

2 Palmerston North City Council - Urban Amenity Trial Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Description of the Palmerston North community	2-2
Background to the trial	2-2
Workshop results	2-4
Reflections on the urban amenity trial approach and proposed MfE urban amenity framework	2-8
Key lessons learnt	2-10
Resources required	2-10
Usefulness of adopting a similar approach at the national level	2-10
Appendix 1 - Liveability discussion document	2-12
Appendix 2 - Liveability principles	2-15
Appendix 3 - Sample letter to iwi/community representatives	2-16
Appendix 4 - Urban amenity keywords used as workshop prompts	2-18
Appendix 5 – Completed templates from trialling report	2-19

DESCRIPTION OF THE PALMERSTON NORTH COMMUNITY

The focus of this trial was at the city level. Palmerston North is predominantly an urban centre with a population in excess of 73,000. In basic terms the community exhibits the following characteristics:¹

Age

- a median age of 29 years compared to the national median of 32;
- more people aged 15-29 (31%) than New Zealand generally (22%);
- fewer people under the age of 14 (34%) and over the age of 40 (34%) than the national average (which is 23% and 39% respectively).

Ethnicity

- a higher proportion of people who identify themselves as European (76%) than the national average (71%);
- a marginally lower proportion of Maori residents (13%) than New Zealand generally (14%) along with the proportion of those who describe themselves as Pacific Islanders being half (2%) the national average (4%);
- a slightly higher Asian population (5%) than the national average (4%);
- an increasing degree of ethnic diversity which is evidenced by a decline in the proportion of those who categorise themselves as European (down 7%) and a corresponding increase in the proportion of those who categorised themselves as Maori (up 3%) and Asian (up 1%) since 1991.

Gender

- a greater proportion of women (52%) to men (48%) than the national average (which is 51% and 49% respectively);
- an age distribution which sees slightly more men represented in the 20-29 year age category with women predominating in the 40+ years age categories.

BACKGROUND TO THE TRIAL

In June 2000 the Council adopted a report entitled 'Palmerston North Urban Design Strategy - A Way Forward'. This report identified a four-stage approach to advance the preparation of an urban design strategy to enhance the liveability² within Palmerston North. The intended focus of each of these stages is as follows:

- *Strategic Context* – identification of a series of generic guiding principles that will promote the development of the public environment in a sustainable manner and provide a context for future urban design initiatives;

¹ Based on the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings

² 'Liveability' refers to the extent that:

- places, spaces and buildings are created or improved in order that they work well, wear well and look well;
- the scale and form of places is responsive to people's needs and aspirations;
- diversity and local distinctiveness is valued and protected;
- local community and cultural identity is strengthened;
- provision is made for cultural, leisure and recreational opportunities that are readily available to all.

- *Urban Form Analysis* – analysis of the urban form of the city in order to gain an understanding and appreciation of its changing character and the elements that have influenced its shape and to use this information, in turn, to develop a design vision for the city;
- *Design Vision* - the development of a vision for the city that results in the creative integration of the identified urban design principles with the key structural elements that contribute to the character of the city; and,
- *Urban Design Initiatives* – identification of area specific initiatives/projects that reinforce and build on the identified urban design principles.

In order to facilitate the first of these stages - Strategic Context - the Council convened a series of four workshops in late August/early September 2000 to address two key matters:

- to confirm a commonly shared design objective for Palmerston North (ie. to make Palmerston North a more liveable city); and
- to identify and confirm a series of commonly agreed principles/qualities that contribute to making Palmerston North a 'liveable' place.

In order to ensure that the format and content of these workshops was professionally robust an urban designer was engaged to assist in scoping and facilitating these workshops.

