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**Re: Resource consent: Frank Kitts Park**

This submission is from the Architectural Centre, an incorporated society dating from 1946, which represents both professionals and non-professionals interested in the promotion of good design.

The Architectural Centre has the following comments to make regarding the Resource Consent application for Frank Kitts Park.

1. We support a redesign of Frank Kitts Park and the inclusion of a Chinese Garden on this site. However, we ask the council to give Wellington a Chinese garden which represents the best that contemporary Chinese garden design can offer. A walled compound, ignorant of its site, is poor design, and particularly problematic in this waterfront context.



2. As a public design project on Wellington's waterfront, we consider that the redesign of Frank Kitts Park has greater than usual obligations in two respects:

Firstly, **a high quality of the design is required**. The Waterfront Framework<sup>1</sup> is explicit regarding this. For example, one of its objectives is that *"The waterfront is locally and internationally recognised for its design"* (p. 21). In addition, the requirements for the Frank Kitts Park area include: *"A high*

<sup>1</sup> *The Wellington Waterfront Framework: Report of the Waterfront Leadership Group* (Wellington: Wellington City Council, April 2001) <http://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans-and-policies/a-to-z/waterfrontframewk/files/framework.pdf>

*quality to design and implementation is paramount on the waterfront"*  
(Waterfront Framework p. 23).

Secondly, the design needs to think across the artificial zoning of the site, and beyond the site's edges to make connections to other parts of the waterfront (including Whairepo Lagoon), and the city.



3. The proposal to remove the concrete footbridge will require at-grade traffic light co-ordinated crossings (Design Statement p. 17). While we would agree that this Stalinist footbridge likely has only a small group of admirers, we consider that the proposal to remove it will require more than simply an at-grade traffic crossing. The Waterfront Framework (2001) states that:

*"Improving pedestrian access across the heavily-trafficked "quays" is critical to the success of the waterfront development. The work proposed by the Council should be undertaken as soon as possible. This work includes: ... an increased number of controlled pedestrian crossings along Jervois and Customhouse Quays. More bridging across the quays and Cable Street should be considered as opportunities arise" (p. 13).*

Jan Gehl's report<sup>2</sup> similarly noted:

*"The six lanes of Jervois Quay are a major obstacle when it comes to linking the city and waterfront and letting the city take full advantage of the potential to develop a successful recreational and economically viable waterfront." (p. 13).*

*"An upgrade of Jervois Quay is ... essential in order to make the waterfront work" (p. 57).*

4. These recommendations were made over a decade ago, and their sentiment has been observed over a longer period. It is well overdue that Jervois Quay is narrowed and better serves its location adjacent to the waterfront.
5. We support better visual connections to the sea, though note that with the high use of the waterfront promenade views to the harbour will often be blocked by pedestrians and cyclists and by temporary architecture (e.g. stalls) erected to support Waterfront events. This is frequently a busy, crowded space with little chance of a view at ground level on sunny weekends. Given this, we question whether, in practice, the design will open up *"more direct views across the park to the waterfront promenade and the harbour beyond"* (AEE 5.3.10).

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<sup>2</sup> Gehl Architects *Report for Wellington's City to Waterfront* (2004)  
<http://wellington.govt.nz/~media/services/environment-and-waste/urban-development/files/gehlreport.pdf>



## Chinese Garden

- The design of the Chinese garden (Huiyuan | the Garden of Beneficence) is disappointing given the designers assert that the design of the garden aims to *"respond to the challenge of the "contemporary" New Zealand in the realm of a Chinese Garden ... [and address] ... how does a garden located far removed from China seek to embody (or represent) "Chineseness" without imitative and antiquarian mannerisms"* (Landscape Architecture and Design Statement p. 11).



Jinhua Architecture Park, Yiwu River, Jinhua, Zhejiang province (2002-2006); Ai Wei Wei (curator)

- We consider that geometric, spatial and compositional aspects of the Chinese Garden (e.g. *"symmetry, axuality, hierarchy, and disclosure ... to capture, in microcosm, something of the majesty of the forces of nature"* (Design Statement p. 11)) could be less dependent on what appear to be the kind of antiquarian mannerisms that the designers say they were trying to avoid.



