

President's Report 2026 Annual General Meeting

16th September 2026

An outline of the main Newtown Residents' Association activities, and other milestones for Newtown, during my first year as President, from September 2025 till August 2026, with additional notes about activities from then until the present.

September 2025

Association AGM in September: I was elected unopposed as the new President for the Association. Rhona Carson continued as Secretary (and I need her close in this role!) and Sam Somers as Treasurer. A new-ish elected unopposed executive team of 9 brought knowledge, commitment and representation of the past and present members within our community.

Grateful to Stephen Pritchard, executive member who has completed the first version of the Association's revised Constitution. This was shared to executives then discussed with attendees at the October adjourned AGM meeting.

October 2026 adjourned AGM: Facilitated meeting with Rhona's support.

Our Treasurer motioned changes to **Resident' Associations bank accounts** needing updates. An update on signatories, including removing previous signatories, names on the accounts and making this a priority to get sorted so that our Treasurer and signatories have better online access to complete his role as our Association's Treasurer.

Review of our draft constitution executives and members helped complete the final version of the Associations' Constitution - clarity, recommendations and amendments that helped successfully complete this. The final document was updated and submitted to *keep us official*. We are now looking at the process of becoming a registered Charitable Trust.

Attending the **opening of the Heritage Festival event** with Rhona and her husband at Te Papa. There were many planned events throughout Wellington, with Newtown showcasing various activities available like other displays, community walks and talks during this year's festival. Rhona hosted '**Newtown in Photographs and Stories**' for a second year at 247 Riddiford Street gallery, previously shown at Rice Pudding gallery.

Meeting the NRA Executives with a potluck dinner hosted at Rhona and Neville's home. This was a great opportunity to get to meet the team directly, ask and answer any questions and develop a vision of what we want in Newtown, matters yet to arise and what the year planning could look like. It was great to sit down, share kai and start conversations about why we are involved in the Association and what we each bring as executives. This inspires me to get to know strengths and weaknesses, collective our ideal community for safety, inclusion and support the wide diversity Newtown has.

November 2026:

The *association received Council's annual grant* for our operational costs and expenses. *Stone Soup Community Gardens for Carrara Park gardens*, these funds provide much needed supplies to keep the raised bed gardens maintained. The Association appreciates the council's support.

WCC announced toilets for *Carrara Park likely to be completed in June 2026*.

I accepted **Salvation Army's 'Behind the Shield' Christmas appeal event** which included their video appeal and a discussion from various officers and staff members to what they do throughout the year leading up to Christmas.

WCC Connected & Newtown Safety Plan team - Joel Berryman, Billy Murray and Delly Ranginui provided an update on progress on the clean up of Riddiford Street, the bus stop and the garden bed. Installation of CCTVs in the area and trespass notices issued to individuals hanging around St Thomas' courtyard and a more visible Police presence in the area.

Having **regular updates from MP Julie Anne Genter** and what her electorate office has assisted people with various enquiries. Updates on cleanup initiatives and Mt Victoria tunnel proposal, that requires funding and how this will affect neighbouring suburbs.

Mansfield Street burnt out house was brought to our attention to officially get the Associations' backing to support the directly affected neighbours and how this property is attracting unsafe access and behaviours. Neighbours provided us details of what they have done so far and feel that they are not being informed on progress by council, FENZ and running out of options. Members present were very supportive with communication commenced for ongoing support with me and shared with executives to discuss a plan forward.

This was *our end of year meeting, concluding the year with a festive celebration* provided by the Association members for all to share.

- Months of **December and January is our close down period of no meetings** however still available to engage with the community if any issues or matters of concern are raised. It allows everyone to enjoy the festive season with loved ones and family, to allow our executives and members a breather from Association related and for us all to return in the New Year, refreshed, rejuvenated and a restart of the year ahead.

