



WELLINGTON CIVIC TRUST: Response to Wellington City Council's request for responses to its proposed Te Ngākau Civic Precinct – framework

The proposed vision for the civic and cultural heart of Wellington is:

“Te Ngākau is the beating heart of our capital city: A thriving neighbourhood where creativity, culture, democracy, discovery and arts experiences collide on the edge of Te Whānganui-a-Tara.”

Do you support the following vision (tick one):

Somewhat support

If you strongly support or oppose the vision (above), please explain why briefly below:

- The Wellington Civic Trust was established in 1981. Its members work to:
- encourage public participation in decisions that affect our city
- ensure good planning and design to address the challenges of the future
- preserve the best of the old, but encourage new development which will enhance our city
- protect and enhance the unique character and the many natural features of the city, including the skyline, the town belt and the harbour
- encourage green space and environmentally conscious development
- develop a pedestrian- and cycle-friendly environment
- safeguard the waterfront as a public amenity
- support transport options that enhance the city and the health and wellbeing of its residents

Vision

The Trust somewhat supports the proposed vision for the redevelopment of Te Ngākau – Civic Precinct but believes that there are too many unknowns and uncertainties at this stage to construct a coherent vision statement. Further public engagement is required before a vision statement can be finalised. We would like to see reference to the historic context of the area, and its continued role as a focal point for the city's administration and civic institutions.

A recent seminar organised by the Trust highlighted the need to include concepts of neighbourhood, creativity, discovery and democracy in encouraging active involvement in building and maintaining a sense of place. These concepts should be integrated into the vision for Te Ngākau.

Are there other key issues related to Te Ngākau Civic Precinct which have not been already identified within the draft Framework? Please list them below. You can see the identified issues at www.letstalk.wellington.govt.nz/te-ngakau

The Trust is concerned that the framework is not clearly aligned with the principles embedded in the Council's District Plan. The sale of land associated with the Precinct area and the potential demolition of significant structures including the MOB and CAB buildings and the City to Sea Bridge would contravene these principles.

The Te Ngākau – Civic Precinct area is listed in the Council's heritage list as the Civic Centre Heritage Area with a detailed description of its historical, cultural and architectural significance. This needs to be acknowledged in the proposed framework with a commitment to consultation before removal of the non-listed heritage buildings, for example CAB and MOB, or changes to the character and/or extent of the Precinct's open space.



Objectives

The Framework sets out seven objectives that express what we are seeking to achieve for Te Ngākau. Each of the objectives (listed next) is described in the Framework and supported by a range of policy statements.

Objective 1: Te Ngākau is a place that welcomes and expresses our diverse culture and integrates Mana Whenua values into design and delivery processes

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Strongly support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

The Trust endorses the commitment within the framework to work with Mana Whenua to embed Te Aranga Māori Design Principles in the design and delivery process.

Objective 2: Te Ngākau is a place that respects and incorporates experiences of architecture, design and heritage balanced with ensuring its functional role for the city.

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Somewhat support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

The Trust supports this objective with the proviso that there is a meaningful consultative process around any decision to remove or otherwise transform the primary role of the Precinct as the Civic Centre of the city, with a commitment to return the council's administration functions to the centre as quickly as possible.

The 1990's development largely achieved its purposes and for several decades was the beating heart of Wellington. The open space was versatile and a centre for much of the city's communal life. It is important that the achievements of the current design are acknowledged and recognised before any major decisions are made regarding changes to the centre and its surrounding buildings.

Objective 3: Te Ngākau is a place that is vibrant, welcoming and supports a range of uses to locate alongside its core civic role

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Somewhat support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

The Trust supports this objective, while being mindful that the amount of space available to dedicate to specific uses is limited. Feedback from our members and partners indicated that the greatest need is for contiguous open space, that can be utilised effectively for quiet enjoyment as well as public gatherings – for commemoration, celebration and protest.



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The proposal to incorporate more active edges in the design is supported, however the ability of enterprises such as cafés to survive and prosper requires consideration of both access for supplies and customers day and night, as well as affordable rentals.

The ongoing increase in local population requires the Precinct to function as a “front garden” for many of the residents in Wellington’s most populous suburb. This requires multifunctional spaces to create better social and mental health; a focus on more green/open space than structures and buildings; and social spaces for youth and children in which to create their own activities.

We also would support the reinstatement of some of the types of water features which were such a feature of the original design and are not otherwise much featured in the city centre.

Objective 4: Te Ngākau is a place that integrates with the city and the waterfront

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Strongly support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

The Trust recognises the lack of integration between the buildings within the Precinct, and the restrictions on access and flow for pedestrians. We support the objective to integrate the area with the city and waterfront, while ensuring that historical features such as the city to sea bridge are retained and enhanced. The value of the Precinct as an oasis of calm and refuge from the bustle of city life should be recognised in any future design, and its role as an integration point between land and sea strengthened.

Objective 5: Te Ngākau is safe, inclusive, comfortable and green

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Strongly support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

Evidence suggests that safe, inclusive space is important in combatting activities such as substance abuse and sexual harassment – with a focus on comfortable areas in which to relax, as distinct from ‘paid for space’ in a café or concert hall. There is a strong wish for increased green space rather than hard surfaces or infrastructure, with an emphasis on native plants and water features, as was envisaged in the original Precinct design.

Objective 6: Te Ngākau is a place that is resilient, sustainable, and enduring.

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Strongly support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

The implications of the Precinct’s location are much better known now than in the 1980’s and any future development plans need to acknowledge that sea level rise will continue for decades along with an ongoing sinking of the land itself.



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The Precinct itself is relatively sheltered but its susceptibility to ground water rise means that the integrity of foundations, basement flooding and storm water ponding must be taken into consideration. The current design has endured for over thirty years. Much of the problems currently being experienced related to deferred maintenance and a short-term approach to infrastructure design and construction. Any future development must consider a much longer projected life for the Precinct and its components.

Objective 7: Te Ngākau is easily and safely accessible and integrated with the wider transport network.

Do you support this objective (tick one):

Somewhat support

If you strongly support or oppose the objective (above), please explain why briefly below:

The Trust's recent seminar highlighted the need for the Precinct as a place of gathering and connection for everyone. The original design made provision for an access pathway under the Nikau palms over the bridge and down to the harbour edge, but this was removed due to cost factors. While cost is an important consideration in any design, retrofitting to correct design errors and omissions generally incurs greater expenditure.

Incorporation of universal design and co-design concepts and principles from the outset are important to ensure that a redeveloped Precinct is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. This includes efficient, accessible transport options (including mobility parking, active mode routes, multi-node routes and clear signage and wayfinding). Co design harnesses the knowledge and creativity of citizens and staff in identifying problems and generating and implementing solutions. It offers the opportunity to uncover the real barriers to and accelerants of progress.

The Trust encourages the Council towards early engagement with advocacy groups such as the Accessibility Advisory Group (AAG) to incorporate their knowledge of accessibility and advice on the needs of people with impairments.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions you'd like to share on the vision and objectives for Te Ngākau Civic Precinct? Please list them below.

The Trust's recent seminar captured the knowledge and experience of those with an understanding of the Precinct's history, its most recent development and the ways that a redeveloped precinct would best meet the needs of the city's residents and visitors, while being resilient and adaptable in the face of environmental and social changes. This wealth of information is available on the Trust's website:

<https://www.wellingtoncivictrust.org/te-ngakau-wellington-civic-centre-seminar-may-2021>.