



Christchurch City Council Annual Plan Submission – 2026/27

The Christchurch Central Business Association (CCBA) represents over 1,200 businesses operating in the central city.

Our members are business owners and tenants who contribute daily to Christchurch's vibrancy, employment, and economic activity. They are the ones opening doors each morning, employing staff, and ultimately carrying the cost of decisions made through this plan.

While we recognise the importance of maintaining infrastructure and delivering services, we have significant concerns about the direction of this Draft Annual Plan — particularly ongoing rate increases and insufficient spending discipline.

Put simply:

This is starting to feel like a rinse-and-repeat of previous years.

The same pressures are acknowledged, yet the same outcomes continue.

Rates and Business Sustainability

Our members are already managing sustained cost pressures across:

- Rent
- Insurance
- Wages
- Compliance and supply costs

For many, particularly tenants, rates are not optional — they are passed through as part of occupancy costs.

Rate increases flow directly into the cost of doing business.

It is not one increase in isolation that creates pressure — it is the cumulative effect year after year that is making the central city harder to operate in.

Proposed increases of around 8% per annum are not sustainable.

The CCBA has consistently advocated that rate increases should be kept in line with CPI.

Anything above this:

- Erodes already tight margins
- Forces price increases for consumers
- Reduces business confidence and investment

A Pattern That Needs to Change

One of the strongest messages from our members is that this is not a new conversation.

Each year, businesses are asked to absorb more, while the underlying approach to spending remains largely unchanged.

This pattern cannot continue.

Businesses across Christchurch have had to:

- Cut costs
- Delay investment
- Improve efficiency

There is a clear expectation that the Council demonstrates the same discipline.

Financial Discipline

Council debt has increased significantly and continues to grow through ongoing borrowing.

Servicing that debt places increasing pressure on ratepayers — including our members.

Like any responsible business or household:

There comes a point where you must stop expanding and start prioritising.

There must be a clear distinction between:

- Essential expenditure
- Discretionary or “nice to have” spending

Ratepayer funds should be directed toward projects that deliver measurable value to the city and its economy.

Spending Priorities and Accountability

Our members are increasingly concerned about expenditure that:

- Does not demonstrate a clear economic return
- Lacks robust business cases
- Would not be justified in a commercial environment

The perception is clear:

Businesses are tightening their belts — but the Council appears not to be doing the same.

This gap is becoming increasingly difficult to justify.

Arts Centre and Student Union Building (“The Dux”)

The CCBA does not support any increase in funding to the Arts Centre for the restoration of the Student Union building (formerly “The Dux”).

While we recognise the building's heritage value, this is ultimately a commercial hospitality opportunity.

Ratepayers should not be funding bars, restaurants, or entertainment venues.

This type of development should be led and funded by the private sector.

More broadly, the Arts Centre must demonstrate stronger financial discipline.

It is not sustainable to return to ratepayers year on year to support operational shortfalls.

Organisations of this scale must:

- Align costs with revenue
- Exercise prudent financial management
- Operate on a sustainable footing

Museum Funding

The CCBA does not support further increases in funding for the Christchurch Museum project.

While the museum is an important civic asset, continued requests for additional funding, particularly amid budget overruns, are of significant concern.

If projects continue to exceed their budgets, the solution cannot be to repeatedly return to the ratepayer.

Both the Museum and the Arts Centre must demonstrate:

Fiscal responsibility and accountability in how funds are managed.

At a time when businesses and households are making difficult financial decisions, it is reasonable to expect the same discipline from publicly funded organisations.

Asset Management and Debt Reduction

The CCBA supports the proposed disposal of Council-owned properties that are no longer required for their original purpose.

This is a practical and necessary step.

If assets are not needed, they should not be held at the expense of ratepayers.

Proceeds should be used to reduce debt, rather than fund additional discretionary spending.

Conclusion

The decisions made in this Annual Plan will have real consequences for our members and the wider business community.

Christchurch has made significant progress — but that progress is at risk if the cost of operating in the central city continues to rise at an unsustainable rate.

Our members cannot continue to absorb year-on-year increases at this level.

What is needed now is:

- Financial discipline
- Clear prioritisation
- A willingness to change course

Not another version of the same approach.

The CCBA urges Council to:

- Commit to rate increases in line with CPI
- Apply greater scrutiny to discretionary spending
- Ensure fiscal responsibility across all Council-funded organisations
- Decline additional funding for the Arts Centre (Student Union building)
- Decline further funding increases for the Museum
- Proceed with asset sales to reduce debt
- Demonstrate the same financial discipline expected of businesses and households

Christchurch's success depends on the sustainability of its businesses.

This plan must reflect that reality, not repeat the patterns of previous years.