As a precursor to the workshops a brief discussion document relating to the concept of liveability was pre-circulated to a targeted range of workshop participants (eg. elected representatives, design professionals, major property owners/developers). The intent of the discussion document was to act as an aide memoire to facilitate increased understanding amongst participants of the issues surrounding the concept of liveability as well as to provide a background context to the workshops (*refer Appendix 1 on page 2-11*). In addition the document outlined a series of suggested principles/qualities (eg. sense of place, legibility, amenity, diversity/choice, robustness/fit, accessibility, efficiency)³ that have been typically identified as being essential pre-requisites to liveability within cities.⁴

The participants invited to attend the workshops represented a range of relevant interests (ie. elected representatives, design professionals, major property owners/developers, and iwi and community representatives) but were not necessarily representative of the community profile of the city (ie. in terms of age, gender and ethnicity). Consequently youth, elderly, women, Pacific Islanders and Asians were under-represented in the workshops. However, this was compensated, in part, by the fact that those who took part in the workshops represented an interested and 'informed' cross section of the local community. Ideally, if time had permitted, it

³ Refer to Appendix 2 for a brief description of these principles.

⁴ These principles/qualities were derived from such sources as D. Appleyard & A. Jacobs (1987), *Towards an Urban Design Manifesto*; H. Frey (1999), *Designing the City: Towards a More Sustainable Urban Form*; U.K. Department of the Environment, Transport & the Regions (1998), *Sustainable Local Communities for the 21st Century: Why & How to Prepare an Effective Local Agenda 21 Strategy*; and City of Sydney Council (1999), *Living Beyond 2000 - City Spaces*.

would have been advantageous to convene additional workshops to elicit the views of these under-represented groups.

The workshops were co-facilitated by an urban designer and Council staff. They were conducted in an informal fashion to encourage increased participant interaction and food and beverage was provided. Following an introduction to the workshop and a visual presentation that focussed on two factors:

- (i) the qualities that contribute to making a city liveable, and
- (ii) the basic building blocks or principles that underpin liveability.

The participants in the elected representative, design professional and developer workshops were invited to share their views on the following questions:

- To what extent does Palmerston North embody those qualities that "make a city a 'good' place to live"?
- Is improved liveability an objective that should be actively promoted in Palmerston North? Is it a concept that is being actively promoted in the city at the moment?
- Do you support the principles of liveability that have been identified and, if not, what would you suggest as a suitable alternative/s.

To aid discussion in the iwi and community representatives' workshop participants were posed differently worded but similarly targeted questions as follows:⁵

- What aspects of the physical environment contribute to making Palmerston North a good place to live?
- What aspects of the physical environment do not contribute to making Palmerston North a good place to live?
- What are the physical qualities that you would like to see promoted/improved in the city in future?

WORKSHOP RESULTS

In general terms the workshop participants considered that Palmerston North was a 'good' place in which to live⁶ although the point was raised within one of the workshops that this is largely a matter of individual perception.

There was also general support expressed in the workshops for the 'principles' or qualities that underpin the concept of liveability (ie. sense of place; legibility; amenity; diversity/choice; robustness/fit/responsiveness; accessibility; efficiency).⁷ Workshop participants observed that these qualities appear to provide a useful organising framework for considering this concept and their perception was that the

⁵ Refer to Appendix 3 for a sample of the letter circulated to this stakeholder group.

⁶ This is reflected, for example, in the observation made by one of the workshop groups that Palmerston North is "a good place to bring up a family"

⁷ Refer to Appendix 2 for a more detailed description of each of these qualities

physical attributes that contribute to making Palmerston North a liveable city comfortably align with the key liveability qualities/principles identified.

Included amongst the attributes that participants identified as important contributors to liveability in Palmerston North are the following:⁸

- *Sense of Place*
 - the Tararua windfarm;
 - the Tararua ranges;
 - the 'iconic' value of the Square.

- *Legibility*
 - highly visible church spires (eg. All Saints, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit);
 - its 'logical' layout - it is easy to find your way around;
 - a strong sense of visual and physical connection throughout the city (eg. to the Tararua ranges, between places of residence and places of work and between the urban area and its rural hinterland).

- *Amenity*
 - clean air;
 - 'generous' footpaths;
 - wide streets;
 - expansive tree coverage;
 - widespread underground services (eg. phone, electricity, sewer);
 - the 'untapped' potential of the Manawatu River;
 - an extensive public walkway system;
 - the emerging development of 'green corridors' in the city;
 - generally safe for children (ie. for biking, skateboarding, rollerblading) and elderly.

