



Submission of Civic Trust Auckland

The Victoria Quarter Views on the Action Plan and the Victoria Quarter Environment

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Introduction

Civic Trust Auckland is a non-profit public interest group, its aims including:

- Preservation of heritage, in all its aspects
- Encouragement of good planning, for the City and Region.

As such, the Trust has an interest in the development of the Victoria Quarter and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments. We have read the booklet "Victoria Quarter plan - Auckland CBD's dynamic western fringe".

The vision for the Quarter is stated as "the development of the Victoria Quarter as the dynamic western fringe of the CBD where a diverse choice of alternative, intensive inner city urban living and working opportunities are offered". Civic Trust Auckland supports this vision, and, as invited by and assured by Council in its request for views on the Victoria Quarter, the Trust would like to be kept informed of the review and the outcome.

1. Economic

1.1 Consideration needs to be given to premises for new businesses which cater both for people working from home who require space for an office with adequate facilities, and boutique offices with only two or three people. Shared facilities such as a common conference room and shared infrastructure should be in the mix. Cafes should be able to offer free internet and larger than usual tables for working spaces.

1.2 Purchase prices of properties and Council rates will need to reflect support for small business, a sector which gives a strong contribution to the city's economy yet does not receive the benefit of support in many areas.

2. Social and cultural

2.1 "Creating a sense of community" is stated as one of the main goals for the Victoria Quarter. We note that a sense of community is achieved not simply by providing places to live but with the support of good public open spaces and facilities. We are therefore pleased to see that the vision includes "a network of parks, squares and plazas". We see the inclusion of trees in these areas as a priority. Aside from Victoria Park, trees do not feature greatly in the Victoria Quarter, and provision of such would contribute greatly to making this area an attractive place to live.

2.2 We also note that creating a sense of community involves giving the people a voice. We suggest that more involvement of the current residents / workers in the neighbouring parts of the CBD as well as current and potential (if practicable) residents / workers of the Victoria Quarter itself in discussing future provisions for the Victoria Quarter would help to achieve this sense of community as well as a "buy-in". This could be achieved partly through working closely with groups such as the CBD Residents' Advisory Group and the relevant business associations, along with developers and appropriate local authorities.

2.3 People are being encouraged into the city to work and live. Issues for the members of these communities need to be addressed by Council as and when they arise, in order to attract more inner city residents, to retain these new converts to city living and to maintain and enhance the quality of urban life. To cater for the needs of families in particular, the Victoria Quarter needs to offer an environment where people can move in, out and around the area safely, and where access to the rest of the city is easy. Otherwise people in this Quarter may feel isolated, cut off from the rest of the CBD in terms of walkability and cycle access by virtue of the terrain, as well as roading focussed on motorised traffic.

3.4 Issues for residents in the CBD include noise, much of which is under Council control. Regulations regarding the night-time collection of rubbish, particularly glass, the hours of operation of cleaning machines including leaf blowers, the permitted hours of construction work under the District Plan and the timing of road works need to be considered.

2.5 Two comments on Victoria Park being further developed for recreation are that:

- Residents who live in close proximity to Victoria Park have expressed their wish to see the petanque playing area (featured on the inside cover of the “Victoria Quarter plan” booklet) reinstated in the park and to see it adequately maintained in the future.
- the skateboard area will need reinstatement. Skateboarders in the CBD constantly challenge the city street furniture (e.g. in Lower Khartoum Place) which suggests the need for more skateboarding opportunities, taking into consideration the desire of skateboarders to be “creative”, i.e. to use the streets as well as sites set aside for their use. Rather than creating a large fixed skateboard area, Council could consult with skateboard users regarding a number of small areas of such a design that elements can be altered to maintain ongoing interest. Informing such considerations should be the noise caused by skateboard use.

2.6 Victoria Park Market and the former Council depot are seen by Council as “two ideal spots for community facilities”. As the latter area was granted a resource consent in 2007 for the 2.9ha Rhubarb Lane development of 20 mixed-use residential and commercial buildings, including 1,000 plus apartments, this development would seem to go a long way to achieving some of the vision of the action plan and should be clearly stated to all stakeholders as a proposed element of the Quarter. It would seem to be essential that the development of Rhubarb Lane be closely monitored for appropriate development, especially as it comprises such a large part of the Quarter.

2.7 A sense of community can be achieved by members of communities participating in activities together, therefore the provision for such activities is important.

3. Built environment

3.1 Civic Trust Auckland has a particular interest in the Logan Campbell Kindergarten, a heritage building with a New Zealand Historic Places Trust Category 1 rating and scheduled as Category B with Auckland City Council. This building has been allowed to deteriorate and must be preserved as a priority, its future use being in line with the relevant heritage document determining the building’s significance. In October this year the Trust would like to join in celebrating the 100th anniversary of its opening as the first purpose built free kindergarten in New Zealand. This could be highlighted as an important part of the Victoria Quarter Action Plan.

3.2 The retention of the destructor building and other heritage buildings in Victoria Park Market we also see as a priority.

3.3 The New World supermarket would seem to be an aspect of the built environment in the Quarter that could have benefited from Council's proposed "specialist team to work with developers to secure the best environment and design for sites". If an improvement could be made to this building it would go a long way towards Council's stated aim of creating "a high quality urban environment".

3.4 In considering the apartment blocks that have been imposed over the last few decades on Hobson and Nelson Streets we note that:

- A large section of the Victoria Quarter has these unattractive and bleak buildings as an integral part of their view
- There is little desire by anyone who frequents this Quarter to endure more of this type of development
- If these existing buildings could be improved in any way before their eventual demise it would improve the visual amenity of the Quarter immensely, e.g. by renewing parts of the façade to add interest, changing balconies.
- A strategy should be worked out now, looking forward to 20 years and beyond, for upgrading such low quality buildings.

