

1. URBAN GROWTH MANAGEMENT

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PURPOSE

This item reports on two recent papers on urban planning delivered at the NZPI Conference in May and a speech by Environment Minister, Marion Hobbs. It also summarises the main points arising from a report by Linsay Gow, Deputy Chief Executive, Ministry for the Environment, on urban growth management. Mr Gow visited the United States in late 1999 to find out how growing metropolitan areas managed their urban growth and development.

This item is mainly for information although several broad recommendations are made.

INTRODUCTION

Urban sustainability and growth management was one of the main themes at this year's New Zealand Planning Institute Conference in Christchurch. Keynote speakers included:

- Sir Peter Hall (via satellite link-up from the UK). Sir Peter is one of the world authorities on urban and regional planning and the author of numerous books on the subject.
- Professor Patrick Troy (Australia), an internationally recognised academic whose books include "The Perils of Urban Consolidation."
- John Kari, a Senior Planner in the metropolitan Council of Minneapolis - St Paul, who also spent several days in Christchurch talking to planners and other groups.
- The Minister for the Environment, Marion Hobbs.

Following its banishment from the political (and in some quarters professional) agenda in the 1990s, urban growth management is experiencing a resurgence.

Concerns about urban sustainability (or lack of it) were raised by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment in his 1998 Report, *The Cities and Their People: New Zealand's Urban Environment*. Although the report's recommendations received little support from the then Minister for the Environment, they appear to have been taken up by the new government. Linsay Gow's visit to the United States and his subsequent report has further fuelled interest in the subject.

In light of the Environment Canterbury proposal to prepare a sustainable living strategy, and pending references to the Environment Court on urban growth, these various papers seem extremely pertinent, particularly those of Troy, Kari and Gow.

LINSAY GOW

Lindsay Gow's report looks at urban growth in a number of US cities - Portland, Seattle, 'Twin Cities' - as well as Florida. He then draws some conclusions for the New Zealand context.

When one reads this material it becomes obvious that the sorts of issues being tackled in these cities are similar to those in Christchurch – apart, of course, from the vast differences in scale. It is also obvious that many of the growth management techniques are similar to here, eg curbing urban sprawl, managing travel demand. However, the crucial and fundamental difference is the ability of the US cities to influence the market through economic incentives. There is a greater potential in the USA to develop partnerships and prepare strategies that combine regulatory measures with various types of economic instruments, including tax regimes. There are also resources for demonstration projects and community participation in developing growth management policies.

Gow's key findings from his visit are attached. Without wishing to sound arrogant, there is not much here that Council policy planners were not already aware of. In fact, many of these ideas are already contained in the City Plan or imbedded in other strategies such as the Regional Land Transport Strategy, and Waterways and Wetlands Asset Management Plan.

However, the true value of this report is its seemingly explicit message that urban planning (growth management) is not only a legitimate function of councils, but is an absolute necessity. This message has escaped those, both within and outside the planning profession, who have taken 'purist' views of what the Resource Management Act is about. While the RMA is only one instrument to be used in urban planning within the current institutional context of New Zealand, it is still a very important one.

JOHN KARI

John Kari's visit to New Zealand was courtesy of the Ministry for the Environment and directly attributable to Lindsay Gow's visit to Twin Cities. His paper described the regional growth strategy adopted by the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council (population 2.6 million) in an effort to address problems associated with urban 'sprawl'. Of particular interest was the process the Council adopted in consulting and involving the various communities involved:

“What is needed is a visual map or tool to help citizens and decision makers understand the physical form implied by the growth strategy.”

This paper sets out, in some detail, the methodology used by the Council to develop “Regional Blueprint 2040”, adopted in 1996. One feature of the Blueprint is the number of demonstration projects initiated as part of the Affordable Housing Programme.

PATRICK TROY

Professor Troy's paper provided a contrasting approach to growth management and questioned many of the underlying assumptions used to justify urban consolidation.

He identified three fundamental targets for urban planning:

- reduction in household consumption of water
- reduction in per capita energy consumption
- reduction in per capita generation of waste

He then went on to discuss two fundamental drivers of urban development: the desire for space, and the desire for mobility and access. These have tended to create lower density cities and he saw no reason why this couldn't continue. "Moreover, it appears that this traditional form results in the lowest level of environmental stress."

Troy advocates a much more innovative and sensitive way of dealing with water in our environment than has happened in the past. This includes management of demand for water, utilising technology for treating waste water and greater use of natural catchment design. Many of his suggestions have already been adopted by the Council.

Turning to energy consumption, Troy advocates influencing the form and structure of cities as a means of saving energy. But he is critical of policies to centralise cities, an approach which he sees as inefficient. He sees higher density housing as an impediment to waste minimisation, for example.

