



Feedback of Civic Trust Auckland

Proposed concept designs for the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall and Freyberg Square upgrade

1. Civic Trust Auckland (CTA) supports some changes in Freyberg Square but not to the extent proposed.
2. We endorse the Waitemata Local Board's comments regarding the community's desire for a thriving community hub.
3. We do not support change for the sake of change, however, and suggest there is little evidence of the community's involvement in the drive for the extent of change as proposed by Council.
4. We are pleased to see that the upgrade of the hall is taking place at the same time as the square (as per our earlier submissions to Council on the Auckland Council Draft Annual Plan 2014/2015 on 24 February 2014, the Waitemata Local Board Plan on 31 March 2014 and the Draft Long-Term Plan 2015 - 2025 on 16 March 2015).
5. Although we generally support getting people out of cars, there is scope for vehicle access through Freyberg Square along the front of the hall (as at present) and this could be at certain times of the day only, and a retractable barrier - as on Queens Wharf - could be employed. The road could be completely closed off in the weekend or evening or when there is an activity in the square that uses the hall as well.
6. We propose converting the current vehicle access into a shared space. This concept has been rolled out in various parts of the CBD and Council promotes it as enhancing pedestrian safety and traffic calming. There is no apparent reason it could not work in this location, in conjunction with keeping the traffic out entirely at certain times of the day or when the square is used for events. It would provide an extension of the shared space in O'Connell Street and that proposed to extend up Courthouse Lane.
7. We object to the removal of any of the trees in or adjacent to Freyberg Square. We consider that the form and scale of the Phoenix palms is appropriate planting for the location. Metropolis is a building of considerable scale, the trunks of the palms are narrow and minimally intrusive visually, and the fronds fan out and serve to screen the carpark levels of the building.
8. People who frequent the square appreciate the trees that remain in the wake of recent tree removals by Auckland Council, examples in the vicinity being from Queen Street, Albert Park and Khartoum Place (the trees that were under threat in Vulcan Lane having been saved by the public).
9. People value the sunlit area of the square, the sun being one of its main attractions. (We note that the sun does not fall directly in front of the hall as in the

concept drawings, this area always being in the shadow of the hall.) The current trees in the middle and bordering the square provide shade in summer and let the sun through in the winter. Native trees have their place - but do not suit every space. The historical basis advanced for planting species trees that once graced the slopes of the area is tenuous justification. It is CTA's view that "celebrat[ing] and protect[ing] the natural environment" does not go hand and hand with cutting down mature trees.

10. Architecturally, the space is a square and works well being contained as such. It is an intimate space, an area of calmness. The sun, the one-way streets, the trees and the water feature all contribute to this. The people who regularly spend time here like much of the square the way it is. With such a lot of change occurring throughout the city, some people value the familiar.

11. Freyberg Square *currently* "provide[s] opportunity for individuals and groups to gather and inhabit" and is already "a place of repose - in the sun or sheltered in the dappled shade" ..."

12. Whilst it has been suggested that the sequencing of the traffic lights at the intersection of High Street and Victoria Street east could be changed to allow the traffic to flow out onto Victoria Street to a greater extent, with the Victoria Street carpark also pouring cars out onto High Street into the intersection, Freyberg Square provides a convenient exit for traffic faced with slow-moving rubbish trucks in High Street.

13. We note that there are already steps and an escalator which lead up to Metropolis, so additional access is not necessary. (We do not detect any handrails provided on the steps in the design.) We read the steps as concrete steps, like any other steps, not symbolic of a lava flow. The volcanic history of the area is a story that can be told within the hall.

14. We know that the current water feature is appreciated by many people, not least because it screens the traffic noise. The proposed water feature is unlikely to provide this benefit.

15. Freyberg Square needs to have the ground surface redone and some of the furniture repaired or replaced - but in our view, not much more than that. If there is to be new furniture we suggest that people prefer to sit on wood, rather than concrete or steel, which are both not only hard to sit on but cold, unless warmed by the sun.

16. As regards "improving the sight lines and accessibility between Freyberg Square, O'Connell Street, High Street and Courthouse Lane" (a) we suggest that a sightline to the sea from the square would add great value to the space and (b) we point out that the integration with the adjacent Chancery shopping precinct is not well articulated. The retail spaces in Chancery are failing. A good connection with Freyberg Square would assist in their recovery, obviously with improved visual linkages using paving and also through the efforts of Council to secure an appealing tenant at the front tenancy of Chancery.

17. If there is a desire and a need for a big empty space for events, we suggest that that is what Aotea Square is for.

18. We like the concept of flexible community spaces in the proposal for the hall. We would like to see the hall provide information to the community about events, facilities, services and activities.

19. We endorse the departure of Pumpkin Patch from the ground floor part of the hall. We hope that this store will be able to relocate to one of the Metropolis spaces. The space that this store occupied can then be turned back to the community.

20. CTA would like to see more emphasis given to the pioneer women (as the name currently on the building reflects) and less to Ellen Melville. (She has a park named after her.) The stories of those pioneer women should be told within the new hall space.

21. We would like to see consideration given to use of the roof of the hall, including the possibility of a roof garden.

22. We acknowledge the difficulty for the retail outlets at the base of the Metropolis building and suggest that this would be helped by establishing a good retailer in one of the spaces. We note that Working Style on the corner worked well. We suggest that "visibility" for these retailers could be assisted by the hall carrying information about them.

23. The recent upgrading of O'Connell Street caused difficulties for retailers and we believe it is essential that their views be acknowledged and provided for.

24. CTA endorses all the design objectives of this project but suggest that either further work to address the concerns and ideas that we and others have provided would produce a better outcome for the square, or less work should be done: confined to maintenance and repair of what is currently in place, without the need for a redesign and without the need for the amount of expenditure proposed. The current design of the square enables the space to function well.

25. Apart from the typography that gives rise to the proposed design, it is not distinctive and it does not further develop the historic nature of the square. (We have supplied a photo which shows the hall and the square in earlier times.)

26. As we are of the view that not much more than the paving in the square needs to be addressed, we consider that construction disruption need not be extensive.

Date of feedback: 27 September 2015

Signature:



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Audrey van Ryn'.

Audrey van Ryn
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