

9. URBAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT FORUM

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Corporate Plan Output: Public Accountability	

By resolution of the council, I attended the Urban Planning and Management Forum in Auckland on 26 and 27 September 2000. Over two solid days of work, we heard from 14 speakers on a range of topics. If any member of the committee is interested, I have 18 single-spaced typed pages of transcribed notes that make decent reading, and a large file folder full of handouts of overheads.

I have attempted to précis the two days down into a short report, but have failed miserably to do so. I offer you a mixture of the most compelling jottings, verbatim quotations and thoughts.

What I can tell the committee is that the topics were solid, meaty and thoughtful and it was the most educational two days I have spent in a very long time. It was an expensive conference to attend, but absolute value for money. I apologise for my writing style in this report. I want you to get the flavour.

DAY ONE

Lindsay Gow, our keynote speaker for day one, commented that it is impossible to strategically plan for urban growth through the RMA, that the Act is considerably overplayed and overblown in terms of what it does and what people expect it to do.

- “If you want to get serious about strategic planning it has to be at the core of local government.”
- “Lot of problems of our urban design have been that we’ve tried to copy North America.”

He went on to explain his impressions of high density living – “the idea that we can all live in New York isn’t part of our culture.”

- “Environmental issues cannot be solved simply by minimising adverse effects.”

Mr Gow reminded us that there are many things we’ve yet to think of – how about transport by hoverboard? What are our telecommunications opportunities for the future? Trends analysis are vital for good planning. He suggested we listen to retailers, as they’re the ones who know what customer preferences are.

Like many of the other speakers, Mr Gow spoke about transport, and also pollution (synonymous with Auckland highways, it seems).

He discussed land banking and made the point that a reserve of about 2-3 times available land is necessary or prices will go up.

Given the significance of Mr Gow’s positions, I feel this comment should be writ large:

“New urbanism is not a holy grail – nodes connections are simply being reinvented. It’s not going to work if you just blob it on a plan and stick some zoning around it!”

Q. “What we hear you saying is, it is okay to plan. Is it likely that changing philosophy will see legislative expression?”

He answered, “Correct. The previous 15 years have been somewhat strange - never mentioned planning, and deliberately so. But people change. It is again legitimate for government to have a role. We are now looking for an enabling document.”

Q. “Resources spent on District Plans – do we have to maintain that approach?”

Mr Gow “(doesn’t) ...believe we should have to put that kind of effort into district plans. People use it for gains and advantages and has been set up in a world that maybe goes too far.”

Bob Nixon commented that the *“task of reviewing (District Plans) is so horrifying it’s daunting. Would this government be amendable to tweaking?”*

Mr Gow’s reply – “Possibly. RMA was intended to be about simplifying and removing need for regulation – it’s done the opposite. People want protection.”

Q. Shopping hierarchy – is retailing in the States controlled or free for all?

A. “They didn’t try to guess what kind or where people would like (access only barrier), but rather accepted that retail reinvents itself every 5-7 years. Retail starts to want to change its demand structures. Big Box, Malls, Streetscape (MainStreet) which goes nichey and community service boutique. We are better to think, not **“What’s in there, but what can I use it for next?”**

Cathy Henkel of Waitakere Eco-City spoke next (at length) about her overseas experiences of viewing sustainable communities.

Gerard Cleary of the Invercargill City Council then discussed some of the ways in which Invercargill City Council is trying to entice more residents into its area – they are deeply concerned about Southland’s dwindling population.

The ‘death slot’ after lunch on day one was a discussion of the differences between Auckland and “Wellywood” – film is showing through strongly as a pull in many of our centres. **Marc Bailey** of Wellington told us the Mount Victoria (Wellington) example of infill was noted as having been to the detriment of the quality of the area.

- They had a fascinating model for handling outstanding ridgelines and hilltops. Boffa Miskell mapped outstanding ridgelines and hilltops. Used a visibility study – computer programme divided it into 1,000m grids and found highpoints of city which showed how visible they were. “It was clear that generic rules wouldn’t work in trying to manage a resource which had so many variable conditions – could restrict building from the top back from a ridgeline.” A community consultation process led to design brief.
- There was a discussion of the unsuccessful Variation 17, and the point was made that the 50-year scale of the plan may have been too large for the community to grasp it easily. In hindsight, thinking shorter-term may have resulted in a better outcome.

Doug Leighton of Boffa Miskell in Auckland told us (again) about the Auckland Growth Strategy, and that city's transport woes. Quote of the day from his speech was:

- **“I'm a great believer in some of the New Urbanist Approach – but it can also be the Amway of Planning. It is frequently manipulative at charrettes which results in ideas being thrust down people's throats ... take it with a large grain of salt.”**

He further reports that no-one's happy with the current (RMA) system. Planners would rather spend less time on District Planning and more on strategic visioning.

Dave Serjeant of Kingett Mitchell and Associates discussed the relationship between retail location and urban sustainability as a prime example of the tension between strategic and bottom-line approaches.

He made this challenging comment:

- *“Congestion can be seen as an externality – or it can be a sign of a healthy economy?”*

He recommended reading Robert Cervero's “The Transit Metropolis” – planning a random pattern of movements connected by a vast array of places.

His session was very useful, discussing caselaw. He suggested that:

- *“In terms of adverse social and economic effects, include in your plan as explicit criteria as you can on the types of social and economic effects you wish to avoid or enjoy benefits from.”*

He stressed the concept that retail areas need to be “people places” – not just concrete barns.

Peter Reaburn's opinion was that the best processes involve communications between developers and councils. Good development can be frustrated by bad processes, particularly if it's innovative.