Square & Round, Fang Yuan Garden, Château Chaumont, France (2013); Turenscape

- The design may well be a textbook example or replica of a tradition Chinese garden, but it is definitely **not** a *contemporary* Chinese garden which engages with this waterfront site. This is particularly surprising given the breadth of innovation evident in contemporary Chinese design, including challenging and

astute uses of contemporary materials and technology. As such, we consider that the proposed design is inappropriate given the Waterfront Framework's requirement for a contemporary design.

9. The Technical Advisory Group's (TAG) Design Brief for the park is that the Chinese garden will *"provide a contemporary view of being Chinese in New Zealand"* (Appendix 10: Design Brief 3.2). A contemporary understanding of being Chinese in New Zealand is not apparent in the design.



Farrar Pond Project, FlexFENCE, Lincoln, MA, USA (2007), Mikyoung Kim Design

10. We oppose the intention to lock the Chinese Garden up "after hours." We currently do not have open public space on the Waterfront which is locked up. Excluding the public from space appears to us to be contrary to the ethos of the waterfront. For example the Waterfront Framework states that:

*"Natural surveillance achieved through good design is preferred to electronic or formal methods of surveillance" (p. 21).*

*"The area will be user-friendly and safe at all times" (p. 20).*

*"Developing a safe waterfront for 24-hour use is a key issue" (p. 28).*

We encourage the redesign of the Chinese garden to enable open access 24/7 as was initially intended. In addition, a walled-off space is not appropriate for this site, the entire brief for the waterfront stresses openness not closure.



Yi Garden, Chinese Pavilion, Venice Architecture Biennale, Italy (2013), Studio Pei Zhu

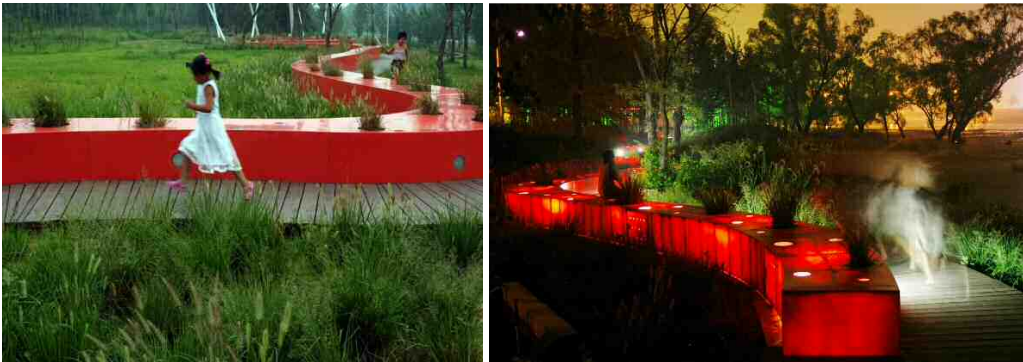
11. Many contemporary Chinese garden designs could be open to all 24/7. Yi Garden (which uses 1300 acrylic bars) and Beijing Sunken Gardens appear to

be cases in point. Korean American landscape architect Mikyoung Kim's work also demonstrates how intricate, but robust, design is possible. Her use of CorTën to create FlexFENCE in the Farra Pond Project is a case in point.



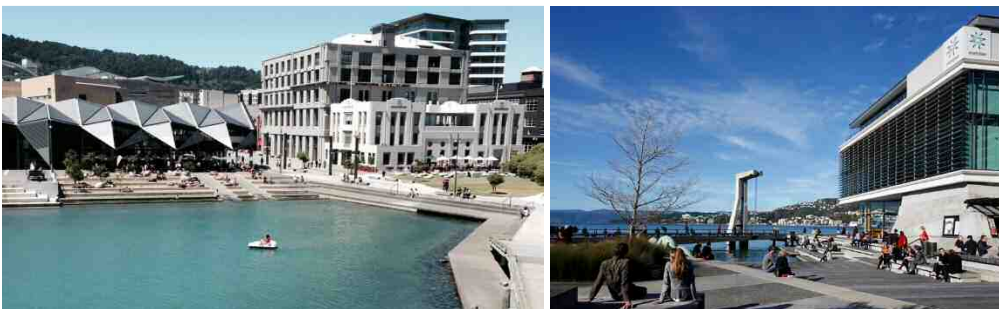
Beijing Sunken Gardens, Beijing, China (2012-13) Plasma Studio and Groundlab

12. We also see the potential to create a new understanding of the design at night. The continued success of the LUX festival demonstrates the potential of such thinking. Projects such as The Red Ribbon indicate how strategic use of lighting in design can produce magical intrigue after dark, and we consider that distinct personalities of the design could be revealed in different lighting and climatic conditions.