February 2026:

Ellen Blake from Ponake Public Housing Future addressed members about this new group and introduced their petition which had support from some members. This petition was to have the government retain social housing and to increase supply, as well as putting pressure on reasons why state housing is important for our community, for affordability and sustainability. An opportunity was provided to be part of a video interview from various individuals of the community to share their views on the current homelessness issues, the importance of social housing and to encourage the continuation of housing developments that have stopped.

Newtown had also become unsafe with an assault on a community member, an increase in homelessness and begging on the streets and by the ATMs, open use of drugs and alcohol that raised a lot of concern, and an increase of anti-social behaviour. This was a priority for the Association to collaborate with groups, Police and Council to start paying attention to what is happening and making significant changes as soon as possible.

Andrew Wilson from **Salvation Army** shared their *Owen Street housing development* of 25 new dwellings,

a mixture of 1 - 3 bedroom accessible units and a community facility possibly completed mid 2027. It will be exciting to hear progress during the construction period and other important dates leading to completion and first introduction to new tenants.

March 2026:

The annual **Newtown Festival** is always an event community and thousands of others are keen to participate in and look forward to every year. This year I stood on the stage with the Mayor, Councillors & MPS, Festival Trustees and team, the Children Commissioner Claire Achmad, and supporters to officially open the Festival and *to celebrate Independence Women's Day*. This was a great experience which concluded with Newtown School and South Wellington Intermediate School kapahaka, speeches and a live band leading the way to Newtown Community Centre where Newtown Residents' Association hosted a morning tea for the officials.

At the March meeting a WREMO update from Vania Szymkowiak provided us with an update on what WREMO's evolving role is in Newtown, shared a planned 1-day weekend community workshop held at Newtown Community Centre to engage with interested individuals to participate in ideas and the start of a plan (or its continuation of previous years plans) for Newtown' emergency preparedness. This was an interesting workshop that helped connect others that attended, open conversations about preparedness as well as a new contact list of interested volunteers to be activated as needed.

The **Protest Exhibition - 1970s protest and art** held at 247 Riddiford Street and a display at SubCulture space, Hilary Watson, an Association executive provided us with updates and was well attended. The exhibition was extended a bit longer as there had been a lot of interest about this history and how well done it was by those involved.

March4Meals a call for action to walk raising funds and awareness to support Salvation Army's empty post-Christmas foodbanks amidst rising living costs. Andrew Wilson's father-in-law Major Gavin Baxter walked the length of Aotearoa on the Te Araroa trail from Bluff to Cape Reign. What a champion!

An update from *local government, central government and regional council all in one night* was amazing to have all three representatives present at our meeting sharing and providing us with a humorous update on how all three cross over and relate to issues about our suburb, our city and nationwide. It was truly an experience that I discovered more about how all three shared their mahi and correlates to each other, especially with Moa Point plant failure at the centre of the conversation and future environmental disasters for Wellington.

April 2026:

Our April planned meeting was cancelled due to flooding to the South Wellington coast area and St Thomas' Church and Community Lounge suffered significant flooding that had to be fully stripped out and time to dry the premises properly with a plan to renovate as needed.

In the early hours of Monday 20th April morning, was the heaviest downpour of rain and significant flooding to Newtown, Berhampore, Island Bay, Owhiro Bay, Brooklyn and Karori areas were the worst affected area, destroying homes, property and belongings, floating vehicles and displaced families. This day was also the first day of school term and here in Newtown, a lot of flood damage impacted our local businesses, where from day one they cleared and cleaned out their premises for some to operate within a day or two, this showed *community connections, support and resilience* where some business owners had a lot more to deal with. I had an opportunity to walk around with Mayor Andrew Little, councillors and council staff to observe first hand what some business owners had faced within days after the 20th, visiting Ronald McDonald House, Newtown Greengrocer, a walk through Lynchgate Mall and to view the damage to Flight Centre office to crossing over to Rainbow Bridge shop to meet and hear another business owners stories. The week continued with visits to local businesses and checking in with them on their flood recovery and support. It was also a good reason to support our local businesses by popping in, saying hi, purchasing food

or coffee to let them know they are important in our community. I am keen to establish these relationships with Newtown business and building owners.

