

Central City Revitalisation

The Central City needs a clearly defined plan if it is to rekindle a vibrant and sustainable heart.

The competition from the Council approved proliferation of urban malls has been a disincentive to successful businesses wanting to set up in the centre of the city. There has to be a good reason for people to make the effort to travel there, be it for social, business or culture and these days it seems it has to be made easy. The advance of technology has also had an impact, with the example of mobile mortgage brokers diminishing the need to visit the traditional bank head office in town.

What is needed is a plan that for the next 10 years setting out a direction to encourage the city to grow. (It would be worthwhile seeing the review of previous plans and measuring how successful they were - to learn from the experience.)

The more successful developments seem to include clustering of similar businesses to raise the opportunities for people making the effort to travel to the area. Planning could encourage the fashion industry to gather around High Street, as it is tending to do, near the Polytechnic Design School. Similarly Chinese Restaurants should be encouraged to set up together and other ethnic groups could do the same. The Council could relax the rules on signage and lighting in the area to reflect the ethnicity and there could be a small rates reduction for the businesses fitting in with the area. While the growth of these areas won't happen overnight, it will happen over ten years. The only current examples in Christchurch would be the car sales' yards in Moorhouse Avenue and bars along The Strip and around Sol Square. Business and cultural activities could be encouraged in similar way.

Ballantynes appears to lead the way in retailing in the city and is a great draw card. Retailers nearby must enjoy the benefits of their proximity. Council needs to work more proactively with the large businesses and help them do more to encourage locals and tourists. It need not be limited to traditional retail. We need to develop activities such as Medical Tourism. If Christchurch Hospital could get organised, we could have significant income to help balance budgets and tourists combined.

There has to be provision made for people to walk or travel comfortably and safely around the city, otherwise why go there? Covered walkways need to be provided to link areas together that do not have sufficient shop overhangs to protect people in inclement conditions. Shop overhangs should be encouraged in any redesigns. A feeling of security should exist. Interactive entertainment would also help; e.g. the water fountains near the Casino in Melbourne are very entertaining for a lot of people whether they are playing in them or just watching. Incidentally, how does the Council's purchase of Dave Henderson's properties fit in to a plan and what other development ideas have been set as priorities in this plan?

Housing in City Center

The development of housing in the city center may not result in the intended outcomes. What will another thirty thousand people be employed to do in the center of the city if they are housed there? Just putting a larger number of people in one place will not build a happy city center. In fact, it could well lead to more problems.

Thirty thousand more people may require fifteen thousand more jobs to be created, what sector are they going to work in? Thirty thousand people may also mean ten thousand more cars. Where are they going to be parked and where is the space for other people to park when they come to visit them?

New Community Centers

More money should be spent on cultures rather than Community Centers. Encourage activities based around growing and strengthening our diverse cultures that will eventually enhance our communities. When each culture has a strong identity among themselves they will be more confident to mix with others. Shopping Malls tend to act as Community Centers, could there be a requirement on developers to provide more Community facilities within their buildings and parking areas?

Events

There are already some good programs to build on e.g. Summertimes. The City Council needs to do more to build activities around major performances e.g. Rugby World Cup. The Council could be organising matches for tourists e.g. England v Canterbury oldies at AMI stadium with the sale of commemorative T-shirts and other memorabilia. Our Jazz School and other good training centres could be used more in a variety of events.

New Libraries

Where is the research that supports planning for a new \$83m library when the Government plans to spend billions to connect everyone to the Internet cheaply? Is it just for the sake of a new building? Will we need storage for so many books? People may be accessing material on line and downloading stories onto electronic screens? Do we not just need a big computer instead for sharing the information? Can there be more of a link between Community Centers and Libraries e.g. co-locating?

New Civil Defence Building –

Christchurch doesn't need another building. We should be combining existing services e.g. Police, St John, Fire, Coast Guard as much as possible to make most use of current services and equipment, minimise costs, maximise efficiencies and communication. Why would you need to duplicate phones, radios, computers, and personnel if they were housed together?

Transport

There is inconsistency in the transport planning. The conflicting plans to allow traffic in the city mall, but also attempting to reduce traffic coming into the city is an obvious one. The building of another transport hub in the center of the city - when more people are working away from the city in areas that are not well served by buses (such as the industrial development to the west of the city and also near the tunnel road), is another.

The easiest option to relieve the comparatively limited traffic congestion we have is not to build new roads at great expense, but stagger peoples' work start times. We have congestion for relatively short periods each day. The rest of the time it all works quite well. People working at odd street numbers could start at quarter to, even numbers at quarter past the hour, finishing at comparable times at the end of the day. Traffic would be halved at peak times making travel times quicker and less hazardous.

More walking and cycling would be great if our weather was better year round and there were more protected paths and cycleways. Building on the existing bus network seems sensible rather than wasting time on competing forms of transport such as light rail in a city the size of Christchurch.

The current quality of Christchurch roads seems very inconsistent. What are the quality standards for work that is done? Our new roading appears to be irregular from the start – only leveled in one direction, and deteriorates quickly into uneven surfaces. The causeway is one example of this.

Funding

One of the recent funding themes coming through is the idea of spreading the cost of projects over a longer period of time. Isn't this just saying let's get what we want now and make those in the future pay more for it - so we don't have to worry about it? Increasing the repayment time of loans increases the total cost hugely. Let's look at ways of getting out of debt and only buying what we can afford. We will all be better off in the long term. Consolidate current debt in the meantime by borrowing from New Zealand Super Fund or Kiwisaver to reduce risks for all concerned.

The Council "is experiencing tremendous pressure on costs". This is because they are spending too much and not thinking creatively about how a vibrant and sustainable city can be built with a limited budget. Unfortunately, ratepayers are viewed as an endless pot of money that can be dipped into to fund favored projects e.g. the City Council's own building. Who are the people that receive most benefit from the new building? Most people in Christchurch may visit it once or twice in their lives. The proposed new domestic airport could be seen in the same light. It was reported recently that the Airport Company and Air New Zealand had reached agreement about airport proposals. There was no mention of the 'flying public' being consulted anywhere. Personally, I don't need another line of chainstores in the airport! Affordable flights and timely check through are my requirements, similar to most other people I suspect.

All contracts for work should be fixed price contracts. How many times do we have huge budget blowouts? Who is accountable? In private business someone would be!

Encouraging the purchase of local products should be done as much as possible and where not available, either build them locally under licence or there could be some sort of technology sharing to upgrade local skills. For example, we can build world-beating fibreglass racing bikes in Ferrymead, but buy fibreglass pipes from Saudi Arabia that run past the business making the cycles? Promoting links between the CDC, Employers Chamber of Commerce and our Education providers could help inspire creative, local solutions that may develop into business opportunities to sell those solutions globally.

Recycling

The Council should fund projects each year that promise a return on recycling materials locally e.g. turning used plastics into building materials rather than sending them overseas. Onsite rainwater storage could be encouraged for garden watering and vehicle washing. A competition could be run annually to reward properties with the biggest reduction in reticulated water usage. The prizes could be no rates for a year.

Conclusion

There are a considerable number of good things already in Christchurch. The challenge is to build on these over a period of time, based on the development of a suitable plan ticking off the milestones and providing the opportunity for review if outcomes are not as planned. The establishment of priorities – based on affordability, can lead to local solutions for a healthy, sustainable, and successful Christchurch.

Graeme Moore
3 Searidge Lane
Christchurch