



22 September 2020

The Mayor and Councillors
Wellington City Council

Dear Mayor Foster and Councillors,

Submission on the Draft Spatial Plan for Wellington City

The Thorndon Residents Association is an incorporated society established to communicate residents' collective views to local authorities and other community bodies. Our aim is to help improve amenities and facilities for the residents of Thorndon and to encourage a sense of community in a suburb now dissected by the motorway. It is a diverse community with retirees, young families, middle-aged, students and the diplomatic corps all well represented.

Our submission on the draft Spatial Plan for Wellington City is attached.

Thorndon is regarded as one of New Zealand's oldest and most historic residential suburbs and as such holds significant heritage values. We support the submission of our sister organisation, the Thorndon Society, which focuses on the protection and preservation of what remains of Thorndon's heritage and residential character. While maintaining these values are of great importance, we have concentrated in our submission on aspects other than the retention of heritage.

Thorndon/Pipitea has its resilience and disaster response challenges and these should be considered when planning to intensify its population and build multi-storey accommodation. The area is at the nexus of the Wellington Fault, the Wellington urban motorway, the main trunk railway, key water and energy infrastructure and the Cook Strait ferry terminals. The western residential side of the suburb is in the Fault Hazard Zone and other parts are on raised and reclaimed harbour bed or old stream beds. These increase the likelihood of failure of key infrastructure and buildings, which would cause major disruption and dislocation in the city. People trying to get out of the city for the northern suburbs will have to come through Thorndon's main thoroughfares, including Hobson Street.

The Association is concerned at the further fracturing of Thorndon by treating the eastern side of the motorway as the central city, while the western side would come under inner suburb rules. After the destruction of a large part of Thorndon to enable the building of the motorway, this move will be resented and opposed by residents. The high-density development of Hobson Street and its surrounds will rob Wellington of one of its most characterful streets and the housing diversity that marks attractive and liveable cities.

The Association questions the claim that the central city population will double over the next 30 years and that the city will have to find housing for another 80,000 residents in all. These figures are the high end of the forecasts, which were made before the pandemic occurred. The opportunity

created by the hiatus of the pandemic should be taken to reassess the City's long-term challenge, with the aid of digital technology modelling.

We recommend that The City's plans for tomorrow be recalibrated to account for the possible consequences of the pandemic, including fewer people working (and therefore wishing to live) in the City, the future demand for office space and potential for its conversion to living accommodation and the impact of New Zealanders returning from overseas.

There may well be room for the population increase now to be expected without the drastic changes this plan sets out. Accretive measures, rather than disfiguring wholesale replacement, could be sufficient. Certain areas, such as Adelaide Road, Thorndon Quay and others with unattractive and under-utilised commercial properties, could be selectively transformed into attractive residential hubs with affordable housing.

The Plan is a strategic instrument and contains little about how the proposed transformation will take place – what controls will be put on design and preservation of amenities such as sunlight and view shafts, how developers and the construction industry will be managed and what compliance measures will be put in place. However, residents in the most affected suburbs are entitled to some assurance on these matters even at this early stage.

We consider the timetable for public involvement is too short and risks an inadequate response and overlooked consequences for such a far-reaching plan. Implementation will change the face of Wellington irrevocably. The city already bears the scars of what were once considered appealing improvements and now are regretted.

We recommend that the Plan include measures by which development will be managed. Design juries, citizens' assemblies and community voting should be considered. Initiatives in Christchurch to involve its citizens in the city's recovery plan should be explored. The experience of the city of Seattle in the USA is relevant. Communities earmarked for greater density were assisted – including financially – to develop their own plans, carefully guided by Council officials who, amongst other matters, ensured adequate involvement of every part of the community. The community plans were tested at "alternatives fairs" and subjected to hearings. Seattle achieve the required densification and people were satisfied they had had sufficient control over the process in a well-facilitated environment of tolerance and trust.

We recommend that the Spatial Plan be accompanied by an Infrastructure Plan, showing how our already inadequate infrastructure will be enhanced to support the new demands. Our crying need is for updated lifelines so our larger population can have the basic services it needs and be resilient to the natural disasters to which we are prone. The Infrastructure Plan should include hospital and school resources and pay particular attention to sustainability and environmental concerns.

We request that the Association be permitted to make a personal appearance in support of this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Marion Eades
Chair
Thorndon Residents Association