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Inclusion of Roger Walker's Whakatane Airport Terminal Building in the Whakatane District Plan

David Bewley
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Dear David

This letter is from the Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design. We were founded in 1946, and since that time have been actively promoting good design and architecture. We are writing to advocate for the inclusion of Roger Walker's Whakatane Airport Terminal Building in the Whakatane District Plan's Schedule of Built Heritage Features, and to express our concern that such an iconic building has been identified for demolition in the Whakatane District Council "Whakatane Airport Master Plan" (20 May 2008) (p. 37, clause 11.5.2.3, and the associated Opus drawing under appendix 21.34).

Roger Walker has been recognised for over quarter of a century as a significant New Zealand architect. He has been the subject of articles, a book, and an MA thesis (University of Canterbury), as well as being mentioned in the international architectural press, for example, Charles Jencks' *Architecture Today* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 1988) p.160.

The Whakatane Airport Terminal Building is similarly significant, it most recently being identified as a significant modern building in the Julia Gatley edited *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904-1984* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008) p. 181. The building was also a recipient of the 1975 Tourist Design Awards receiving the following citation:

"The terminal building was designed to put Whakatane on the map while avoiding the repetitive, "boxy" design characteristic of many airport terminals. It is excitingly different yet has good flow patterns and clean separation of internal functions. The materials used keep the human element dominant so that passengers and baggage are not treated in a too similar manner."

We believe that the Terminal Building deserves heritage listing for several reasons. It was designed by one of the best known New Zealand architects of the latter half of the twentieth century, Roger Walker, and is typical of his innovative buildings of the 1970s. The building was widely published and respected by the architectural profession at the time. It is a commercial building in a similar, somewhat quirky, style to Walker's residential architecture. Like Walker's Wellington Club (whose demolition was extremely controversial), the scale of the building is deliberately small and domestic in order to relate better to the more human scale of a regional airport. The design was ground-breaking and fully appropriate for its time. Whakatane is somewhat blessed to have



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such a unique member of its built heritage and has the opportunity to carefully and sensitively consider its retention and renovation. There are many examples around New Zealand of recent regional airport terminal expansions that have been carried out in ways that lack any relationship to the region or identifying nature, yet character is what makes New Zealand special to the many tourists who use such terminals. We strongly believe that buildings, such as Walker's Whakatane Airport Terminal, are key to retaining such identity. The recent World Cup has only strengthened the nation's understanding of the significance of such regional identities for tourism.

This building is without any doubt, a special work by one of New Zealand's most interesting architects and is an important example of nationally significant architecture outside of the larger cities, which deserves a deal of respect. In light of the District Plan Review that Whakatane District Council is currently undertaking, the Architectural Centre strongly urges the Whakatane District Council to include Roger Walker's Whakatane Airport Terminal Building in its Schedule of Built Heritage Features, and actively ensure its preservation.

best wishes

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President, Architectural Centre

cc. Ann Neill, NZHPT Central Regional Office
Julia Gatley, Secretary, Docomomo NZ
Pierre du Toit NZIA Councillor (Gisborne/Hawkes Bay)