

17 May 2007

**Re: Draft Annual Plan 2007**

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. Examining issues of architecture, cultural well-being, urban design and transportation and city planning are key to our constitution.

Overall we support the plan but in addition to the points raised below we are concerned at the consistent reference in the Annual Plan proposing deferring maintenance and capital works, and projects such as computer upgrades for the library. We see this as short sighted, and can not see the benefit of postponing much of this work. Another key concern is the apparent lack of vision in relation to issues of sustainable transport. We strongly encourage the council to take a strong leadership position in relation to this increasingly significant issue. More detail about other aspects of the proposed plan are below.

**1) Urban development**

**Built Environment: Capital Precinct, District Plan, Infill Housing, Sustainable Retro-fitting**

We strongly support the Council's priorities to improve the quality of the city's urban design, and the idea of a capital precinct. We also strongly encourage the Council to improve the overall average quality of individual buildings in the city through the resource and building consent processes, as such we support both the intention for a rolling review of District Plan (p. 17), as a key mechanism for ensuring quality, and the assertive stance on examining how to improve infill housing (p. 17). The Centre supports the aim to improve residential infill development to prevent greater urban sprawl, and we encourage publication of good examples of infill housing. We note however that all types of infill development (not just residential) should be improved. We believe there is a significant need for high quality and innovative examples of multi-unit dwellings to be published. Examples might include Thorndon Mews (Peter Beavan), Pitirua Street, Thorndon, and Park Mews (Roger Walker), Moxham Ave, Hataitai, Hamilton Court (James Beard), Hamilton Road, Hataitai and the Courtyard Houses (Studio Pacific) in Seatoun. We applaud the proposal to produce a guide and display module to inform citizens about best practice for retro-fitting existing commercial buildings for residential use, with an emphasis on sustainable redevelopment of existing building fabric and acoustic design. We consider that this will be an extremely productive and worthwhile initiative.

The Centre advocates that all proposed new buildings, additions and alterations must be demonstrably better for the public good (e.g. external appearance, sustainability, innovative design, provision of facilities and public space, contribution to heritage etc.) than what is currently on the site. We also believe that incentives should be provided to redevelop buildings which are at a level lower than average quality. We would be very interested in being involved in any investigation into appropriate strategies to achieve this.

**Graffiti**

The proposal of an anti-graffiti flying squad is unfortunate. The military connotations of "flying squad" are inappropriate in what should be an inclusive city strategy. It suggests this is a comic adventure involving Biggles, Ginger and Algy, rather than a serious and considered strategy which productively contributes to the city. We also believe that some graffiti contributes positively to Wellington's urban life, as well as the city's branding as the "creative capital." There are many examples of politically astute,



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insightful and informed commentary as well as beautiful underground artwork, perhaps typified by, but not exclusively, stencil art. The buzzy bees on Oriental Bay which have unfortunately been painted over by a less engaging whales mural is one example. It has interestingly been observed by Susan Stewart (Department of English, Princeton University) that graffiti uses the same production mechanisms as the corporate world's advertising and branding (e.g. mass production and repetition). Engaging productively with graffiti is an issue for Wellington's art and cultural well-being as well as an issue of property rights. We are not suggesting that graffiti writers should be reformed as "artists," nor that Wellington city should adopt a graffiti aesthetic in its promotion of Wellington, but rather that there are some aspects of the city that should not be subject to annihilation and control to enable underground creative cultures to test and challenge the city, and to support the reality of being a creative city. This really does need smart and creative thinking rather than cute names for city maintenance teams.

#### City Heritage

We are appalled at the suggestion that the city heritage development fund be reduced. This should be increased by at least CPI each year (as is proposed for recreation grants p. 52) and pro-actively promoted to ensure the money is well spent. The fact the fund is undersubscribed is a reflection on the council's inability to promote the fund - not a signal that there is a lack of need for it. There is substantial work needed in other areas of heritage which would help in the promotion of the fund. For instance significant research is needed in the area of post WWII built heritage which is insufficiently recognised in the District Plan. The fund could also be used to assist owners of earthquake-prone heritage buildings in need of restoration and strengthening to comply with new earthquake risk mitigation rules. It is hard enough to get money to support heritage activities - don't take it away using a spurious excuse.

The plan refers to the proposal to enhance public spaces. More detail is needed regarding this before meaningful commentary can be made, and we look forward to being involved in further public consultation regarding this.

#### Growth Spine Public Space, Earthquakes

The Architectural Centre supports the plan for the "growth spine," though we caution against the possibilities of gentrification of the parts of the city this growth spine cuts through. We stress that development of the growth spine can only work if the Council takes an active role in providing additional public transport initiatives to support the housing intensification. In our opinion, the present road system can not take more vehicular traffic along the existing spine.

