

## 6. URBANISM DOWNUNDER CONFERENCE - AUCKLAND

**Officer responsible**  
Director of Information and Planning

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The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the Urbanism Downunder conference, held in Auckland from 20 March 2003 to 22 March 2003 and focus on ideas and processes that are pertinent to the continuing development of Christchurch. This was the first conference of its type in New Zealand combining both New Zealand and Australian urban design interests. The conference was attended by Council staff from a range of disciplines, most of whom contributed to this report.

The theme of the conference was to 'harness the experiences of Australian, New Zealand and international practitioners in the art and science of transforming cities.' The conference was interdisciplinary drawing together the professional skills of practitioners involved in creating liveable towns and cities - urban design, architecture, landscape design, planning, economics, property development, transport, community development and communications.

The comments below, interpreted from the various speakers and workshops by individual Council officers, are intended as discussion points and may not acknowledge work already being carried out by Christchurch City Council.

### STRATEGIC VISIONS

- A long-term strategic vision and development strategy is needed for Christchurch. They are extremely important in creating a cohesive city. This Strategic Plan should be linked to the Capital Works Programme.
- Gosnell, New South Wales has an 'Urban Elements Strategy' including artworks, structures, street furniture etc that provides orientation points throughout the City.
- Central city design strategies, such as the Melbourne provide examples of replacing footpaths or as they are renewed with bluestone.
- Citywide strategy for new signage covering all parks and waterways.

### ACHIEVING GOOD DESIGN

- Clear leadership is important at all levels.
- Keep public space simple.
- More interaction between Council and private people and developers for best results and possible financial commitment to projects two way commitment.
- More definition of responsibility is required to get the work done ie between planners, urban designers, traffic engineers and other professionals.

People and processes which result in good design - there is a need to develop a design culture for Christchurch which is based on:

- Consensus about what people value.
- Shared vocabulary.
- Consistent, long term view of urban design.
- Flexible, simple low key designs that do not go out of fashion.
- Justifying additional capital factoring in lifecycle costs.
- Fixtures, materials etc that are guaranteed for 20 years, (the standard amount of time that it takes to upgrade).
- Compatible products.

Constraints to good quality medium density developments in New Zealand:

- High land cost.
- Insufficient planning controls.
- Unregulated and unrestricted marketing standards.
- Lack of support of innovative developments.
- Regulatory processes inhibit or disadvantage innovative development.
- Good quality developments competing with substandard developments - New Zealanders are drawn by price over quality initially.
- Gaining public acceptance due to perception of medium density development and initial poor quality developments.

How does the Council handle densification in a comprehensive way, rather than on a site by site infill basis? ie issues such as reducing block lengths as densities increase.

## **ECONOMICS AND FINANCING**

Christchurch needs to look at a new form of economics that moves away from the neoclassical mathematical approach to sustainable economics that takes into account:

- Development versus growth,
- Role of natural systems,
- Finite resources,
- Impacts of emissions and waste,
- Lifecycle costs for projects.

Explore further a range of financing mechanisms to encourage heritage retention and/or urban renewal:

- Bonds,
- Revolving funds,
- Trust funds,
- Real estate investment trusts,
- Tax increment financing,
- Tax incentives,
- National grants,
- Reward the retention of heritage buildings by developers by freezing rates for a given period on that building.

## **PROMOTION OF THE POSITIVES**

Christchurch needs to promote more of its good examples more widely eg the water restoration work, neighbourhood plans etc.

## **MEASURING AND MONITORING**

Monitoring of the satisfaction levels of users of new developments needs to be ongoing.

When looking at the value of projects the Council needs to be considering qualitative, as well as quantitative measurements of benefits/performance.

## **STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC ART**

Legibility:

- In the Central Business District and other retail/business areas the building/footpath interface needs consistent legibility/transparency.
- Christchurch needs to avoid any further 'big box' buildings that ignore the street at the pedestrian level in high use pedestrian areas.
- Don't forget the streets with narrow footpaths. As the Brunswick case study high-lighted, even with narrow footpaths it's still possible to have a lively pedestrian street where shops have a good interface with the footpath (eg fold back doors on the cafes) and other elements come into play such as 'dramatic' signage and dual purpose street furniture.
- In both the Melbourne and Johannesburg examples, street traders were an important part the street environment, especially around transport terminals and other high use areas. Within Christchurch's Central Business District more opportunities for street traders could be allowed for.

'Steal back the asphalt':

- Investigate opportunities (especially in the Central Business District) to lessen impact of the road in a pedestrian environment. Narrowing the road and widening the footpath places the emphasis on the pedestrian and creates more opportunity for a quality street environment.

Public art:

- Art in public places - look for sponsorship.
- Art in public places - have a register of local artists and what their particular area is so they can be involved in the project team from the beginning, not included as a last minute thought.
- Foster more superb artworks that have community buy-in (modelled on how Waitakere does theirs). This could include bridges, swales, village greens, street works etc. Consider lighting artworks in the early evenings (sponsored by power companies) to link all artworks, similar to the blue light Melbourne has chosen.
- Christchurch should develop some excellent models with superb artwork (accepted and embraced by communities) and promote these models.

