

1st May 2006

Re: Proposed District Plan Change 41: Design and Wind Controls for the Operational Port Area

This submission is from the Wellington Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington. Members of the Architectural Centre who are associated with the proposal, or who are associated with firms involved in the design (and hence may be seen to have a conflict of interest), have had no input into the writing of this submission.

Support for the District Plan Change

The Architectural Centre strongly supports this proposed District Plan Change 41.

Discussion

The Architectural Centre believes that the change in focus of the port companies activities from the core activity of port operations, to the inclusion of land development in the port area raises serious issues for the development of Wellington city given the lack of design controls over this area under the current District Plan. As noted in the Section 32 Report: "The Harbour Quays development is not intrinsically linked to the port's core operations, and will be more closely aligned to the character and activities of the CBD" (p. 1). Because of this it is very appropriate that the built environment in this area complies with design control rules similar to those of the Central Area.

The operational port area includes approximately half of the city's waterfront, and could be a significant and productive contribution to the city's urban space, providing important connections between the city and the harbour. Its development will make a significant impact on the commercial centre of the city, the northern city gateway, and the built context of port and rail transport centres. As such the Architectural Centre supports all moves to ensure this impact is a positive and productive one for Wellington's built environment.

The proposed plan change will apply "a similar level of design control to new development in this area, as it applies elsewhere in the Central Area." The Centre considers that this is a logical and appropriate approach which provides equity in development opportunities. The Centre strongly supports the new requirement for resource consents for the new buildings in the Harbour Quays area, and strongly supports the use of the Te Ara Haukawakawa Design Guide to assess the design of new buildings.

It is unusual in any city for such a high profile premium "brownfield" site to become available for development, and this is an opportunity which will change the northern face of the commercial heart of Wellington, and impact on the much cherished nature of Wellington's waterfront promenade. As the Section 32 Report notes: "The potential adverse effects created by new, poorly designed buildings and public spaces at Harbour Quays would therefore be long term, largely irreversible and highly visible." (p. 5). The Centre agrees that the current lack of good design controls in this area means the risk of poor design in this high profile area of the waterfront is a significant one which the council must mitigate against. We must do everything to ensure the positive development undertaken by Wellington Waterfront Ltd along the existing public areas of the waterfront is continued by the developers of Harbour Quays. We encourage CentrePort to look closely at the Wellington Waterfront Framework and to publicly adopt this.



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We note however that the proposed District Plan change will not cover the entire port area. The current situation has occurred because of economic and technological changes to port operations. No doubt the area of land needed for port activities will continue to change and we strongly encourage the council to monitor the land use of the CentrePort land which will not be subject to the Te Ara Haukawa Design Guide to ensure that appropriate port activities continue to be the reason for building in this area.

Conclusion

The Centre strongly supports Option 2 "Undertake a plan change to apply Central Area design and wind controls to a portion of the Operational Port Area." We consider that the proposed District Plan Change 41 will productively ensure that the site is developed with wider public design concerns taken into account, and are sure that CentrePort's stated commitment to high quality design will be further strengthened to the benefit of the owners of Harbour Quays and the citizens of Wellington.

Yours sincerely

Christine McCarthy
President
Wellington Architectural Centre