4. Open space

4.1 The Victoria Quarter "is also considered an unattractive and bleak place for pedestrians". This is true of much of Auckland City and we look forward to Council addressing the streetscape of the Quarter, in line with the successful streetscape upgrades in other parts of the CBD. We would expect continued consultation with the wider community, particularly current CBD residents, workers and business owners.

4.2 Any linking up of open public space should have cycle paths included, to link the parks and fit in with Council's Cycle Action Plan 2007 - 2012, which aims to improve communities to "incorporate good urban design when planning and implementing cycling and walking facilities" and "ensure that the needs of cyclists and pedestrians are considered as part of new or upgraded developments".

4.3 Cycleways and walkways should be properly landscaped, perhaps including water as a feature, and some areas should be for pedestrians only.

4.4 Consideration should be given to smoke-free areas within the Victoria Quarter, particularly within the public open spaces. This would be in line with the desire to make areas family friendly

and would also be aligned with increasing smoke-free policies in the region and further afield, such as are being developed for Auckland's regional parks.

5. Transport

5.1 To address the fact in the Victoria Quarter that “traffic dominates its streets and the northern motorway is a barrier to its connections with the inner city suburbs”, Council could consider the disused old Nelson Street motorway offramp (running into Nelson Street at the southern tip of the Victoria Quarter) as an opportunity to connect the Victoria Quarter with neighbouring suburbs (e.g. Grey Lynn / Newton) and to the North Western cycleway. This piece of roading offers a magnificent view of the harbour and would serve well as a pedestrian route and cycleway, with the addition of planting along its edges and other landscaping. Currently the southern tip of the Quarter is most unfriendly for pedestrians from a visual, noise and safety point of view and such a development would have the effect of diffusing the effect of the motorway and the approaches to it.

5.2 Access in and out of the Victoria Quarter to anywhere except the waterfront means negotiating a hill. The installation of trams to connect with neighbouring parts of the inner city would address the issue of the terrain and provide an attractive transport option. This would not only serve the interests of Aucklanders but also of tourists, to bring them both to the Victoria Quarter and beyond. A tram service departing from the Civic Theatre to go up Wellesley St West, Victoria St West and College Hill to Three Lamps would be a good start. Trams are more attractive, safer and more sustainable than other forms of public transport. A unique tram service would add to the character of the Quarter and be a reference to the heritage of the inner city.

5.3 An alternative (but a less desirable one) would be to increase bus services to and from the area, particularly serving the Hobson and Nelson Street high-density areas. These buses would preferably be diesel-electric and ideally create minimal noise, noise from buses currently being an issue in the CBD both during the day and the night.

5.4 A public transport service would need to be frequent. No resident should be more than 200-400 metres from a public transport stop.

5.5 Whichever mode of transport is introduced, it should allow for the carriage of bicycles, to assist residents / workers to get up out of the valleys to the ridges.

5.6 Barn-dance style pedestrian crossings could be considered for parts of Hobson and Nelson Street so that traffic bound for or exiting from the motorway does not inhibit passage for pedestrians. (Residents in the area report that motorists regularly drive through crossings in a dangerous manner when pedestrians are attempting to cross.)

5.7 The 3,000 parking spaces planned for under the buildings in the Rhubarb Lane development would seem to address the demand for parking in the Quarter. However, this huge concentration of carparks would seem to be an inhibitor to the use of public transport.

5.8 Any parking considerations should take into account the increased use of motor scooters, for which parking facilities are scarce and / or not clearly defined in the inner city.

5.9 Council's stated aim to work with Transit NZ on the harbour bridge and additional harbour crossings should include a focus on the cycleway and pedestrian pathway developments in order to better connect these facilities to the Victoria Quarter.

6. Infrastructure

6.1 Shopping opportunities within the Victoria Quarter for residents / workers such as stores with fresh fruit and vegetables within close proximity (lacking in other parts of the CBD) are important. Consideration could be given to a management plan to ensure that the aesthetics and mix of strip shopping and cafes meets the vision for the Quarter.

6.2 A library has been stated by Council as a possible amenity to be provided in the Quarter. A library which focuses on books rather than other items would be a welcome addition to the Quarter and would also serve the interests of other CBD residents, as too many books are stored in the basement of the central library and are therefore not immediately accessible and not on hand for browsing purposes.

6.3 Various disused parts of the Quarter such as the underneath of bridges could be considered for development as climbing walls, with constantly changing configurations, as provided for in other cities, e.g. Melbourne.

6.4 High-speed broadband needs to be available for business purposes.

6.5 To cater for families, some new apartments need to be family-sized, with sufficient separate rooms. Onsite facilities such as swimming pools would assist in catering for some of the recreational needs of families.

6.6 Street lighting for safety, informed by CPTED guidelines, is important part of the infrastructure.

Achieving the Vision

The Victoria Quarter has the potential to become an attractive and workable part of Auckland CBD in which it is desirable to work and live.

We emphasise that the people who live and work in the CBD and more particularly the long-term residents already within the Victoria Quarter have a stake in and experience of inner city living and should be offered ongoing consultation on proposed developments, and, further, that expertise in urban design should inform the development, including the ideas presented to Council from recent overseas experts such as: Daniel Moylan, Jan McCredie, Jonathan Smale, Egle Garrick and Larry Beasley, as well as Auckland City's own urban design champion, Ludo Campbell-Reid.

Civic Trust Auckland looks forward to positive progress in the development of the Victoria Quarter.

Date: 9 April 2010

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Audrey van der Pijl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A' and 'P'.

Board Member, Civic Trust Auckland