



NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF
ARCHITECTS
INCORPORATED

NZIA AUCKLAND URBAN ISSUES GROUP

PO Box 91517
Auckland 1142

26 June 2009

Select Committee on Auckland Governance
email: AGL@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Sir/Madam,

The New Zealand Institute of Architects Incorporated is the professional organisation representing Architects in New Zealand. It is a professional body supporting the needs of its members through a range of services. It also has another role. It is committed to promoting architecture that enhances the living environment of all New Zealanders. The Urban Issues Group is a subcommittee of Auckland Branch of the Institute, which comments on matters related to the urban environment in Auckland.

The Importance of Quality Urban Design

The Royal Commission report makes comment that to achieve more integrated planning solutions, Auckland must have a connected and systemic approach to thinking about urban design for the city. That requires improved coordination and cooperation between central and local government and the private sector, and it requires good design that considers how to get the best social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits from future development.

The UIG stresses the importance of quality urban design. If Auckland is to prosper, and become one of the world's most desirable places to live and work, Auckland's governance structure must encourage and make possible quality urban design.

Over the last decade there has been an increasing understanding and appreciation of urban design and its significance in shaping Auckland's future. It is the discipline of urban design that considers social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects of our urban environment in order to make meaningful connections between people and places. It looks to facilitate the creation of a vision for an area and then deploy the necessary skills and resources to realise that vision.

Limited Urban Design Expertise

The importance of a quality urban environment to the success of cities has been recognised internationally. This has resulted in global competition for skilled urban designers and capacity in this area remains a scarce resource, both within Councils and in commercial practice. While there are many good urban designers in Auckland, the new governance structure must ensure they are well-deployed and not isolated in silos within the Auckland Council.

City Centre

The UIG supports the main thrust of the governance reform to have a single identity for Auckland, and we consider a strong emphasis on the city centre is vital to achieving this. Successful and memorable cities have a highly legible and identifiable heart. The look and feel of the city centre will be the image of Auckland that tourists and visitors retain in their minds, and it will be important in giving a sense of identity to Auckland's citizens, even for those who rarely visit it.

While Auckland is often viewed as a very de-centralised city with numerous outlying nodes, that is a product of a transport system with a heavy car emphasis over the last 50 years and the city's fragmented governance arrangements. This trend is likely to change over the next 50 years with more unified governance and increasing emphasis on public transport. The UIG believes the city centre requires dedicated attention of a local governance body to coordinate development of the CBD and the waterfront. While the Royal Commission's recommendation may not be the only solution to this need, the idea that the city centre is simply a part of a neighbouring residential ward is not a suitable governance arrangement. Well resourced and committed governance of the city centre is important to the overall success of the one city plan and should be considered as one of regional and national importance.

Urban Design within Auckland's Governance Structure

For Auckland to achieve better engagement with communities and connection with people urban design issues must together be considered regionally and locally. The Royal Commission proposes a region wide spatial plan that would provide the overarching framework for the promotion of good urban growth and development for Auckland. At local level urban design development addressing aspects such as local roads, civic facilities and public open spaces would work within this framework with particular focus on local character, identity, diversity and creating a sense of place.

The required number of community boards and their assigned roles and responsibilities should be determined by the level of performance required to support the best urban design outcomes possible. To be effective, the UIG believes each board must:

- Have the permanent membership of Councillors to facilitate quality communication from community board through to Auckland Council
- Represent a physical area or district that can support staff and financial resources to administer performance in delivering high quality urban design outcomes
- Have the ability to represent and influence the local community needs such as land use, parks, local roads, public transport and infrastructure.

The UIG considers that achieving quality urban design outcomes at local level board level would be inefficient and unsustainable with 20-30 community boards as proposed by Central Government. The Royal Commission proposed model of six Local Councils would suggest a stronger and more effective community engagement mechanism to deliver the essential urban design outcomes for Auckland.

Vision Groups within Auckland's Governance Structure

The UIG believes that the design and maintenance of a long term Vision for Auckland is at the heart of the exercise to improve the Governance of the city. We believe that any organisational structure will only be successful if it promotes the idea that the city be designed in all its multi-faceted aspects - an organic and ongoing process, constantly changing, and will need to be clearly articulated, updated and maintained.

The UIG proposes that a Vision Group be established, composed of "experts in their field". They would have a wide degree of empowerment to establish direction and intention. They would not be responsible for implementation, which would be achieved by officers of the Council.

The significance of such a group within the structure is the focus that it would bring upon the importance of design and vision, and the affirmation that Auckland believes in clear statements about the future and the directions it intends to follow. The group would be charged with clarifying and elucidating the design of the city, in ways that can be understood by all members of the public. This is extremely important as a counter to the current situation, whereby such design that does exist is contained in complex word-pictures buried deep within documents such as local authority policy frameworks and scheme plans. The group would assist the Mayor, the Council, local bodies (be they Community Boards or Local Councils) and the public to appreciate, contribute to, and work within, the overall vision for the city.

The NZIA Urban Issues Group and Auckland Branch would like to thank you for this opportunity and wish to appear before the Select Committee to speak to this submission.

Yours sincerely

**New Zealand Institute of Architects
Auckland Urban Issues Group**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Joe', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Shannon Joe
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