May 2026:

The ***Residents' Association has a new location*** now with our meetings now being held at Salvation Army Worship and Community Centre space at 4 Normanby Street. This was sourced due to St Thomas' Church and Lounge being heavily flooded that had to do a lot of clean up post April. The Association appreciates their support allowing the use of this space.

In our new space, we arranged our seating in the foyer space to host our next month's meeting, thinking we'll be okay, but no, the turnout was significant with 40+ attendees keen to hear our guest speakers. We decided to host ongoing meetings in the auditorium.

An ***update from WREMO Vania Symkowiak post-flood recovery***, providing maps to record homes and impacts, to capture callouts. Shared outcome of a well attended community meeting held in Berhampore. **Jamuna Rotstein from WCC Community Engagement Flood Recovery team** shared that they want to hear from the community about issues, to better understand community needs to coordinate support as needed. Key issues that community experienced was expressed to provide council a better understanding on emergency processes and an example of a collaboration with Civil Defence to step in, for calls overflow in an emergency like an automatic escalation process to be implemented as part of a strategic plan

Wellington City Council City Safety team lead by Sehai Orgad and colleague Joel Berryman provided us with an update on what the council has done so far to address the raised issues of safety, anti-social behaviours and open drug and alcohol use. This was supported by **NZ Police personnel** Sgt Melanie Paddon and Community Constable Des Foo on what and how much Police can do in certain matters.

SMART Newtown faced council funding cutbacks with Jane Patterson (Chair of Newtown Community Centre Trust) submitting her Oral submissions on the Council District Plan. ***SMART Newtown was part of the disaster resilience pathway*** for individuals that lost their belongings to access online accounts. This was a great opportunity for individuals to share their stories of how they used SMART Newtown services and emailed directly to councillors. The Residents' Association provided a letter of support on how important this service is and how it would be a huge loss for our community.

The **Resident' Associations bank account was updated** with signatories and ID recorded. This included myself, Sam Somers, Rhona Carson and Martin Hanley. This had multiple and previous executives' names attached that prevented proper access and had to be more accessible to current signatories and was an overdue task.

June 2026:

Sam Somers and I attended before the **Parliamentary Select Committee, on behalf of the Association on the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Amendment Bill**. Sam led the oral submissions to support our written submission.

At the June meeting Paul Barker, WCC Street Transformation Manager provided us with an update on the **Newtown & Berhampore Parking Scheme** introduced in April 2024. An increase of 220 restricted parks were allocated around Newtown East & West with an increase of eligible permit applications and with proposed 860 restricted spaces available allowing P180 timeframe. The community found communication challenging or limited to renewal period notifications, concerns about disabled carparks and applying for permits. We will continue to seek advice or information with the council on updates as needed.

Graeme Carroll, a member of the Association, caught my attention at the community emergency preparedness workshop, with his knowledge, experience and background on climate/flood affected areas outlining resilience issues Newtown faces and increased risks to severe rainfall events, flash flooding, rising

energy costs, transport emissions and Wellington's significant earthquake hazards. He provided us with a **Resilient Newtown draft action plan**, other community groups and initiatives with solutions based ideas to prepare the community and build awareness. I'd be looking forward to working closer with Graeme and others keen to look into some of the suggested ideas as a starting point for Newtown underway.

July 2026:

Mayor Andrew Little was the star of our July meeting, entertaining us with Council truth about the **Council Amalgamation** and his meetings with the Mayors of Porirua, Hutt Valley and Upper Hutt on how the four 'metro' councils were more ideal with consideration to how Wairarapa and Kapiti councils may decide which way is best for them. This was a great meeting with an opportunity to ask questions.