## **EXPANDING THE SKILLS BASE AND ENCOURAGING MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS**

Ensure the Council has the right skills:

- Supporting and promoting the use of in-house design skills.
- Recognising and promoting work that has been done well and achieved the project objectives.
- Politically supporting good design - taking a positive approach to innovation.
- Encouraging the professions involved in urban design to go out and look at other city's urban design work.
- There was a strong theme advocating the use of multi-disciplinary teams at all levels of planning, from large to small scale. While sometimes the Council does this well, I think there needs to be a more consistent approach council wide, with more emphasis on getting the right group of people working together to create the most synergistic team.

## **CONSULTATION**

General:

- Remember in all consultation projects to be sure of objectives first - be up front on your objectives with the communities you are consulting.
- The Council needs to get far smarter with its public consultation to get value from it. The planning of consultation needs to take place to decide whether we are informing versus empowering ie what do we really want from the process.
- Evaluate the consultation process at the end - did it go right, what could we have done better or differently.

Listening to the softest voices:

- Christchurch needs more inclusive consultation with children and youth, especially with regards the long-term strategic vision (these are the people we are planning for after all). They will have ideas of what they would like to see in an area but they will also have a sense of the project belonging to them.
- When consulting with children make sure they have something to take home at the end that reflects their contribution or something that can be placed in their schoolroom to reflect their involvement.
- Don't forget the 'Voice of Nature' in strategic planning. Although we embrace the triple/quadruple bottom line philosophy, all too often this is from a very anthropocentric viewpoint. (I'm not saying we need to have a "Council of all Beings", but I did like that idea of having a physical representation of non-human species at meetings).
- Christchurch City Council should consider funding Wendy Sarkissian to assist with a big, worthwhile project in Christchurch as her skills with children are outstanding - the Council could have an outstanding result with her input!

## **NODAL DEVELOPMENT**

Where Christchurch develops:

- We need to strengthen and consolidate the nodes in our city (both Central Business District and local communities). A restriction on subdivision would curb the urban sprawl and facilitate consolidation. Changing and adapting zones plans to assist the revitalisation of derelict/rundown areas was another example demonstrated that could be utilised in Christchurch (again this needs to be within the framework of a long-term strategic vision).

- Recent developments in technology mean that close proximity to work or related businesses is not always necessary. Consideration should be given to keeping satellite settlements as discreet communities and not blurring the edges between urban and rural.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Christchurch City Council needs to commit to Walkable Communities - including Christchurch River Walks for the Heathcote, Avon and Styx.

The Council needs to be more responsive to the needs of elderly people in the location of elderly persons housing.

Planted swales treating storm water runoff within the central city. May be attractively planted with amenity plants.

Total ban on further subdivisions - tough edges.

## **Comments on specific presentations**

### **1. New Urbanism, Old Nature - Simon Swaffield**

- Traditionally nature was seen as separate from the city, and in the past was considered a museum piece in the form of parks, gardens, reserves and significant natural features like lakes, the coast and streams. Latterly the thinking is that nature should be incorporated throughout the city - for example, in streets, commercial centres, and industrial estates.
- Two types of space were identified - 'Space of Flow' being the networks of connections found in cities such as streets, waterways and links between various commercial activities. 'Space of Place' refers to nodes such as neighbourhoods, retail centres and parks etc. New Urbanism favours the 'Space of Place' because it is traditional and localised. Therefore tension occurs between the 'Space of Place' and the more globally oriented 'Space of Flows'.

### **2. Highbrook Office Park – Richard Stillwell**

- A major industrial development in Tamaki - Auckland, approaches site layout with a very strong landscape input. The developers engaged Peter Walker Associates (USA) to design the development with emphasis on achieving high landscape amenity.
- Unusually the designers not only had high regard for on site amenity but also acknowledged landscape features beyond the site by keeping open views to nearby volcanic cones and the sea.

### **3. A constructive critique of new urbanism's usefulness to New Zealand applications - Garth Falconer**

- Characteristics of New Urbanist design are defined such as nostalgia, utopianism and idealism. Like any movement it is dogmatic and as a consequence is vulnerable to formula based design. Some advantages of New Urbanism were expounded, but Garth ran out of time and so didn't finish his talk. It appeared that he was about to promote more contextual based design.

### **4. Landscape Urbanism - Matthew Bradbury**

- In the traditional approach to urban design the discrete construction of buildings and space meant that the relationship between them often suffered. Modern approaches promote a more integrated approach, with much emphasis on the landscape being the means by which the city is knitted together.

### **5. What does drama mean in relation to urban space and why it is important - Michelle Calleja.**

- The city as theatre where all people are actors. Urban designers are set designers.

## **Why is the city we are building so different from the cities we like?**

In conclusion the general feeling of the staff was that the conference was well worth the effort. The variety of speakers, from politicians to designers and developers, and the topics they covered resulted in a very balanced view of the urban development process. While many of the speakers at the conference gave the impression that there may be one right way of doing things, the reality is that we need to acknowledge the context in which we are working and come up with approaches that are appropriate to Christchurch. These may be a combination of what we are currently doing and new methods and innovative ideas that achieve a better urban design outcome.

### **Staff**

**Recommendation:** That the information be received.

### **Chairman's**

**Recommendation:** For discussion.