- *Diversity/Choice*
 - a wide array of bars/restaurants/cafes and cultural and sporting facilities (eg. Showgrounds, Regent Theatre, George St., City Library, Adidas Rugby Institute) that reinforce the feeling that Palmerston North is a 'happening place' and contribute to creating a sense of vitality and vibrancy in the city;
 - a variety of living environments (eg. rural/urban, infill/large lot) and a wide range of educational facilities (eg. Massey/UCOL/ secondary schools) and social and cultural opportunities available.

⁸ Although there is some variance in the number of attributes that correspond to each of the specific qualities identified this in no way should be interpreted as being a reflection of their perceived importance. When asked, workshop participants indicated that they felt that each of these qualities was relevant to Palmerston North.

- *Robustness*
 - a number of large public spaces that are able to accommodate a wide variety of community events;
- *Accessibility*
 - the right 'scale' - the city is compact and everything is accessible;
 - it is easy to get around;
 - commercial activities and development that are spatially contained;
 - flat terrain that allows for ease of movement by young and old;
 - good access to local parks and provision of neighbourhood parks for kids in residential areas;
 - accessible by air, road and rail;
 - topography that provides visual access to the Tararua ranges (ie. the flatness of the city enhances the vista of the ranges when viewed down many city streets).

The concept of improved liveability within the city was one that was widely supported by workshop participants, although a few participants raised concerns regarding the extent to which it is currently being promoted in the city. Specific concerns identified included:

- that we need to clearly identify and build on the city's strengths/good points;
- that there is a need for increased co-ordination of projects/initiatives (eg. reserves/walkway development);
- that the tangible aspects of liveability appear to be on the city's agenda (eg. infrastructure), but the profile of less tangible aspects need to be raised (eg. image/sense of place).

In addition to these general concerns a variety of instructive comments relating to ways of reinforcing the identified liveability qualities emerged during the course of workshop discussions. In particular, a large number of participants considered that these qualities could be further enhanced in the city if the following issues were attended to:

- *Sense of place*
 - 'lifting' the image of the city;
 - identification and development of the city's distinct/unique characteristics;
 - more obvious expression of the presence of tangata whenua in/connection with the city (eg. marae, arrival points);
 - increased emphasis on marketing and promoting the city's strengths along with the development of a stronger sense of civic pride;
 - development of a stronger expression of our 'sense of community' and our unique 'sense of culture';
 - identification and promotion of the city's history;
 - enhancing/reinforcing existing points of difference (eg. Tararua windfarm, Manawatu River, Square);
 - maintenance of the visual character of the rural areas within the city.

- *Legibility*
 - perception that there is a 'lack of connectedness' between the city's built up areas and the natural environment;
 - perception that the city is devoid of 'landmarks' and that there isn't any obvious 'sense of history';
 - improvement of the visual quality of entranceways.

- *Amenity*
 - provision of parks needs to continue but the quality, location and linkages between these spaces requires carefully assessment;
 - increased promotion/utilisation of the Manawatu River;
 - suburbs should be provided with their own 'amenities' (ie. the creation of 'mini-cities' within the suburbs);
 - increased provision of shelter along street edges in the city centre;
 - the number of bus shelters in the city need to be increased;
 - ecological/environmental factors need to be incorporated into any consideration of liveability (eg. waste management, air quality, noise);
 - negative perceptions of safety impact on the use and appreciation of such areas as the Square (eg. the Square needs to be perceived as providing a 'safe family atmosphere' in order to encourage increased usage).

- *Diversity/choice*
 - encourage the development of places to 'stop and talk' - reinforcement of the sense of the 'village' within the city (eg. suburban centres);
 - provision of a wider variety of recreational facilities for young children and youth (eg. 'wild spaces' for creative/free play);
 - increased commercial activity (and a corresponding increase in population) needs to be encouraged/promoted;
 - public space identification and design needs to provide for a wide range of people including families;
 - a clear 'vision' to increase the level of vibrancy and vitality in the city needs to be developed - this should evolve out of a stronger partnership being forged between the Council and the business/development community;
 - the needs of youth/secondary students/tertiary students need to be more specifically catered for (eg. places to hang out that are safe/fun/exciting; cheap/free entertainment venues with 'relevant' live music; establishment of 'no alcohol' underage club/s);
 - increase the range of water recreation opportunities available (eg. lake);
 - more equitable distribution of recreational facilities (eg. children's play areas, walkways) throughout the city;
 - encouragement of a wider range of housing options in the city and increased opportunities for inner city living.