The Red Ribbon, Tanghe River Park, Qinhuangdao City, China (2005-2008), Turenscape

### **Sense of Place | Place Identity | Design Aesthetics**



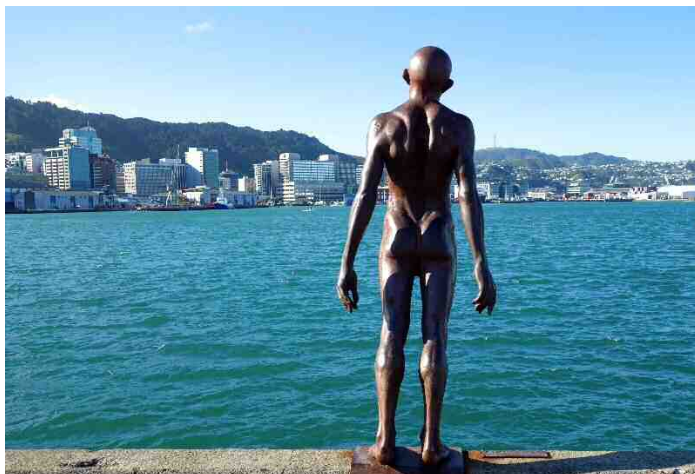
13. Currently there is a strong, idiosyncratic "sense of place" in the waterfront, which has developed a tradition as a place to test and explore design - resulting in great diversity, interest and the occasional design failure and madness. There is merit in an ethos of experimentation and exploration, rather than mute caution and hesitancy.



14. Innovation and progressiveness comes through a cherishing of risk. This is particularly important as this is a public space project and has public space obligations of design. In its prominent waterfront location, this park forms part of our city's front yard and identity, and should demonstrate what we collectively believe in.



15. We consequently ask City Shaper and WCC to lift their expectations of the design team. The design is currently sufficient and conservative rather than innovative and cognisant with Wellington's byline as a Creative Capital.



**Playground**

16. We support the retention of the iconic seagull slide.

**Other**

17. We agree it is appropriate for the retention of the Wahine mast and the memorial plaques to be retained.

18. We are surprised to find that the Wahine Mast is not a heritage item and we recommend to the WCC that it be included in the DP Heritage List, though in saying this we have no problems with it being relocated.
19. We note the potential for solar energy to power lighting in the park, and consider that the WCC is obliged to be a leader in normalising sustainable design practices and technologies.
20. Given the wind issues of the site we are surprised that the application does not include an assessment from a wind expert, and we strongly encourage such a report to be commissioned. Gaining such an assessment would appear to be consistent with the Waterfront Framework's statement that *"Sheltered spaces are important so that people can use the waterfront in a variety of weather conditions ... The detailed design of spaces should take into account the prevailing winds."* (p. 30). We note that the wind conditions on the waterfront result from prevailing winds, harbour conditions, and the organisation of the built structures on the waterfront and in the CBD.



Tianjin Bridged gardens, Qiaoyuan Wetland Park, Turenscape

21. We note the current drainage problems at Frank Kitts Park. This seems to be a persistent issue in a number of Wellington's CBD parks (including Pukehau (National War Memorial Park), and Illott Green). Remediation to prevent the grassed areas becoming pools of mud necessitating closure to enable grass to regrow is needed.
22. As the Applicant for this Resource Consent is WCC it is important that the Resource Consent process is robust and hearing commissioners do not have council-related conflicts of interest. We therefore ask that no councillors form part of the hearing panel.



Where the River Runs, Garden Expo, Wuhan, China (2015), Penda

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Resource Consent application for Frank Kitts Park. Wellington prides itself as a Creative Capital, host of the biannual Festival of the Arts, the World of Wearable Arts, Cuba Dupa and many other events of cultural enthusiasm and vitality. We are a city which fearlessly engages with the innovative and experimental. The commissioning of the Chinese garden is an opportunity to exhibit this civic gutsiness on our waterfront for all to see, not hide our important relationship with China and the Chinese community behind the walls of a replica garden. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



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