Other points included:

- Bad development is a real risk outcome of bad processes.
- Hearings can be too formal and miss opportunities for resolution of issues?
- Critical – structure chart (names!) Keep it fresh and freely available.
- Suggestions to councils:
 - Put your best people at the counter, not out the back.
 - Absolutely endorse the don't accept inadequate applications.

DAY TWO

On the second day, **Professor Geoff Kearsley of Otago University** kicked things off with a spectacular discussion of the social impacts of tourism in natural environments. A compelling lecturer, he would be an excellent guest speaker at a seminar of the Resource Management, Environment and Environment Canterbury committees.

He discussed urban tourism, and made the point that people are choosing to move from old to new, from cool to warm and only the process of gentrification has reversed any of these trends.

- “The focus on heritage and nostalgia **has become almost unhealthy and has reached a level where it is economically damaging in the UK.** European tourism has reached (and count the zeros – they’re right) 1,000,000,000 international trips. It consumes 1 in 8 of all dollars spent.”

In Britain, he noted the massive growth of open air museums. Hugely expensive heritage displays – multi-million dollar pound tourism displays (eg, The Dome in Greenwich). Each visitor subsidised by 187 pounds sterling.

- “If you believe there are visitors and you can attract some investors, maybe you can create a new image for a run-down or forgotten place.”

Prospect of visitors

↓

Investment (public sector pump priming)

↓

Marketing

↓

Visitors

↓

Income

↓

Jobs

↓

Physical economic and social regeneration:

- Jobs in all fields – tourism becomes a catalyst. Population grows and people feel good about themselves.
- Shopping is at the heart of urban tourism.
- Everywhere has small-scale monuments as well as large. One-and-a-half million people attracted to Glastonbury every year to see a thorn tree.
- Tours of nuclear power stations – Whitechapel bell foundry now draws more money from tourism than from bells.
- If you show people something without education it won’t work.
- Events such as the America’s Cup – when you calculate economic impact, you have to be very careful to count **new** money and not shifted money, because so many create money that is spent at the event site that would have been spent elsewhere.

“Dunedin in the year 2000” decided they had to change the economy: either become post-industrial modern or a retirement complex with a university attached. Before, 80% said it was madness – after, 90% said they were always in favour of it.

- Planning problems – cost of infrastructure, creating heritage precincts. Wanaka doesn’t want tourism – wants retirement town – problems of all night parties and transient population.
- While it has brought specialised economic development, cost is substantial and at expense of other sectors.
- Massive research – know your market, what they require, how product will fit with it. Lots about community acceptance of tourism.

It made me wonder about the possibility of an Early Settlers’ museum for Christchurch?

Ken Tremaine and Andrew Braggins went on to discuss financial contributions. Nothing new to report there, I’m afraid, but they said that at length. They mooted a supposedly simple sliding scale which we later decided amongst ourselves was likely to end in tears, horribly.

Judith Tizard then discussed Auckland and how it affects the rest of the economy. Sadly, there was an inordinate focus on Auckland and its miserable transport woes. The Associate Minister of Transport sent chills down our southern spines with her comments about roading priorities. In a nasty little recurrent theme, we heard that:

- **Auckland’s future is New Zealand’s future!**
(The northern equivalent of Oi! Oi! Oi!)

In her opinion the Bridge in Otira may have been desirable, but was certainly not top priority.

I advised the Associate Minister of our concerns about the non-transparency of Transit, given that it needs to work closely with LTAs, and she has promised to follow that up.

I also asked her if there was any suggestion to allow LTAs to take back integrated control of the bus service, and she suggested it would be dealt with under the power of general competence through the LGA review.

Team Manukau City then described with glee their proposed medium/high density long-term project for Development of East Tamaki (unfortunately acronymised as DET), which highlighted for me the massive difference in cultures between the congested north and the airy south. As part of Auckland’s Growth Forum, which anticipates a doubling of the population there over the next 50 years, 70% of that development is to occur within an urban ‘ring-fence’. DET is part of that city-wide infill phenomenon. The 1,750 hectare site is to hold a new town of 50,000 which will take 20 years to build out. They were very excited about building around their stormwater systems and enhancing waterways – I doubt they’ve been to Christchurch. Good opportunity for our water services people to offer their abilities.

Wednesday's afternoon death slot was filled by lawyer **Murray King of Bell Gully Buddle Weir** with the sexy topic of, "The funding of infrastructure projects – what options are legally available to local authorities for urban planning projects." It was a long hour with a single outcome – Section 37A of the LGA.

Andrew Royle then presented an interesting discussion on identifying potential liability of the planning profession. He believes there will be more claims against planners in the next decade. More litigious markets – especially much media focus on US. He offered further discussion on case law – again, very useful.

We concluded with the deliberately challenging **Caroline Miller**, a lecturer at Massey's Department of Resource and Environmental Planning. I've included about a third of my jottings from her speech here.

- "It may be that we have to accept the RMA doesn't work in the urban situation – perhaps there's a better way forward. Auckland nearly had its own planning legislation in 1911. RMA tries to compartmentalise matters.
- The whole concept of sustainable management is difficult and narrow. What does it actually mean?
- RMA is predicated that we are willing to give up options now to save some for the future.
- Students now are a generation who will find it difficult to pick up some of the tools if we are going to do genuine urban planning beyond limitations that are in the Resource Management Act, because they've been taught in the Upton Era of market-driven planning.
- May be better to simply expand the powers of local government.
- We've spent nine years getting out of step with the rest of the world. Most of the instruments of good urban management are going to be highly interventionist. Quite limited tools within the Act – significant limitations.
- Reduced everything to minimalist proportions. Accountable, transparent, least cost – but no reduction in what local communities expect local government to do, and central government's withdrawal makes it worse.
- Overseas concept of 'planning gain' is well established – we forget about it here.
- Separation of policy and regulation – those who write policy are well removed from those who implement it."

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the information be received.