



Designing Auckland:

a springboard for action

The Mayoral Task Force
on Urban Design

A report to Mayor Dick Hubbard

MAY 2005



*Mayor's Office
Auckland City*

31 May 2005

I have great pleasure in presenting to Councillors of Auckland City Council and to all the people of Auckland the report of the Mayoral Taskforce on Urban Design. This taskforce was set up approximately three months ago and was the result of a clear call for action by both professionals and by the people of Auckland.

The taskforce has worked hard to produce this report. At the inaugural meeting, I indicated that there were several considerations that I wished them to take account of. These were as follows:

- (a) To "leave no stone unturned" in this exercise and to look at all possible impediments to good urban design in Auckland both within Auckland City Council and external to it. This was to include any possible impediments at the council political level.
- (b) To not accept "second best" but to work on the basis that only the best in urban design will do. Auckland is a stunningly beautiful city on the outside and the aim is to have it just as beautiful on the inside.
- (c) To be bold and not be constrained by trying to second-guess any political acceptability of the recommendations.

In my opinion, the taskforce has delivered and has delivered well. The taskforce members have put a huge amount of their time into this report and have worked diligently and well as a team. In my opinion, they have fulfilled the brief as outlined above. They have not concentrated on detailed methodologies for implementing the recommendations and nor should they have. That is our job at the political level and the administration level.

Many of the recommendations do not involve a great deal of money – rather they require a mindset change and a culture change both within the Auckland City structure and also within the development industry. The report signals a greater sense of partnership and common purpose and shared responsibility between both Auckland city and those from the private sector development industry.

The report clearly identifies the need for strong political leadership to champion the changes proposed in the report. I give an undertaking to provide leadership that champions the principles outlined in this report and I give an undertaking on behalf of Council to the people of Auckland that I will be working with council to implement as many changes as we can and as fast as we can. I want Auckland to not just be a world-class city but also a world-leading city in bold and imaginative urban design.

Thank you to the taskforce members for providing such a clear and lucid pathway to get to this end point. I have no doubt that the legacy of the recommendations in this report will be felt by very many Aucklanders and very many generations to come.

Dick Hubbard
Mayor of Auckland City

Designing Auckland: a springboard for action

Introduction

Auckland's future is urban. Urban design is about how we can make busy, built-up cities attractive, liveable and functional for residents, workers and visitors. In other words, a “back to basics” approach to city-making – not just the aesthetics but the form and function of a sustainable city.

As Australasia's second fastest-growing city, Auckland must demand a high quality of urban design – a city that takes into account how people connect to the landscape and to each other.

The Mayoral Task Force on Urban Design was convened to find ways to accelerate Auckland toward being a design-led city, where all the people involved in building the city work together to springboard Auckland into becoming a genuinely resilient and attractive city.

The Task Force recommendations are not just about architecture or aesthetics. Urban design is as much about the performance of buildings, the spaces between buildings, and the connection between places and people, as it is buildings or architecture. We need to promote this message as clearly as possible. The outcome must be a sustainable, workable, pleasant, inspiring city for people to live in, to invest and to work in, as well as visit.

Creating a quality city rests with many hands - with decision makers who are also consumers, with developers and investors, with the design professions - including urban designers, architects, landscape architects, planners, engineers, surveyors and others, as well as with the city's elected and professional staff.

The Task Force members urge rapid progress to reposition Auckland with a new design based platform for the future shape, look and feel for Auckland. It means making urgent change within the council and equally within the wider development industry. The recommendations accelerate good development, and deter mediocre or bad proposals.

The Task Force is not content with incremental change, nor with complacency about some of the good developments we see around us. Decisive action is overdue; we must all do better, starting now.

The Task Force has identified a handful of essential measures for immediate impact, and actions to sustain change:

- **create memorable places and spaces**
- **only the best will do - tilt the playing field toward good development**
- **be bold - say “No!” to bad design**
- **be clear about the big picture**
- **bring in champions to accelerate change**
- **rebuild a ‘can do’ design-led council organisation**
- **fast track changes to outmoded rules and processes.**

Priorities for design-led transformation

The Task Force's complete list of issues, proposed actions and timeframe is outlined in the Action Plan (from page 5).

