

7. PLANNING FOR URBAN RENEWAL

Officer responsible General Manager Strategic Development	Author Janet Reeves, Urban Design and Heritage Team Leader, DDI 941-8351
---	--

The purpose of this report is to seek the Committee's support for an annual plan request aimed at achieving better urban renewal outcomes in the city's older urban areas. The report is submitted to this Committee because of the benefits of the proposal to the co-ordinated planning of all neighbourhood improvement works and the implications for undergrounding overhead wires.

BACKGROUND

The Urban Planning and Growth Special Committee, on 26 November 2003 requested:

- "1. That the Annual Plan Working Party review the level of urban renewal funding, in order to deliver a greater focus on planning without losing the ability to fund small infrastructural projects and;*
- 2. That the Council review the level of service for urban renewal improvements in neighbourhoods in order to offer better urban design outcomes."*

ISSUES

A report has been prepared for the next meeting (March 2004) of the Urban Planning and Growth Special Committee detailing the issues and options for urban renewal. The basic tenet of the report is that there are many uncoordinated Council initiatives which can be classified as urban renewal (or have an element of urban renewal) such as neighbourhood plans, living streets, kerb and channel renewal, street tree planting programme, waterway enhancement, local parks acquisition, art in public places, Aranui community renewal, council housing provision, community board projects and discretionary funding. There is a clear need for a mechanism for ensuring the coordinated planning of all these activities as well as community and private initiatives.

The neighbourhood improvement plans were developed to act as an integrated planning tool but it has become clear that they are no longer sufficient to plan and coordinate the plethora of Council and community initiatives. Furthermore the plans only partially cover the older urban areas and apart from the two most recent ones (Charleston and St Albans) their existence is often overlooked or disregarded. Efforts have been made in the past year to raise the profile of the plans and actively pursue the implementation of projects, following the approval of the Annual Plan Working Party to fund project management from the capital budget for a two-year period. This is proving valuable but the level of funding needs not only to be continued, but also augmented, if neighbourhood planning is to be comprehensive, up to date and meet the needs of the community.

A WAY FORWARD

Currently the urban renewal programme has an annual budget of \$500,000 per annum, split equally between operational and capital funding. Most of the operational budget is used to fund the undergrounding of overhead wires, with a small amount used for plan preparation and improvements to private land. The capital budget is used to fund landscaping and amenity improvements, often adding value to other Council spending, such as kerb and channel renewal. Urban renewal funding is used to improve urban design outcomes which would otherwise not be pursued. In order to deliver a greater focus on planning, an increase in the urban renewal operational funding of \$200,000 would be required. An alternative would be to leave the urban renewal funding at its current level and transfer the responsibility for undergrounding of local streets to City Transport. This would free up the urban renewal operational budget for planning activity.

The bulk of the Council's budget for undergrounding is managed by City Transport (City Streets Unit). The urban renewal budget contributions towards undergrounding are confined to local streets in the older residential parts of the City covered by neighbourhood improvement plans, where undergrounding will contribute to enhancing the residential qualities of the area. Undergrounding overhead wires is hugely popular with residents and can have a very marked impact on the appearance of a street and therefore its continuation is highly desirable. Furthermore, the undergrounding of overhead wires in conjunction with kerb and channel renewal is an expected part of the Charleston Neighbourhood Plan improvement works, over the coming years.

OUTCOMES

Strengthening urban renewal planning in this way would enable:

- Comprehensive coverage of neighbourhood/or community plans (in a new format).
- Plans to be prepared in a timely manner.
- Plans to be kept topical, relevant and act as guiding documents.
- The achievement of better urban design outcomes.
- The Council's budget to be spent wisely and efficiently.
- Cross-unit opportunities to be seized.
- Private expenditure in local areas to be encouraged and facilitated.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Committee recommend to the Annual Plan Working Party that funding is allocated for strengthening urban renewal planning by transferring the responsibility for funding the undergrounding of overhead wires in local streets to the City Transport Unit.