- *Robustness*
 - identification and reinforcement of the city's 'recreational anchors';
 - creation of spaces that will facilitate/accommodate events - both formal and informal (eg. markets, festivals, bands, performers);
 - increased opportunities for inner city living.

- *Accessibility*
 - increased linkages/connections between the central city and Massey University (ie. recreational/cycle/pedestrian);
 - simplify vehicle access routes through the city;
 - improvement in the quality of pedestrian routes in order to increase the level and ease of 'walkability' in the city.
- *Efficiency*⁹
 - effective allocation of resources in order to reduce opportunity costs.

REFLECTIONS ON THE URBAN AMENITY TRIAL APPROACH AND PROPOSED MfE URBAN AMENITY FRAMEWORK

One of the primary objectives of this trial was to identify a range of qualities and associated attributes that provide a meaningful definition of urban amenity at the local level. A secondary but allied objective of the trial was to test the relevance and applicability of the key urban amenity qualities outlined in the Urban Amenity Conceptual Framework with a range of community representatives.

Reflective comments concerning what worked and didn't work in relation to this trial are as follows:

Urban Amenity Trial Approach

- reliance on a series of small workshops (7-10 persons) provided a systematic and structured means to identify the physical qualities and attributes that contribute to making the city a good place to live. In addition, limiting workshop numbers gave all the participants increased opportunities to actively contribute to the discussions;
- pre-circulation of background material¹⁰ relating to liveability helped to increase participants understanding of the concept. However, distillation of the essence of the concept and its expression in both simple and concise terms presented an interesting challenge;
- reliance on slides and associated prompt sheet/keywords¹¹ as well as the pre-circulated written material to convey what it is that makes a city liveable and how these qualities apply to Palmerston North helped to focus workshop discussion and to stimulate both relevant and meaningful responses to the questions posed in the pre-circulated material;
- getting participants to focus on the physical aspects of the city that they liked, didn't like or would like to see improved instead of the liveability qualities themselves provided a relatively simple and 'non-academic' means of engaging the participants and eliciting meaningful information relating to what participants saw as important contributors/detractors to liveability in the city;

⁹ This equates to the quality entitled 'Quality of Services' identified in the proposed MfE urban amenity framework as contained in Technical Report 64.

¹⁰ Refer Appendices 1 & 3.

¹¹ Refer Appendix 4.

- some of the workshops did not attract the number of participants that had been anticipated due to the voluntary nature of attendance. To encourage greater attendance in future the provision of an inducement (eg. movie passes, petrol vouchers) as well as food and beverage will be explored;
- use of an urban design professional provided a means whereby the process developed and the material produced was accurate and/or robust and technical questions/issues raised by workshop participants could be professionally and quickly attended to.

Proposed MfE Urban Amenity Framework

- the key qualities identified in the conceptual framework developed as part of the Urban Amenity Project appear to provide a useful and valid means of organising individual perceptions of what amenity means within a localised context. Although the range of key qualities are quite generic in nature their breadth ensures that they can comfortably encapsulate the broad range of attributes that a community might identify as important contributors to the liveability of their neighbourhood, district or city;
- one of the fundamental challenges to the effective utilisation of the framework is to ensure that there is a clear understanding amongst those who are involved in the process of defining urban amenity as to the particular meaning ascribed to each of the key amenity qualities. This matter was addressed during the course of this trial through the pre-circulation of targeted discussion material, use of visual material (slides) that depicted these qualities and the identification of allied verbal prompts/keywords;
- the robustness of the framework could be enhanced through some additional fine-tuning. In particular the distinction between the qualities 'Comfortable and Safe' and 'Healthy Environment' appears to be a moot one and has the potential to create confusion in relation to the definition of their respective attributes. A more practical alternative might be to collapse these qualities into a single entity entitled 'Comfortable, Healthy and Safe';
- it is questionable whether the qualities of 'Included' and 'Well-being' should be identified in the framework as specific physical qualities of the urban environment. As 'Inclusiveness' is principally concerned with how people participate in defining urban amenity it is therefore oriented more towards the process that is used to define amenity rather than being a unique physical quality in its own right. Similarly, 'well-being' certainly plays an important role in influencing individual responses to defining urban amenity at the local level. However, the reality is that individual perceptions of well-being are likely to be a pivotal consideration in the identification of the attributes associated with the other tangible urban amenity qualities and therefore should not be considered in isolation of this wider physical context;
- the templates developed to facilitate the process of community engagement and defining urban amenity provided a useful checklist of matters to consider as well as a systematic approach to undertaking these tasks.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

