it was continuing to licence Flamingo "due to their consistency, attention to detail and community-centred approach."

Lime has been selected as a "complementary partner based on their scale and maturity bringing opportunities for ongoing service improvement, technology refinement, and sector leadership."

Each organisation has a cap of 500 e-scooters and 150 e-bikes. **TL**



ULO ? Unidentified Local Object

Can you identify the mystery object?
It's something in the Te Aro area.

If you think you know, email us by the end of the month at editor@the-local.co.nz. If there's more than one correct answer the winner will be selected at random. The winner gets a \$20 book voucher. **TL**



Do you have a regular or one-off event, class or service you would like to promote? 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*.

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.

February Community Clean-up, Wednesday, 18 February 2026

Join Te Aro Zero Waste Centre for our monthly community street clean in Wellington! Let's unite to kick trash to the curb and beautify our streets. Join us for as little or as long as you like, starting Te Aro Zero Waste @ 12 pm at the Sustainability Trust, 2 Forresters Lane, Wellington.

Vincents Art Workshop

Vincents Art Workshop presents a solo exhibition of art by Rebecca Haig, a local Pākehā German artist. Rebecca's paintings and ceramics will be on display at Vincents Gallery, Willis St Village, 5/148 Willis St. Opening 5:30pm Tuesday 10th February, until 3rd March.

Tip Shop Truck

The Tip Shop Truck will be at Te Aro Zero Waste at 2 Forrester's Lane on 28 February (the fourth Saturday of every month) between 10am and 1pm. The team will be collecting any big, bulky, awkward and other forgotten reusable items. They'll be taking furniture, building and gardening materials, books, and bric-a-brac. You can bring your e-waste, tools, metal, bicycles and hard to recycle items at the same time to Te Aro Zero Waste.

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the-local.co.nz/advertise

THE LOCAL 
COMMUNITY NEWS



Felix Clarke and Kitty Muir-Woodley hit the streets of Te Aro to photograph and interview people about their personal style.

Seen here with pink hair, red ballet flats, and a woolly newsboy hat, this fashionista cites Pinterest as a main influence, often blending styles such as cottage-core and whimsy.



Montell combines a refined classic style with the sneakers and shoulder bag of streetwear. As a dancer, he sometimes shares clothes with his friends. "A lot of dancers are dripped out."



Wearing her denim jacket over a vintage pink parrot dress, **Antonia** ties everything together using pink flats, a blue headband, and plenty of silver jewellery. Her style? "Eclectic."



The owners of Superfly Vintage, **Rebecca and Jacob** prefer vintage streetwear, especially distressed denim. Jacob likes grunge while Rebecca hides sought-after Isabel Marant sneakers behind ripped bootcut jeans.

My night out is a monthly series where we feature contributions from readers. Do you have a story to tell? The best accounts will be published and win a \$50 prize. See the-local.co.nz for more information.

An unrefined evening in the Opera House

Cealagh Taillon tells us about her night out in Wellington.

It was a brisk November night and the girls were poised and primed. Earlier that day, Eloise had received the good news: an A on her final law exam. “What, like it’s hard?”, as Elle Woods famously said. Let me tell you, as someone who witnessed Eloise’s five-and-a-half-year law school journey since it began in Katherine Jermyn Hall, it was hard.

Martinis in mind, we arrived at Crumpet in style, Bella resembling a 1920s socialite in a matching fur coat and hat. Soft lighting and melodic jazz welcomed us inside, leaving the reality of Manners Street far away. We took a table by the window, ordered our drinks, and settled in. It took some effort to convince June – who hates gin and despises olives – to try her first martini. She opted for vodka with a twist. She still hated it.

Even if you hate martinis, they get the job done. As the second round started flowing, so did the conversation. We four were school friends who found ourselves some years later in Wellington. Eleven years of knowing each other carries with it some embarrassing tales and nostalgic stories. As we sat there laughing and reminiscing, I realised that eleven years of seeing these girls grow into women was coming to a close. Bella and June had plans to leave Wellington. They soon said goodnight for the evening. Maybe it was the universe preparing us.