Below are eighteen **high impact actions** which should be started now.

Both the council's actions and collaboration with industry partners is at the heart of success. Task Force members, who represent a significant cross-section of the design, investment and development community, are willing to stay the course to make sure things happen and to engage others to assist.

Create memorable places and spaces

- develop and notify a design-led plan change for the western reclamation (the tank farm) that captures the character of the waterfront and the city's future as a world-class creative city.
- make the key routes of the city memorable before more opportunities for good quality buildings and people-friendly places are lost e.g. Dominion Rd, Symonds Street and the central transit corridor

Only the best will do - tilt the playing field towards good development

- investigate a scoring system to assess the urban design merits of all developments, to ensure developments with the highest quality urban design get a "smooth passage" through the regulatory process
- investigate incentive mechanisms for good urban design

Be bold – say 'No!' to bad design

- flag poor development at an early stage and require redesign to raise the standards
- require all new buildings in the Central Area and isthmus to include an assessment of urban design outcomes in the resource consent process
- instil an organisational culture empowered to say "no!" to bad design
- continue and strengthen the Urban Design Panel's role in the review of proposed developments in the central area, isthmus and Waiheke

Be clear about the big picture

- finish the citywide open space/landscape framework for Auckland to guide projects, public spending and private initiatives.
- overhaul all council strategies and policies to deliver best practice in urban design and sustainable development

Bring in champions to accelerate change

- appoint an urban design champion to lead change – the “city architect” role
- appoint a Chair of Urban Design at University of Auckland, with funding assistance from Auckland City Council.
- establish and run mayoral awards for great urban design to signal a change in direction
- launch a series of town hall forums for the general public, industry and media to educate Aucklanders and debate the issues and solutions for Auckland

Rebuild a ‘can do’ design led Council organisation

- ensure the new chief executive and his recently appointed general managers are accountable for quality urban design and cultural change in their performance contracts
- create cultural change within council to enable a successful implementation of urban design actions

Fast track changes to outmoded rules and processes

- revise the city’s District Plan to adopt best practice in urban design and sustainable development and notify a design led review of the Central Area district plan
- press central government for changes to the Building Act, and advocate for environmentally sustainable design

Action Plan

Design-led transformation

Successful, growing cities need good urban design to sustain them as attractive, inspiring and well-functioning environments.

Auckland is a stunning city, located between two harbours, dotted with volcanic cones, the physical setting for a potentially magnificent urban landscape. However, over recent decades, we have wasted many opportunities.

The evidence suggests that much of Auckland city's recent development – in both the central city and suburbs – does not measure up. It is the product of a laissez faire approach toward design and the public realm. Inadequate planning and Building Act controls have provided a framework for poor quality development.

Auckland's role as the nation's economic engine cannot be compromised by urban development that does not function well, nor inspire creativity and well-being in its people and businesses.

In response to growing public anxiety at what Aucklanders see springing up in the central city and their neighbourhoods, Mayor Dick Hubbard has signalled his intention to make urban design a signature issue for his mayoralty.

As a stake in the ground, and to support the work of the council's existing Urban Design Panel, the Mayor has appointed this Task Force, broadly representative of the design, investment and development community, to recommend fundamental changes to the way the city manages a collective responsibility for urban design.

Many parties are responsible for creating and maintaining the urban setting. Consumers and investors have as much influence as the professionals involved – the developers, designers, traffic engineers, surveyors and others.

The members of this Task Force represent some of the key parties in Auckland who are committed to high quality urban design. They include:

- council - which should provide the leadership, regulatory framework and processes; as well as design and build the infrastructure and public realm
- developers - who brief and build development
- businesses - who inhabit the city and demand high quality spaces and places for their activities and people
- designers - who design the buildings and spaces around them, inform and educate their clients
- educators - who supply the designers, managers and consumers of the future city
- residents - who are passionate about their city and choose to live and work in, and advocate for, Auckland.

Many Auckland organisations have signed up to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol, which promises to *“provide a platform to make NZ towns and cities more successful through quality urban design”*.