Mayor Little opened the discussion, after amalgamation update, for other matters, like Arlington flats social housing development updates and rate increases. After our meeting, a publication of the Arlington flats aligned with what Mayor Little shared with us previously and it was a great opportunity to hear this from him, beforehand.

August 2026:

On Sunday 2nd August, we had a *community celebration for the Carrara Park toilets*. Due to the weather forecast, a decision was made to postpone it to the following day, with the weather perfect for our event. We had a great turn out of executives, members of the community, friends and their families, all came along to meet each other, check out the toilet facilities and to get the general public's approval. Andrew Wilson brought along a Salvation Army Emergency Trailer with a large BBQ attached to cook the bulk of our sausages and other supplies, donated by Newtown New World. We had some vegetarian, finger food options available. This was to acknowledge the long term, many years of advocating toilets in our well used and loved community parks. We do hope that in a discussion, and consideration for toilets at Kahukura Park (Workingmen's Bowling Club site on Owen Street), it would be ideal for the council to include toilet facilities for any and all park upgrades.

Newtown had Minister Mark Mitchell visit with the support of MP Julie Anne Genter and staff to discuss the safety issues our suburb is dealing with. A suggestion to create a steering group with community groups and organisations working together to address Newtown issues. The first meeting was held at the Salvation Army Miro meeting room, was well attended with an opportunity to build from this group and hear from others what issues are needed to be focussed on and our community role to keep our community safe. This is the beginning stage of **Newtown Community Stakeholders Group**, a monthly meeting is scheduled for regular updates.

The **abandoned burnout property of 285 Mansfield Street has been demolished**. Since June, it was given the green light to come down, a process with council and demolition team to coordinate a plan to bring this down safely and with careful clear planning and communication, it's been achieved!!! This had been a long journey for the neighbours hugely affected for the past 13 months and hope this provides our community a sense of safety and much brighter options in the area.

At the August meeting the topic was 'Social Housing'. Christina Tyson from Salvation Army provided us with an update on the **Owen Street housing development** of 25 units and their *Tenancy with Heart kaupapa*. Completion April 2027 with tenants moving in July. This is really exciting for Salvation Army housing and for our community to support our vulnerable.

Ingrid Downey from Dwell Housing and Giselle Moinfar from Aoraki Construction provided us with an update on the 25 Hanson Street, Mt Cook, development of 12 apartments and their partnership arrangement of build and lease to Dwell Housing for 25 years. Ingrid also shared an update on 17 Gordon Place site and after three funding applications to the government, were declined. We are keen to continue connecting with Dwell to provide us an update on progress but this is disheartening that Gordon Place will remain untouched for a while until other funding options are explored.

September 2026:

A year has passed and another AGM is upon us, hence me doing my first Presidents' Report. So much more to do for our community, more community events to plan and more members in our community to sign up as a paid member. I do say get involved with keeping Newtown vibrant, safe and inclusive. I have enjoyed my role of being involved, where I plan to create more activities to connect our community. Keep an eye out for our **Meet the Candidates event on Tuesday 13th October**, to keep you informed of your government representative for the upcoming **General Elections on 7th November**.

Other activities being involved in:

WSCNG - Wellington South Community Network Group

I've been connected in this group previously as the Coordinator of Berhampore Centennial Community Centre, with previous Centre Managers Lisa Cunningham from Island Bay Community Centre, Erin Gribble and Elle Clayton, both, from Newtown Community Centre. This was always a group that connected community groups, Wellington City Council staff, Police personnel, social service providers, businesses and organisations, and other community groups that wanted to participate, to share updates around and about the Wellington South area. It was always well attended and already well-established that it's good to see that it continues to provide valuable insight and information for the community to be informed. With Berhampore Community Centre no longer operating, these meetings still remain alternating between the two centres to provide the valuable community connections. In this role, I have started attending again and will continue to stay involved as best as my calendar allows but it is definitely one of my favourite down time to share about Newtown Residents' Association related and other matters, of what we are up to in our community.