The Architectural Centre also supports the council's aims to "gain a better understanding of the vulnerability of the region to large earthquakes" (p. 20), and the plan to fund a major research project to investigate the impact of a major earthquake on the city which was signalled in the Long Term Plan. We see this as long overdue, and consider that given the expressed intent of supporting increased development along the growth spine, that this area in particular be considered in full regarding earthquake impact. We support the council taking a lead in earthquake awareness including such strategies as requiring earthquake ratings of buildings to be displayed at building entrances.

## **2) Transport**

#### Support for increased public transport, cycling and walking as alternatives to the car

We consider that the proposed transport plan is weak. It is unquestionable that an assertive direction needs to be taken because of the very real and related issues of climate change, greenhouse gas emissions and peak oil. The proposal for transport is resigned to increasing numbers of cars rather than having the council take the leadership role which we have come to expect in other areas of council duty. This plan needs a higher level of commitment and needs to make connections with an urban design strategy and the recreation strategy. These cannot be seen in isolation.

The targets proposed to measure performance in this area are generally retrograde rather than simply disappointing (p. 24). Performance measures for car usage,

pedestrian and public transport useage propose greater car useage and reduced pedestrian (from a current 10% now (c.f. 14% in 2001), aiming for 4% 2007/8), cyclist (only aiming for 3%) and public transport use (from 34% now, aiming for 32% on bus) - this is not the direction a smart and sustainably focussed council should be heading. Cyclists need to be included in the statistics gathered to measure transport useage (p. 7) as this is a group which needs to be monitored as part of the city's intention to encourage alternative transport, and public transport use needs to be broken down into bus and train use so changing transport uses can be accurately measured. The ambition for only 38% of city-bound bus-stops to have effective bus-shelters (p. 24) seems very low. Consideration, and prioritisation, of cyclist traffic needs to be more prominent in the plan. Cycle ways as well as bus lanes need to be given more road space than is presently the case.

We strongly support the proposal that the council reduce its "own reliance on cars for Council business" (p. 23). We believe that councillors and council workers should use public transport, and be encouraged to walk and cycle for several reasons, in particular so the council leads by example and so councillors and council officers become intimately aware of where alternative transport is and isn't performing and are actively involved in working to ensure these are viable transport options for as great a number of citizens as possible.

We encourage the improvement of the city's passenger transport system through bus priority measures. The regular occurrence of late buses and full buses that decline passengers during peak time is both predictable and a reason for people to drive their cars. This needs to be addressed. We suggest that systems such as "Park' 'n' Rides" be implemented to reduce the number of private vehicles in the central city to make it safer for cyclists and so encourage greater bicycle use. We caution that the proposed aim to continue to provide car parking in the city centre may be counter to the aim to encourage walking, biking and use of public transport.

#### Ghuznee Street/Cuba Mall

The By-pass was not an example of a commitment to alternative transport needs. In particular the promised reduction of traffic along Ghuzneee St has not occurred. The Ghuznee Street/Cuba Mall intersection is in immediate need of work to prioritise pedestrian traffic. Prioritising pedestrians through a range of options (changing traffic light phasing, instaling speed humps, use of bollards, restricting traffic to one way, closing off car traffic to Cuba Street and/or Ghuznee Street) is needed to demonstrate a positive impact of the bypass on this part of the city. The physical characteristics of these spaces must prioritise the pedestrian experience.

### **3) Environment**

The Architectural Centre strongly supports the Council's aim to promote energy efficiency and sustainability, and we consider that the built environment is key in achieving this. We suggest that the council publish of the energy ratings of buildings, especially Council owned buildings, as well as promoting strategies to improve these ratings. We commend the Council's intention to take a more active role in water and energy conservation and efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources. We support the introduction of water charges, and the introduction of greywater requirements in new housing or as an interim steps incentives for green buildings (e.g. reduced fees/ time in buildding consents, priority service etc.)

We encourage the Council to invest (possibly in conjunction with other councils) in both the research and development of energy-efficient multi-storey buildings (e.g. CH2 Melbourne). We also suggest that the Council invest in specific schemes (such as well-designed solar-powered street lamps) as a first step towards reducing the city's long-term energy demands. We support the proposed Kai to Compost scheme (p. 36) for businesses that produce foodscraps, but we also believe this scheme should be extended to include inner city apartments. We also consider that in addition to the proposals to convert landfill gas to electricity, and reviewing the viability of waste-to-energy and solid waster recovery, the council needs to be actively involved in strategies

for preventing waste. Local taxes on plastic supermarket bags and requirements for manufacturers to take back packaging as examples of these. In the Netherlands it costs 30 euro cents per supermarket bag. This means customers see a direct connection between the bag they use and the cost for the bag (and perhaps ultimately the environment). Customers quickly learn to bring their own bags. The cost for bags could be used to fund sustainability projects.

