

## Annual Report Year Ending 31 March 2024

### Introduction

2023-24 has been a year of flawed Council urban plans and processes. The Association was engaged with two types of city design plans; either plans for protected bike lanes and their consequences, or the Proposed District Plan (new zones, rules and guidelines for development and intensification). A district plan defines what can be enabled on any residential property with or without resource consent.

For the bike/road changes WCC's *engagement* processes prevailed and we represented the Association's submissions to the Council's Regulatory Processes Committee. However, the District Plan review used a refreshingly different approach; a *consultation* process led by an Independent Hearing Panel, comprising Planning Commissioners.

From a submitter's perspective, the contrast with the Council's engagement processes was remarkable; we were listened to by the Commissioners, and our evidence was scrutinised through a transparent, well documented process. They inquired with meaningful questions to seek an understanding of submitters' perspectives, clearly willing to be persuaded if the evidence existed. The process was robust, and the outcome was that some of the Association's proposals prevailed and were folded into the Independent Hearing Panel recommendations.

### Urban Planning – the Proposed District Plan (PDP)

Much effort during the past year was related to advocating improvements outlined in the Association's submissions from 2022 on the Council's notified PDP. The Association proposed measures to help find a balance between keeping the suburb's iconic residential character while also recognizing where sensible upzoning (six storeys plus) for greater density might be enabled to align with contemporary government policy. The Association appeared before the Independent Hearings Panel in five separate hearing streams to cover relevant sections of the PDP.

Notwithstanding the robustness of this quasi-judicial consultation, nor that Council spent \$1.7M on logistics to enable these hearings, the Council decided to arbitrarily reject key planks of evidence and recommendations provided by the Independent Hearing Panel. On 19 March 2024, the Mayor sent the councillor's arbitrary amendments to RMA Reform Minister, the Hon Chris Bishop, for him to make a final decision.

*At the time of preparing this report, the outcome from the Minister was unknown.*

*Please refer to the Association's website for background and updates.*

### Road layouts

The consequences of the Council's Committee decisions are becoming increasingly apparent in Thorndon/Pipitea streets; *protected* bike lanes, car park removal, and other street layout changes. Significant disruption is occurring in Thorndon Quay presently and this appears likely to continue for much of this year.

Implementations of protected bike lanes in Molesworth St, Murphy St and Mulgrave St have yet to start. Foodstuffs North Island called for a Judicial Review to determine whether the Council

had consulted adequately last year on the *Thorndon Connections Project*, particularly in the vicinity of their New World property. Evidence was heard in the High Court on 20 February 2024. At the time of drafting this report the judgement was unavailable.

In October 2023 the Association also submitted on the *Karori Connections* project to try to influence design improvements in Glenmore St and get more consideration for access to the Botanic Gardens by deploying different (better) options for car parking for this destination landmark in the city. The hearing was hosted by WCC's Regulatory Processes Committee but on the day that the TRA was scheduled to appear there was barely a quorum (just 25% of Councillors were present); our considerable efforts were in vain.

### **Engaging with Local/Central Government**

The Association's experience with the Council's engagement activities on roading reconfigurations raised serious concerns about transparency and conflicts of interest. In December 2023 these were highlighted in a letter to the Minister of Local Government.

Following the Council's arbitrary rejection of recommendations of the Independent Hearings Panel for the PDP, and with submitters having no right to appeal, the Committee prepared three letters to the Minister responsible for RMA Reform. The first was sent immediately following the Council's decision to ignore the recommendations of the IHP; we highlighted the arbitrary nature of the response. A second letter focused on natural justice with examples arising in Thorndon, and the third letter on process and defending democracy. We also documented concerns which were sent to a senior official at the Ministry for the Environment.

The Council's failure last year to provide official information on bike lane submissions in a usable format led to a complaint to the Ombudsman. Recent correspondence from that Office indicates this will be resolved with the Council shortly.

The Association wrote to the Auditor-General seeking an investigation of Council governance and processes; supporting the view that only elected Councillors should participate in ballots on significant policies and work programmes. We learnt that the OAG doesn't have the mandate to generally appraise whether the Council's decision-making processes are fair and democratic. So, in January 2024, we wrote to the Minister of Local Government with a request for the Minister to have the Local Government Commission investigate and report on WCC's committee structure and balloting processes. *At the time of drafting this report we do not yet have a reply.*

### **Communication**

The two primary ways the Association has reached out across the suburb to residents have been through the publication of the TRA Newsletter and the Association's website.

The printing of the Newsletter is supported by Tommy's Real Estate and this support is greatly appreciated. The Newsletter is delivered to every accessible residential mailbox in Thorndon and Pipitea and is available online to the wider community.

Both television and newspaper media were interested in aspects of the proposed road changes and the Association's perspectives on the effect these changes would have on our community.

## **Queens Park**

The Friends of Queen's Park led by Peter Steel have met monthly. Their efforts in the garden are becoming increasingly noticed and appreciated. Peter maintains a schedule of monthly 2hr working bees. The schedule is published on the TRA's Queen's Park webpage.

The Council's Parks Management team changed during 2023 and Peter is coordinating with new staff to ensure that support for the project is maintained. WCC has agreed to supply \$5,000 worth of plants for the 2024 planting schedule.

An open and warm invitation is extended for anyone to join the working bees. This is a satisfying couple of hours and it's rewarding to see how much is achieved. Please consider joining a session; bring a friend, a neighbour, or family. Any level of contribution is appreciated. Benefits also arise from networking; the morning tea break has often offered a chance to share progress on other significant projects in Thorndon. This project contributes to the Association's key objectives e.g. improving amenities and encouraging a sense of community, among others.

## **Collaboration**

Where it was deemed appropriate to do so we cooperated with other associations, groups, or bodies with similar objects or issues. During the past year this has included:

Wellington Residents Associations Network (WRAN)

[LIVE WELLington](#) – a livable city by design

[Shared Spaces Karori](#)

[Thorndon Society](#)

Wellington Region Emergency Management Office (WREMO)

[Friends of the Botanic Gardens](#)

Thorndon School

Thorndon Quay Collective

Retail NZ, and the Chamber of Commerce

Automobile Association Wellington District

## **Appreciations**

I wish to highlight my appreciation to the TRA Committee, and to other TRA members who have made valuable contributions to projects over the past year.

Our webmaster, Anita earns special acknowledgement for her helpful, timely responses.

We thank Tommy's Real Estate for sponsoring the printing of the Newsletter.

We also wish to acknowledge funding assistance from WCC's Social and Recreation Fund.

And thank you to the Backbencher Gastropub for their support.

For further information please visit our [website](#) or contact a Committee member.

## **Richard Murcott**

Chair

29 April 2024

<https://www.thorndon.org.nz/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ThorndonResidentsAssociation>