WRAN - Wellington Residents' Associations Network

This group is a collective of representatives from several Wellington Residents' Associations in the region that meet on the last Monday of the month via Zoom. I was previously involved with this group as I coordinated/formed the Berhampore Community Association under my role as Coordinator of the Community Centre in 2016. Returning as the President of the Newtown Residents' Association has been great to reconnect, discuss and share issues or matters of concern for Newtown. I have learnt some great information from each meeting with learnings about different projects, initiatives and better understanding of council jargon because most of the association dealings are with councils in their suburbs. The end of the year meeting is a face-to-face festive celebration and a hooray to a year of great work done and it's nice to meet individuals that you've known via zoom in person. It has created a collection of passionate individuals that have achieved great things within their community and that's great for me to be part of.

I acknowledge with gratitude

- The ***Residents' Association executive members***, that have assisted, supported, responded to emails, contributing to submissions, their presences at our monthly meeting, attended our executive potluck or shared meals to discuss Association related matters, thank you;
- To ***Rhona Carson and her husband Neville***, allowing me into their home each week to meet, learn from their combined wisdom. To enjoy our weekly meeting to reflect on what's on top, what's coming up or what's needing urgency as we both prepare for each monthly meeting;
- Thank you to ***Wellington City Council*** for their ongoing financial support that assists with our operating expenses;
- ***Newtown New World*** for their ongoing support of our community events;
- ***Paekawakawa/Southern Ward Councillors Laurie Foon and Nureddin Abdurahman*** for attending our monthly meetings and keeping our community informed about Council related

matters that affect Newtown and advocating for our community at the Council table;

- **Mayor Andrew Little** for attending our July meeting to discuss the Council Amalgamation process;
- **Wellington City Council staff, officers, teams** that accepted our invite and attended our meeting to provide us with an update on matters that affect Newtown and addressing concerns, policy reviews and consultations;
- Wellington City Council **City Safety Team for appointing Maako our dedicated street cleaner** that keeps our streets clean every weekday, your work has not been unnoticed and the Association would like to acknowledge him;
- **MP Julie Anne Genter and her support staff**, who continue to advocate and work with Newtown Community matters;
- **St Thomas' Church congregation** for sharing and accommodating the Association prior to April's flooding, we truly appreciate their support;
- **Wellington South Corps of the Salvation Army and executive member Andrew Wilson**, for their support and transition into their space to host our community meetings after April's flood;
- **Acting Sgt Melaine Paddon, Community Liaison Officer Des Foo, Sgt Mike Bryne and NZ Police community officers** for engaging with the Association, community organisations and businesses addressing community related incidents, being visible within our community, reducing anti-social behaviours and supporting our vulnerable members of the community by restoring order to keep our community safe;
- **Newtown Community Centre, Wellington Timebank and other organisations** who have contributed so much time for our community;
- **Newtown business owners and operators that support the Residents' Association** and connect directly to us with issues or matters that collectively we are able to address them together;
- Lastly, **everyone that connects with Newtown**, our community, residents, schools, churches, students, visitors that continue to support our suburb by buying and eating locally, enjoying our community parks, our business owners still operating under difficult circumstances and everyone that has Newtown in their mind and hearts of being a great and vibrant community.

Conclusion

In my first year in this role as President, I am fortunate to have wise support from dedicated Newtowners that have spent tireless years advocating and supporting great initiatives in our community. I have learnt and discovered more fabulous things about Newtown that has a rich history and the 60 plus years of the Association being part of that history. I carry this as a huge privilege as Newtown grows with new arrivals, significant changes, challenges and developments. I look forward to working with the incoming Newtown Residents' Association executive members during my second year and to continue to make Newtown a suburb to enjoy for all.

Kia orana e Kia manuia

Merio Marsters

President

16th September 2026