

Local Authority Funding of Public Fireworks Displays

New Zealand comparison with Taupō District Council | Working briefing | 19 August 2026

Purpose. To place the indicative \$50,000 all-inclusive cost of Taupō's New Year's Eve fireworks display in the context of identifiable expenditure by other New Zealand territorial authorities. The Taupō figure is treated as indicative and includes traffic management and associated delivery costs.

Executive summary

- Taupō's working figure is approximately \$50,000 all-in. Using a district population of about 42,700, this is approximately \$1.17 per resident.
- Dunedin is the strongest currently identified cost comparator. Its Council reported that its existing New Year's Eve event costs \$132,000 for security, production and traffic management, with fireworks or a light show costing an additional \$45,000.
- Matamata-Piako provides a smaller-district example: Council approved a \$5,000 grant to the Morrinsville Chamber of Commerce specifically for fireworks and traffic management. This is a contribution rather than the full event cost.
- Tauranga is useful as evidence of the scale of council commitment, but its headline budget is not directly comparable. Its 2025/26 status-quo option was \$513,275 for five community events and ten fireworks launches.
- Importantly, Tauranga also costed a fireworks-focused alternative: eliminating the five community events and delivering five fireworks displays at 9.30pm and midnight was budgeted at \$200,500. This still represents five displays across a large city, not one Taupō-style display.
- On the evidence presently available, a \$50,000 all-inclusive professional display in Taupō is not obviously outside the range of NZ local-authority expenditure. The evidence does not support claiming that Taupō is either unusually cheap or unusually expensive.
- Auckland illustrates a different delivery model. The high-profile Sky Tower New Year's Eve fireworks are part of a partnership involving Auckland Council, SkyCity and Vector, but no evidence has been identified that Auckland Council directly purchases the Sky Tower pyrotechnics. Auckland local boards have separately supported community fireworks events and associated safety/traffic-management costs.
- This suggests sponsorship or partnership should be considered alongside the binary choices of full Council funding or cancellation. For Taupō, commercial sponsorship could potentially reduce the net ratepayer cost while retaining a public display.

1. Primary cost comparisons

Council	Identifiable amount	What the amount covers	Comparability to Taupō	Comment
Taupō District Council	\$50,000 indicative	All-inclusive fireworks display, including traffic management and associated delivery costs	Baseline	Working figure supplied for this analysis; formal budget/invoice confirmation would strengthen the comparison.
Dunedin City Council	\$45,000	Additional fireworks or light-show cost; existing NYE event costs \$132,000 including security, production and traffic management	Strong, but not identical	The \$45,000 is the display addition rather than an all-in standalone event cost. Council later approved a \$159,000 NYE event including midnight fireworks.
Matamata-Piako District Council	\$5,000	Council grant for "fireworks and traffic management"	Partial comparator	A council contribution, not evidence of the total cost of the Morrinsville event.
Tauranga City Council	\$200,500	Option for five fireworks displays, with community events removed	Contextual	Much larger multi-location programme. Useful because it strips out the five community events, but still covers five display locations.
Tauranga City Council	\$513,275	Five community events plus 10 fireworks launches	Not a direct cost comparator	Useful only to demonstrate the scale of a fully rates-funded civic NYE programme.

2. Taupō: working benchmark

Indicative cost: \$50,000 all-inclusive. On the current understanding, this includes the fireworks display, traffic management and associated delivery costs. The 2025 Council event involved a Mini Bang and midnight Big Bang, professional pyrotechnicians

launching from a barge on Lake Taupō, and a Roberts Street road closure. The Council's event material also records Coastguard and other agencies being involved in safe delivery.

Indicative cost per resident: approximately \$1.17, using a district population of about 42,700.

Caution: the \$50,000 figure should remain labelled “indicative” until supported by a Council budget, supplier quote, invoice or officer report. It should not be confused with the historical \$5,000 support associated with a separate Rotary/Guy Fawkes event.

3. What the comparisons show

Dunedin. Dunedin provides the cleanest benchmark because its officer report separates the existing event infrastructure from the display. Council stated that its NYE event costs \$132,000, including security, production and traffic management, while fireworks or a light show would add \$45,000. An earlier report similarly recorded a \$45,000 quote for a new city-wide fireworks display. This means Dunedin's \$45,000 should not be compared as though it includes the same supporting costs as Taupō's indicative \$50,000.

Matamata-Piako. Its \$5,000 grant is valuable evidence that a district council of broadly similar scale supports a community fireworks event, but it is not evidence that the whole event costs \$5,000. The published grant description expressly covers “Fireworks and traffic management.”

Tauranga. Tauranga demonstrates why bundled event budgets must be separated from fireworks costs. Its status-quo programme was \$513,275 for five events and ten fireworks launches. More usefully, officers costed an alternative with the community events removed: five fireworks displays at a total budget of \$200,500. Divided mechanically, that is about \$40,100 per display location, although this should not be treated as a supplier price because common city-wide safety, management and production costs may be embedded in the total.