It was just Eloise and I left in a cocktail bar known for “providing refined libations for unrefined evenings”. I wouldn’t describe what we did next as “unrefined”, but maybe you would. If you have ever been to Crumpet, you know this establish-

ment’s bathrooms are those of the Opera House. Now sufficiently libated, Eloise and I commenced our journey to the loos. Not a soul in sight, we ascended the marble staircase. We did go to the bathroom. What we didn’t do was return to Crumpet.

Ordinarily, before a show, the Opera House is all hustle and bustle. Now, in the illicit quiet, we savoured the detail. Ornate mirrors proudly displayed their golden filigree adornment. The tall ceilings, patterned in plasterwork flowers, glowed softly. It felt like the Palace of Versailles.

Tossing our jackets to the side, we twirled around, taking up the expansive space before us. ‘Feather’ by Sabrina Carpenter blasted from a phone speaker, accompanied by our fits of laughter. We danced outrageously, only pausing to pose for photos on the velvet chairs. As the clock neared 2am (well past Crumpet’s closing time), we reluctantly descended the marble staircase. We sheepishly walked back into the bar and were greeted by a surprised bartender.

“You’ve been up there this whole time?!” he asked. “What on earth have you been doing?”

How could we explain? It was probably better not to.

We said our goodbyes to Crumpet and reentered the reality of Manners Street. With a slight sway in our step, we headed home, reflecting on the night just been. We would miss our dear friends, but we would be fine. We still had each other, and we were still the kind of people who would dance in a deserted Opera House. TL





Understanding our whenua

The view from the top of Matairangi tells us a story from the past, as **Felix Clarke** explains.

The view from the Mt Victoria look-out comes to life when you better understand the Māori aetiology (or creation myths) of the region.

From the peak of Mt Victoria we look out over the city towards the distinct green of Te Ahumairangi, “The Whirlwind”. The story of this hill starts at the beginning of Aotearoa New Zealand itself, when the legendary figure Māui first caught the North Island, Te Ika-a-Māui.

Te Ika-a-Māui was hacked apart for food by Māui’s own excited brothers. This is said to explain why the North Island is so hilly! However Māui soon shooed his brothers away, insisting that they only take what they needed for their families.

This led to a period of quietness in Aotearoa. Quietness, which turned to isolation. Te Ika-a-Māui started to plunge its head in and out of the water, splashing around to express its emotion. This is echoed by the geological activity of the Wellington region – regular earthquakes along multiple faultlines that have considerably uplifted the land. In fact, Te Aro was underwater until the Haowhenua earthquake created almost two meters of uplift between 1430 and 1480 AD. The ensuing tsunamis certainly could’ve felt like the splashing of a gargantuan fish!


Moved by Te Ika-a-Māui’s grief, Ranginui cried six tears which became the largest mountains and rivers of the North Island. He also cried two secret tears, which became the sister mountain ranges overlooking

Wellington harbour: Pukeariki and Pukeatua.


The sisters saw that Te-Ika needed company from creatures akin to it. So, they created two taniwha, Ngake and Whataitai. At that primordial time, Wellington harbour was a lake, and the taniwha soon grew too big for it. Ngake tried twice to launch himself over the hills to freedom. The first attempt flattened Kilbirnie, and the second went on to become the harbour mouth. It’s to Ngake’s credit that we have salt water in the harbour at all! However, he was a freshwater creature, and soon died in the salty ocean.

Whataitai tried a different approach, launching himself to the North and creating Ngauranga Gorge. He crawled down the coast looking for his brother, finally collapsing somewhere in the region. There is disagreement around the exact spot, some say Miramar, some Hataitai, and some put his final resting place as Ahumairangi, pictured above.


Whataitai’s body finally gave in, but his spirit took the form of a bird, flying over Te Aro to the Mt Victoria lookout. He looked east and saw his brother, also in the form of a bird, silhouetted against the rising sun. Whataitai let out a rending screech and flew to join him in the afterlife.

This is why Mt Victoria has two names in Māori: Tangi Te Keo, “the sound at the peak”, as well as Matairangi “scout the sky”. 

The source for this account comes from a waiata written by the legendary Rangatihi Tahuparae. Many thanks to Terangingahina Moeahu, of Ngā Ruahine, Te Āti Awa, Taranaki –Tuturu, Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Toa, and teacher of performing arts at Toi Whakaari, for translating the waiata and assisting with this story.



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