The final part of his paper focuses on how urban planning can be used to make cities more equitable and democratic. This leads him into governance issues.

MARION HOBBS, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Marion Hobbs also emphasised the need to involve communities in planning and reaffirmed the important role of Local Government in planning. She concluded her speech with six main messages:

- that urban issues are complex and involve all levels of government and the community
- we need to look at new approaches
- need for a strategic approach and to form partnerships
- need for agreed outcomes
- regulation should be used to underpin and support outcomes - not decide them - especially if such decisions can only be decided through protracted litigation

- strategic planning is a core component of local democracy and urban sustainability.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESENT COUNCIL POLICIES FOR URBAN GROWTH MANAGEMENT

The closest thing to an urban growth strategy for Christchurch is what is in the Proposed City Plan as amended by decisions, May 1999. This plan was prepared in accordance with the RMA, is largely statutory-based and short-term.

At the time of writing this report, the City and Environment Canterbury had prepared draft consent orders on the objectives and policies for urban growth and this agreement is being negotiated with other parties. Irrespective of the outcome of these negotiations, there are likely to be hearings in the Environment Court, if not on the objectives and policies, then on several of the zoning decisions around the edge of the city. Negotiations are also taking place on the objectives and policies relating to retailing.

Irrespective of what happens in the Environment Court, the City needs to continue its commitment to urban planning, looking ahead beyond the City Plan period, and developing non-regulatory programmes to implement present urban development policies. A lot of knowledge can be gleaned from experience gained elsewhere, not only in places like Australia and the US but also nearer to home - the Auckland Growth Forum, for example. Moreover, the present political climate in Wellington appears to be infinitely more encouraging for urban councils to develop strategies for managing their growth through influencing the form and structure of their cities.

If the City is to prepare itself for planning over the next 30 to 40 years, we need to learn some lessons from experience with the City Plan over the past five years, for example:

- (a) A greater emphasis needs to be placed on sound policy research and analysis, including public consultation. This means greater resources must be made available at the start of the process.
- (b) Greater attention to fleshing out zoning patterns through urban design and structure planning, rather than relying solely on broad bush zoning. This implies a multi-disciplinary approach to planning and less reliance on statutory plans. It also means a reappraisal of how policy is co-ordinated across the Council. Finally, it means preparing plans that are outcome driven rather than process driven.

- (c) More effective communication methods with the local community. People have been drowned in the submission process (not only by the City Plan), and many other residents feel that they have been excluded from effective participation in the process.
- (d) Better integration between central, regional and local Councils and the various service providers. Planning in Christchurch has been affected by fragmentation of service delivery (eg planning for schools) and decisions by SOEs (eg location of Christchurch Railway Station).
- (e) Developing incentives to influence development, eg favourable charges for proposals that align with Council policy.

CONCLUSION

These papers have emerged at an opportune time for Christchurch. It is nearing the stage where the urban growth strategy in the City Plan will be detailed in the Environment Court. The Regional Land Transport Strategy is up for review and the draft Long Term Financial Strategy will be put to Council next March. Finally, Environment Canterbury has made provision in its Draft Annual Plan for preparing a sustainable Living Strategy.

The papers described in this report arguably present diverse views and do not cover the other 'market-based' approaches that some would argue produce more efficient, equitable and democratic outcomes. For example, Gow, in his report, reproduces "An Alternative View of the Portland Experience - People 2000: Liveability and Freedom" prepared by the Thorea Institute (recommended reading in the McShane Thinkpiece).

However, the papers provide a basis upon which to undertake further investigation into urban growth management techniques. To this end, it would be appropriate for the Council to hear more on these issues from experts such as Professor Troy and a Councillor/Planner involved in the Auckland Growth Forum. There is also an Urban Development Conference in Auckland in September where many of these issues will be discussed. It would be of value to the Council and a programme is attached.

- Recommendation:**
1. That Council officers prepare a report on the practicality of:
 - (i) The preparation of a potential programme for Professor Troy, including the holding of discussions with Councillors (to be discussed with Professor Menem of Lincoln University).
 - (ii) That an invitation be extended to Professor Troy to address the Council and community.

- (iii) That representatives from the Auckland Growth Forum be invited to explain the process Auckland Councils have adopted in the preparation of the Auckland Growth Strategy.
- 2. That Councillor Sue Wells attend the Urban Development conference to be held in Auckland in September.
- 3. That Councillor Charles Manning attend the RMLA conference in Auckland in October.

The Committee notes that as both conferences are in Auckland, only one Councillor should attend each conference.