#### **4) Cultural Wellbeing**

The Architectural Centre supports the intention to strengthen Wellington's "sense of place." We see architecture (both our past and current architectural heritage (Maori and Pakeha)), as having an important role in facilitating "sense of place." We also point to the importance to recognise other cultural groups (e.g. the Chinese, Indian, and Pacific Nations communities) and their contributions to the city's built environment. In this regard we see it as important to protect significant examples of both past and current examples of architecture and the built environment, and we note that, in particular, better protection of significant interiors of buildings is needed. It is likewise critical to ensure high quality architecture contributes to our contemporary cityscape, through increasing the standard of architecture through city-sponsored debate about architecture and design, and through a rigorous building consent process which calls on both professional expertise and public transparency. As noted above we support increases (rather than reductions) to the incentive fund to help building owners upgrade heritage buildings, and the implementation of a penalty for damage to heritage buildings which is proportional to the market value of the building and its site.

We consider that Te Ara o Nga Tupua (the Maori Heritage Trail) needs to be more actively promoted (p. 40), and we strongly support the proposed increase in the Wellington Museums Trust funding, which we believe should automatically increase by a minimum of the CPI annually. We encourage the council to ensure that the redevelopment of the City Gallery includes provision for a replacement cinema and lecture theatre. This would provide an opportunity to provide a larger multi-function venue with a 200-250 seat capacity which would fill a gap in the venues currently available for arts and community events in the city. The new Hancock Gallery and the proposal for Shed 11 to become a Portrait and Photography Gallery will be highly complementary venues and we strongly support both of them.

#### **5) Social and Recreation**

##### The need for links between recreation and transport strategies

We believe the social and recreation plan needs to be linked to the transport plan. We need to move away from the idea that recreation is something you drive to. Greater interconnections between pedestrian, cycling, and even public transport, as both transportation and recreation would productively inform decisions about the design of Wellington's urban spaces.

##### Affordable Housing

The Centre strongly supports the Council's provision of housing to assist those unable to access state housing, and encourage speedy discussions with the government to ensure there is no disadvantage resulting because of the proposed changing in funding social housing (p. 48). We consider that the aim to ensure that the average of 80 days (3 months) waiting time for applications to be housed (p. 48) is far too long. Imagine being homeless for that length of time. We strongly support the proposed wet hostel (p. 51) and we urge that the Council also put in place policies to ensure there is 10%-15% affordable housing in all residential developments over a certain size. In particular the waterfront residential developments (e.g. the Overseas Terminal, Odins, Herd St Post Office redevelopment) would benefit from the inclusion of a percentage of affordable housing to ensure occupancy and diversity. London's Coin Street Community Housing Project on the South Bank is a good practice example including social housing in conjunction with more expensive housing. We strongly encourage such a stance on the waterfront.

##### Proposed Sports Centre

However we do not offer the same level of support to the proposed eight court indoor sports centre at Cobham Drive which we strongly oppose. There is little in the way of public transport to the Cobham Drive site, and we foresee bad car parking problems in the area, and a likely clogging of this main arterial route. We would instead suggest that the Council explores using the proposed space by the Stadium, where the sports centre could utilise the existing excellent transport infrastructure and be more central to the wider Wellington region. The extra expense should be assessed against the savings in public and private transport to arrive at the sports centre, over the 50 year lifespan of the building.

#### Parks, Public Space and Streetscape

The Architectural Centre believes that Wellington has a very small amount of well designed quality public spaces and desperately needs more, especially in Te Aro, in areas east of Taranaki St. This is particularly important with the increasing numbers of people living in the inner city. We want the city to be visionary, and be proactive rather than reactive in the planning for and of these spaces. The city needs a strategy of where parks and public spaces can and should be sited, rather than the apparent system of taking snippets of land for parks as they arise. We would also appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the proposed upgrade of Cobblestone Park, as well as the proposals to upgrade the street furniture and Civic Square. We support the move towards active, occupied edges to buildings, and would support moves to lessen car parking and apartments at the ground floor of central city buildings.

#### **6) Governance**

The Architectural Centre supports and appreciates the Council's aim for transparent governance and for increased participation in decision-making processes. We appreciate our ability to comment on proposals related to architecture, design and the built environment and would like the Architectural Centre to be considered as a member of the "civic network" of advisory input groups. We note that it is important to distinguish between the role of public participation and professional expertise, and point to both the waterfront development and Waitangi Park as models for getting the balance right between public consultation and participation and the role of professional advice.

We hope our comments have been helpful and are willing to elaborate any of the above points if that would be helpful to Council. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft Annual Plan.

Yours sincerely

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