We believe this is essential, achievable and urgent. Our recommendations to the Mayor are that Auckland City and its partners need to act now to create a world-class city - one which makes the most of our highly distinctive location and is able to compete with other cities in the region to attract talented people and investment.

Action Plan

The actions outlined require a change of mindset and the cooperation of all of council's partners. Task Force members, a significant cross-section of the design and development community, are willing to stay the course to make sure things happen and to engage others to assist.

Create memorable places and spaces		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connected urban spaces which celebrate Auckland's unique natural environment and create a great civic/public environment which is distinctively Auckland 		
To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Develop and notify a design-led plan change for the western reclamation (the tank farm) which captures the character of the waterfront and the city's future as a world class creative city	1 st year	Council, ARC, Ports of Auckland, owners, stakeholders
Make the key routes of the city memorable before more opportunities for good quality buildings and people-friendly places are lost e.g. Dominion Rd, Symonds Street and the central transit corridor	2 nd year	Council
Ensure all public infrastructure projects are required to deliver high quality, pedestrian friendly urban design benefits	1 st year	Council
Develop and create an awareness of a "family" of integrated council policies and strategies for landscape/public realm (tree, ecological corridor, footpath, services, lighting, street furniture, built form interface) to implement the big picture vision	1 st year	Council
Ensure public spending treats the public realm as a whole rather than focusing on individual streets or spaces, upgrade the city's streets across the board	1 st year	Council, utility agencies
Provide greater professional resources within Council to press for and deliver enhancement of the public realm	1 st year	Council
Initiate quarter and neighbourhood planning throughout the city (brief to include sense of place and civic qualities) to identify key urban design characteristics and heritage features as basis for future development controls, and/or design guides	1 st year	Council, residents, businesses, developers
Start a programme that identifies and develops urban design briefs for key sites in the city	1 st year	Council
Investigate a city wide GIS (computer) spatial system to enable understanding of context and urban landscape	2 nd year	Council
Build, display and maintain physical central area model. Require developers to update the model as proposals are approved	2 nd year	Council
Strengthen the programme of community arts projects and events to celebrate local sense of place	1 st year	Council

Strengthen the city's commitment to public arts – explore a “percent for arts” levy to supplement public arts fund	1 st year	Council
Only the best will do - tilt the playing field toward good development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt regulatory practices and attitudes that encourage good development, making it easier to do good urban design and difficult to do bad 		
To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Investigate setting up a scoring system to assess the urban design merits of all development	Immediate	Council, Property Council, NZIA
Link scoring system back to assessment criteria in the District Plan, and be area specific. The elements scored and their weighting may vary depending on the zone. Undertake any regulatory plan changes to implement this	Immediate	Council
Give only the developments with highest quality urban design a “smooth passage” process i.e. an obstacle-free path through all council consenting processes. Appoint senior case managers to project manage developments that demonstrate good urban design	1 st year	Council, development industry
Reject developments with low urban design scores, but give specific guidance as to how to improve their urban design for redesign and future re-submission. Let developments that meet the acceptable urban design thresholds (score) go through the resource consent process in the normal manner	Immediate	Council, Property Council & developers
Instil cultural change within council to enable successful implementation of the scoring system “smooth passage” process across council	1 st year	Council
Encourage professional institutes to actively lobby members to support implementation of the scoring system and quality urban design outcomes for Auckland	Immediate	Council, All professional organisations
Investigate providing other incentive mechanisms for good urban design	1 st year	Council, Property Council & developers
Be bold – say “No!” to bad design		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a whole-of-council attitude that makes bad development difficult, but provides flexibility for robust design-based development 		
To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Require urban design assessments in the resource consent process, including crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and sustainability. Undertake any necessary plan changes to embed the requirement for urban design assessments	Immediate	Council
Flag poor development at an early stage and require redesign to raise the standards. Be prepared to contest parties that do not want to play ball on improving design outcomes.	Immediate	Council
Continue and strengthen the Urban Design Panel's role in the review of central area,	Immediate	Council, PCNZ

