



the architectural centre inc.
PO Box 24178 Wellington

27 September 2017

Mayor and Councillors
Wellington City Council
P.O. Box 2199
Wellington 6140
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Dear Mayor and Councillors

We write following the council vote on 21 September 2017 to adopt a plan (resulting from the Mayor's Housing Taskforce), in order to increase Wellington's housing supply and density,¹ including by "increasing building heights and allowing more site coverage."²

The Architectural Centre has been advocating for greater residential density almost since our beginning over 70 years ago and we strongly support increased housing density. Given the importance of the success of this plan, and the need for it to work in relation with other aspects of Wellington city's built environment, we would like to highlight a number of issues which we consider important to ensure that implementation of the plan is effective and nourishes our city as a whole. We make the following points:

1. any housing sponsored (either financially or via RMA streamlining) must be sustainable. Climate change is a reality and there is no reason for new building to add to this problem. The council must put in place strong incentives to support the building of **sustainable housing**. In addition we urge the council to lobby government to amend the Building Act to make sustainable architecture a requirement for all buildings in the future.
2. while we acknowledge that affordability is a function of market dynamics, banking regulations and the cost of borrowing money, other parts of the world require developments to provide a percentage of **affordable housing**. We note that currently this is not a condition of Wellington's Housing Accords but we urge the council to include a percentage (say 30%) affordable houses as part of any future WCC Special Housing Areas legislation in order to ensure that housing is built which directly addresses the need for more affordable houses.

¹ Devlin, Collette "Wellington City Council give green light to bold housing reform plan" *Dominion Post* (21 September 2017) <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/97086729/wellington-city-council-give-green-light-to-bold-housing-reform-plan>

² Devlin, Collette "Wellington councillors told they face "painful decisions" over affordable housing plan" *Dominion Post* (20 September) <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/property/97007967/wellington-councillors-told-they-face-painful-decisions-over-affordable-housing-plan>

3. **high quality design of the public realm** is vital for successful inner city neighbourhoods, including responding to specific needs and how people engage with and actually use spaces (e.g. desire lines). We also ask that the council ensure that access to existing open spaces are retained, including that provided by community facilities, such as schools etc.
4. encourage and **incentivise good design of dwellings**. Higher density housing does not need to come at the cost of good architecture and urban design. This includes building house types which address gaps in the market as well as homes that are warm and dry. With higher density, issues of privacy, acoustic insulation and natural surveillance are also important, as well as the provision of neighbour infrastructure within walking and/or cycling distance. We encourage the council to identify design exemplar to use as benchmarks, and to publish these, as well as hosting open days for the public to see what well-designed high density housing can provide.
5. in addition to incentivising house building, past strategies used in New Zealand to protect housing supply has included support for **maintaining existing buildings**. Looking after our current housing stock lessens the need to build replacement housing, and reduces the numbers of new houses needed in future. We consider that this often forgotten aspect of ensuring sufficient numbers of housing should also be prioritised in any council housing strategy.
6. we note that the proposed housing plan will require a **District Plan change** to encourage greater housing density and raise height limits.
7. in addition to the changes that the council already envisages we encourage you to take this opportunity to **remove the current mandatory requirements for car-parking** in residential areas so that people have a choice regarding whether or not they have an off-site garage or car-parking space. Our rationale for this includes the following:
 - (a) the allocation for car parking and associated driveways takes up valuable land which could better be used for housing.
 - (b) reducing the number of driveways will make cycling infrastructure more viable as driveways create additional conflict points and consequently accidents.
 - (c) carparking and driveways typically occupy the best parts of residential sites (the front yard, which is usually flat land), and they often result in poor streetscapes (streets of ugly double garage doors making the houses appear as if they are designed for cars before people).
 - (d) on hilly sites, the requirement to provide carparking (including excavations, retaining walls and/or car-decks) adds significant expense to house building, negatively impacting on house affordability.
 - (e) incentives to use car-sharing and e-bikes will reduce the need for car-ownership, and also car-parking and garages.
8. we also note that the District Plan favours developers in the provision of traditional long narrow terrace houses, whereas private people are not permitted to build more than a bungalow (a single storey house) close to its boundaries. We ask that you address this inequity, but also revise yard requirements to facilitate **terrace housing** as a house-form which will

enable higher-density housing. In addition to cost-savings associated with building terrace housing, 2+ storey houses, with their stairs, are in-built "gymnasiums," ensuring cardio fitness of occupants, resulting in 10 years longer life for their residents and half the doctor's visits of the rest of the population. As Harvey Simon, Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School has stated "walking up stairs is one of the best-kept secrets in preventive medicine."³ Swiss researchers have found that taking the stairs - rather than the lift - "translates to a 15% cut in the risk of dying prematurely from any cause."⁴

9. finally, please don't completely exclude the public from decision-making. Democratic decision-making is inconvenient, often messy and takes time, but genuine listening to the community can produce better outcomes.
10. we also refer you to our housing manifesto (http://architecture.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/Final_Metrolite_Housing-manifesto.pdf) as an easy guide for key issues important to effecting positive and sustainable change to housing.

Yours faithfully



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cc David Chick, chief city planner, Wellington City Council

³ Simon, Harvey "Stairs as Fitness Tool?" *New York Times* (15 June 2005)

<https://consults.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/15/stairs-as-fitness-tool/>

⁴ "Climbing the stairs can prolong life" *BBC News* (1 September 2008)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7591311.stm>