4. Contextual councils - evidence of funding, not cost benchmarks

Christchurch, Queenstown Lakes and Wellington remain useful in a national survey because they demonstrate councils continuing to support public fireworks within civic celebrations. They should not be used in the primary numerical comparison unless a sufficiently comparable fireworks/display cost can be isolated. Whole-event budgets containing entertainment, multiple locations or other activities can materially overstate the cost attributable to fireworks.

5. Auckland and alternative funding models

Auckland. Auckland's prominent New Year's Eve Sky Tower fireworks provide a useful example of a public/private partnership model rather than a straightforward council-purchased display. Auckland Council describes the central-city celebration as a partnership with SkyCity and Vector, while SkyCity presents the Sky Tower fireworks as its display. On the evidence reviewed, the pyrotechnics should therefore not be recorded as a verified Auckland Council fireworks cost.

Local-board support. Auckland local boards have also supported or considered support for community fireworks events, including traffic management, first aid, toilets and display-safety costs. This demonstrates that councils can support delivery without necessarily meeting the full pyrotechnics bill.

Implication for Taupō. The funding choice need not be limited to either approximately \$50,000 of Council funding or cancellation. A sponsorship model could seek commercial contributions toward the fireworks, barge, traffic management or event presentation, with Council underwriting only the residual cost. Any sponsorship proposal would need to consider procurement, naming/branding rights, multi-year certainty and whether sponsorship revenue substitutes for rates funding.

6. Suggested conclusion for decision-making

On currently available information, an indicative all-inclusive cost of approximately \$50,000 for Taupō's professional New Year's Eve fireworks display is not demonstrably out of line with identifiable New Zealand local-authority expenditure.

Dunedin has identified approximately \$45,000 for the fireworks/display component alone, in addition to substantial wider event-delivery costs. Tauranga has costed a fireworks-focused, multi-location programme at \$200,500 for five displays. Smaller councils

may contribute much less where Council is providing only a grant rather than meeting the full cost of delivery. A sponsorship or partnership approach should also be assessed before treating full Council funding and cancellation as the only alternatives.

Accordingly, the central policy question is less whether \$50,000 is an abnormal market cost, and more whether Council considers approximately \$50,000 an appropriate use of public funds for the community benefit, attendance, visitor experience and civic celebration generated by the event, relative to competing priorities.

Sources and notes

1. Taupō District Council, “Big Bang Fireworks Display”, 31 December 2025: confirms Mini Bang and midnight display, barge launch, professional pyrotechnics and Roberts Street closure. <https://www.taupodc.govt.nz/community/events/events-and-workshops-calendar?item=id%3A2wednaplq17q9ssms2oj>
2. Dunedin City Council, Council agenda, 12 February 2026: \$132,000 existing NYE delivery cost; additional \$45,000 for fireworks or light show. https://infocouncil.dunedin.govt.nz/Open/2026/02/CNL_20260212_AGN_3370_AT.htm
3. Dunedin City Council, Council agenda, 30 April 2025: new city-wide fireworks display quoted at \$45,000. https://infocouncil.dunedin.govt.nz/Open/2025/04/CNL_20250430_AGN_3069_AT.htm
4. Dunedin City Council, minutes, 23 April 2026: approved \$159,000 2026/27 NYE event including midnight fireworks. https://infocouncil.dunedin.govt.nz/Open/2026/04/CNL_20260423_MIN_3373.HTM
5. Matamata-Piako District Council, 2024/25 approved grants: Morrinsville Chamber of Commerce, \$5,000 for fireworks and traffic management. <https://mpdc.govt.nz/grants-and-funding/approved-grants>
6. Tauranga City Council, agenda, 3 March 2025: status quo \$513,275 for five events/10 launches; fireworks-only event model \$200,500 for five displays. https://infocouncil.tauranga.govt.nz/Open/2025/03/CO_20250303_AGN_2799_AT.PDF
7. Population figures are used only as indicative contextual measures. Taupō population basis in this working paper is approximately 42,700. The primary comparison is the nature and scope of council expenditure, not population alone.
8. Auckland Council, central Auckland New Year’s Eve celebrations (2025): Council group partnership with SkyCity and Vector. <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2025/12/new-year-s-eve-celebrations-in-central-auckland/>
9. SkyCity Entertainment Group, Sky Tower New Year’s Eve fireworks (2025/26): describes SkyCity’s fireworks and projection programme. <https://www.skycityentertainmentgroup.com/news/news/sky-tower-fireworks-and-projections-to-lead-new-zealand-into-2026/>
10. Auckland Council / Franklin Local Board grant material: community fireworks event application including traffic management, first aid, toilets and display-safety costs. https://infocouncil.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Open/2022/08/FR_20220823_AGN_10246_AT_files/FR_20220823_AGN_10246_AT_Attachment_89978_1.PDF