isthmus and Waiheke development proposals		NZIA NZILA
Instil an organisational culture empowered and upskilled to say “no” to bad design and resource council with sufficient expertise to enact this change	1 st year	Council
Be clear about the big picture		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cascade all decisions down from the big region-wide picture framework to the smallest details • Understand what is good urban design, how it comes about and how it can be delivered in a way that is appropriate to this city 		
To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Finish the city-wide open space/landscape framework for Auckland. Make this part of the big picture framework for the city, guiding projects, public spending and private initiatives.	1 st year	Council
Align all council strategies, policies and actions with best practice in urban design and sustainable development	2 nd year	Council
Use the Task Force and Auckland’s <i>NZ Urban Design Protocol</i> signatories to improve the city’s urban design – to make sure the actions are achieved, that development standards rise noticeably and that people see a change in the quality of the city’s spaces and places	1 st year	All signatories
Raise the level and quality of the public debate on the future shape of the city and public realm including issues such as: the regional growth strategy and the future form of the sustainable city – design-led intensification the waterfront (including resolving the second harbour crossing / Victoria Park flyover)	1 st year	Council, professional organisations, Committee for Auckland, media, development industry, universities
Develop a sophisticated understanding of Auckland’s urban areas and needs through shared research capability between the universities, council and industry	2 nd year	Council, Universities
Report regularly to the people of Auckland, and also through the government’s <i>NZ Urban Design Protocol</i> , on achievements	1 st year	All

Bring in champions to accelerate change

- Strong and visionary leadership to inspire a change in how the city is designed and managed
- To be competitive in the global market and attract talent and investment, Auckland must be a well designed, attractive place to live and work
- All those involved in creating the urban environment - developers, designers, regulators and consumers - must understand the benefits of good urban design and insist on it

To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Appoint a senior urban design manager to provide leadership, vision, coaching and mentoring of staff and to champion urban design throughout the organisation and city – the “city architect” role	1 st year	Council
Appoint an urban design champion to signal a change in direction – University of Auckland, with funding assistance from council, will appoint a Chair in urban design with time dedicated to the Auckland urban design champion role	1 st year	Council, University of Auckland
Identify and catalogue local projects that demonstrate good urban design. Collaborate with architecture, planning and landscape architecture professional institutes, Property Council and education institutes to reward, display and publish the best examples – the “mayoral awards”	1 st year	Council, professional organisations, Property Council, universities
Launch a series of town hall forums – “city talks” – for the general public, industry and media to debate the issues and solutions for Auckland. Inform these debates with local, national and overseas luminaries	Immediate	Council, professional organisations, media, Committee for Auckland
Engage Auckland’s <i>NZ Urban Design Protocol</i> partners and Auckland’s media to become positive forces to drive design quality. Protocol partners act as sounding board/think-tank to Mayor, review action plan progress and give independent advice	Immediate	All signatories
Prioritise and fund a number of “kick start” projects in key locations to demonstrate good urban design	2 nd year	Council, development industry
Set up Auckland urban design centre to provide a focus for education, information, examples of excellence, and debate	2 nd year	All

Rebuild a design-led “can do” council		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A council organisation which is clear about the value of good urban design and is primed to deliver it through its many roles 		
To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Ensure the new chief executive and his recently appointed general managers are accountable for quality urban design and cultural change in their performance contracts	Immediate	Council
Integrate urban design professionals across the organisation, with links into property, project management, transport, parks, landscape and planning	1 st year	Council
Demonstrate best practice urban design and sustainable development in every council project - from project conception to project brief to on the ground delivery	1 st year	Council
Champion good urban design at CEO and senior management level of council and infuse it through everything the organisation does	1 st year	Council
Attract and retain a sufficient number of high calibre design staff throughout the organisation (permission to pay premium)	1 st year	Council
Assess staffing levels and organisational culture to make sure a “strategic” approach to urban quality is both resourced and driven	Immediate	Council
Plan, fund and deliver an organisational change programme from policy to regulatory delivery to drive quality design agenda	1 st year	Council
Strengthen council processes to reinforce a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to urban issues and development	1 st year	Council
Ensure the new management team keeps abreast of international trends in urban design and regeneration – benchmark Auckland by continually talking to other leaders, travelling together, and bringing in experts.	1 st year	Council
Provide and reinforce training in urban design for council staff, commissioners and elected members	Immediate	Council
Fast track changes to outmoded rules and processes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies are aligned and focused to deliver a sustainable urban form to deliver the city’s social, environmental and economic goals 		
To be successful we must:	Timeframe for delivery	Partners
Revise the city’s District Plan against best practice in urban design and development, and notify a design-led review of the Central Area District Plan	1 st year	Council
Notify design-led reviews of the isthmus and Hauraki Gulf Islands District Plans	2 nd year	Council
Require an assessment of urban design outcomes for all new development as part of the resource consent process	Immediate	Council, developers

