

5. REPORT ON NEW ZEALAND PLANNING INSTITUTE CONFERENCE 2001, TAURANGA

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Corporate Plan Output: Public Information	

On 16 and 17 March 2001, Councillor Wells and I attended the New Zealand Planning Institute's Annual Conference in Tauranga with the theme 'Market Rules?' While a conference with such a title produced the worst pair of papers Councillor Wells and I have heard in combination, namely the compulsory eulogy of the market and criticism of any regulation and compliance costs from Simon Carlow of the Wellington Business Association, and a response from Dr Rodger Spiller so cliché-ridden as to be useless and possibly meaningless, there were a number of worthwhile papers on the first day.

Professor Hirini Matunga of Lincoln University presented a Maori perspective on urban growth. He outlined how the built form of cities, their design, architecture and vegetation tended to reflect the ideology of the dominant colonial culture, and how things of importance to Maori were often seen only on the periphery. In consequence, he urged that "a re-imaging, re-presenting and retro-fitting of the city needs to take place, so as to relocate our cities in Aotearoa away from the imperial centre and to provide a more inclusive foundation for urban growth".

Professor Richard Bedford, a demographer from Waikato University presented a paper on population trends. In particular, he demonstrated that the considerable variation of fertility rates and migration policy had produced "cohorts" in the population which would produce considerably different age profiles of the population at different periods. This would not only be true as the 'baby boomers' grew older, but when the same happened to groups born in other periods when fertility was high, for example from 1989-95. Professor Bedford also demolished some long-held myths about population change; while population drift was popularly held to be from south to north and from rural to urban. In fact, in the period 1986-96 population in the South Island increased slightly at the expense of the North, and there was a marginal increase of rural dwellers at the expense of urban. Professor Bedford made the point that demographers' predictions should be treated with caution. While the rate of births to deaths was reasonably predictable, a whole range of variables affected internal and external migration, such as the health of local economics, government immigrations, perceptions about climate and amenity of different areas. Demographic results depended on assumptions on all these matters, which may not in fact prove accurate.

Professor Howard Frederick of the University of Auckland gave an interesting, if for my taste rather over-dramatised and over-Americanised paper on *Impacts of New Technology*. Despite over-use of religious imagery and a somewhat evangelical style, Professor Frederick indicated that the new technologies allowed a number of presently centralised activities, such as work, shopping and the like, to be done from home. This has two impacts: firstly, the sort of assumptions presently made about traffic planning may change markedly in the next two decades. An even greater proportion of journeys will be leisure rather than work-related. Secondly, if more people work from home, their perceived need for space around them may increase, so that the demand for lifestyle blocks and larger sections may increase.

URBAN GROWTH MANAGEMENT

The keynote address on this topic was given by Leigh Hopper, Managing Director of Hopper Investments, but it will also be convenient to discuss the insights of a workshop on this subject attended by Councillor Wells and myself on the second day, when Lindsay Gow of the Ministry for the Environment made some interesting remarks.

As a general aside, as might be expected in Tauranga, the speakers tended to concentrate on the North Island experience, which is not necessarily our experience in Christchurch, nor are the same models of governance necessarily appropriate. Lindsay Gow made the important point that for much of New Zealand, urban growth was not the major problem. The real problem was retro-fitting cities designed in the 19th century for 21st century conditions. Many towns and cities with a static or declining population base were faced with replacing a now decaying infrastructure of poles and roads and the like. Perhaps we are fortunate to be experiencing some growth, despite the problems it causes.

On the same theme, Leigh Hopper outlined one of the major problems of infill in older suburbs. Many of the older suburbs with their quarter acre sections were built before the days of district plans, and before developers were obliged to provide reserves in reasonably-sized developments. The assumption with the larger sections was that there would be room for children to play and parents to relax on their own, or their neighbours' lands. Older suburbs thus developed with minimal reserves. Infill made adequate reserves even more valuable, and to find land for them was both difficult and expensive. Infill and intensification are not a panacea for managing urban growth and frankly, the balanced approach we have taken in Christchurch is much more tenable.

A number of participants in the workshop on 17 March had experience of the Auckland growth strategy. Two things, or perhaps three, emerged from this discussion which are worthy of note. Firstly, the Auckland urban area stretches over the territory of four or five separate territorial authorities. The need for, or at least the rationale for a regional strategy is much stronger than in Christchurch, where one authority controls the majority of growth areas in absolute terms. Secondly, the much-vaunted agreed strategy still has to meet the tests of the district planning process. That is to say, the local authorities have, in varying degrees, accepted a neo-urbanist approach of rigid urban boundaries and densification, but what this will mean in terms of densities and the like has not been tested at district plan level, where it is highly likely that resistance will be encountered from groups who perceive the threat to their amenity. I'm sure Councillor Wells and I and other members of Panel one would love to give evidence in Waitakere City! My third comment is an aside. It seems that the Waitakere City high density corridors are presenting problems. Developers have built quite cheap homes in these areas (surprise, surprise), and all the houses are being occupied by those who can't afford to live elsewhere. Since low income often runs in parallel with other indicators of low status, such as poor health or limited education, the high density corridors have become ghettos for those with social problems. The evidence of this is anecdotal, but oh dear, whoever would have thought it?

I also attended two other workshops, one on Section 94 of the Act, and another on the new generation of plans. Section 94 deals with the issue of notification and non-notification. It may be useful at some time for the Resource Management Committee to conduct a seminar on these matters in the near future, but there is now a substantial body of law on the permitted baseline text, that is, in judging whether effects are minor, the standard by which this is judged in the environment as it exists, or the environment as it may be permitted to exist under any plan. When *Bayley v Manukau* was originally issued, it was believed this would lead to an increase in notification, in the present environment might be used as a yardstick. Later cases suggest that "the existing environment" is far more likely to be used to limit notification where the plan has standards that are not matched in the surrounding environment.

The new generation of plans workshop was based on a recognition that many of the present generation of plans were conceived in the early days of the Act, when understandings of key sections, such as Section 32, were less well-developed. Many plans were simply transitional plans 'tarted up' to conform with the legislative framework of the Resource Management Act. The new generation plans will have the benefit of a variety of case law as well as templates provided for Section 32 analyses. For the information of Councillors, in an analysis of plans produced under the Resource Management Act, the city's plan comes out pretty well.

Councillor Wells and I both benefited from the conference. Next year the conference is combined with the Australian Planning Institute in Wellington. There may be merit in sending some Councillors with less experience of the Resource Management Act, as well as Councillors who are dealing with issues all the time.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the information be received.