<p>Undertake strategic environmental assessment/urban design audit of rules and policies in District Plans and other policy documents including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transport • roading/engineering standards • code of subdivision • footpaths. 	1 st year	Council
<p>Work with developers, and through plan changes, to introduce stronger controls and incentives so that private developments relate better to the public realm</p>	1 st year	Council, development industry
<p>Advocate to central government for changes to the Building Act to raise baseline standards to reflect good urban design and sustainability – incorporate the joint council/industry recommendations on minimum apartment sizes and standards</p>	1 st year	Council, Property Council, NZIA
<p>Introduce a collaborative approach in plan change development – involve relevant parties in the development of changes to the District Plan. Ensure that issues are not continually revisited throughout the process</p>	Immediate	Council, Property Council, professional organisations
<p>Investigate mechanisms for providing incentives to encourage environmentally sustainable design techniques into new developments</p>	1 st year	Council, Property Council, professional organisations

Making sure change happens

The actions outlined require the cooperation of all of council's partners. Once council agrees the Mayor's action plan, the Task Force members are offering to stay involved and to help with making change happen. The Task Force will engage other Aucklanders to assist in the task of making our city better by design.

The council needs to:

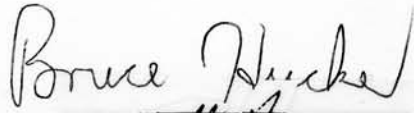
- Develop measures for each action – how will we know we've succeeded and when?
- Develop, approve and manage budgets to implement actions
- Monitor how each action is progressing – and tweak them if needed
- Report to council and the public on achievements and changes
- Keep the discussion in the public eye through media and events.

The Task Force needs to:

- Review progress quarterly – 1st review August 2005
- Support the urban design champion and council to achieve excellence in urban design in our city

The Task Force members below commit to working with Your Worship and your council to bring about the vision of *Designing Auckland: a springboard for action*.

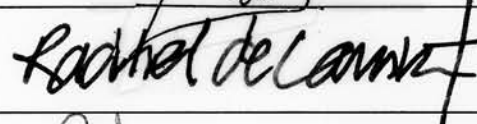
Cr Dr Bruce Hucker



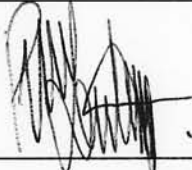
Deputy Mayor
Chair of the Mayoral Task Force on Urban Design



Richard Didsbury
Committee for Auckland



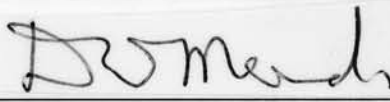
Rachel de Lambert
Boffa Miskell



Patrick Fontein
Property Council of NZ
Kensington Properties Ltd



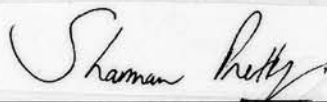
Nigel McKenna
Melview Developments Ltd



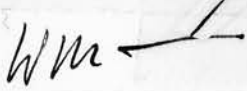
David Mead
Hill Young Cooper



Gordon Moller,
President, NZ Institute of Architects
Craig, Craig, Moller Architects



Sharman Pretty
University of Auckland



Wayne Rex
Landco Ltd



Julie Stout
Mitchell and Stout Architects



Robert Vale
University of Auckland



Martin Udale
McConnell Property Ltd



Barry Rae
Barry Rae Transurban Ltd



Cr Christine Caughey
Auckland City Council



Dr Jill McPherson
Auckland City Council

For further information: www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/urbandesign