Some of the key lessons learnt from this trial are as follows:

- pre-circulation of background information concerning liveability as it helps to facilitate informed discussion amongst participants;
- use of visual imagery (slides/OHP's) to explain/contextualise the key urban amenity qualities aides community understanding and encourages discussion;
- working with an urban design professional can add value to the process through providing professional and dispassionate guidance/advice on the key qualities, identifying appropriate approaches to encourage meaningful discussion and developing relevant/targeted presentation material;
- a structured workshop format encourages consistency in approach and helps to ensure that discussion is focussed and that participants are given an opportunity to actively contribute;
- it is essential, at the outset, to carefully identify and promote the relationship of the key qualities to the definition of urban amenity locally in order to ensure that their relevance and meaning is clearly understood and appreciated by participants engaged in the process of identifying associated amenity attributes. Equally, early clarification of this relationship has the potential to assist in overcoming participant perceptions or preconceptions that this relationship is nothing more than an 'academic' construct;
- the key urban amenity qualities are not solely applicable to urban environments - they have equal validity in assisting communities to define amenity in peri-urban and rural environments.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

This trial essentially involved 2 major resource inputs:

- an internal staff member; and
- an external urban design specialist.

The overall 'person hours' involved in undertaking the trial (inclusive of background research, identification of workshop content and format, preparation and distribution of material and workshop facilitation) was in the order of 155-160 hours. Of this approximately 30-35 hours was attributable to the urban design advice/input provided while the balance relates to the conceptual, research, administrative and facilitation functions undertaken by the internal staff member.

USEFULNESS OF ADOPTING A SIMILAR APPROACH AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The key urban amenity qualities offer the potential to provide a meaningful context for defining urban amenity irrespective of scale (ie. neighbourhood, city, nation).

Although the attributes that contribute towards denoting these qualities may vary according to their situational and locational circumstances, the introduction and application of the Urban Amenity Conceptual Framework at the local level may identify a common set of core attributes allied with the key urban amenity qualities that could be usefully monitored and reported on at a national level.

Provided that there is some consistency in the approach applied to attribute identification and monitoring it may be possible for the information that is derived at the local level to be aggregated to provide an indication of the status of urban amenity nationally.

IS PALMERSTON NORTH A 'LIVEABLE CITY'? - A DISCUSSION PAPER

Introduction

One of the clear observations that can be made regarding the ongoing evolution of cities such as Palmerston North is that people are increasingly becoming more discerning regarding the quality of life these urban environments provide. The extent to which a city meets the social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations of its residents strongly influences how they, in turn, perceive the quality of the urban environment in which they reside.

Bearing this in mind the purpose of this discussion paper is to elicit your views on the following areas:

- whether you consider Palmerston North to be a 'liveable' city - one that provides for the social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations of its residents; and
- whether the concept of liveability is one that should be positively supported and actively pursued by the Council.

Background

Cities are essentially places in which people 'live, work and play' and where the intersection of society, the environment and the economy is most obvious. Cities also provide the physical framework that embodies and binds communities.

Qualities that can positively contribute to making a city a 'good' place in which to live include:¹²

- that it provides for all the physical needs of its citizens: a place to live, work and be educated and easy access to services and facilities.
- that it offers safety and security, a visually and functionally organised environment free of pollution, noise, accidents and crime.
- that it offers a conducive social environment. It is a place where people have their roots and children have their friends; it enables and encourages people to actively participate in their community.
- that it has an appropriate image and a good reputation as a place to live.
- that it offers communities a chance to influence the shape of the city and their neighbourhoods according to their needs and aspirations.

¹² Based on Hildebrand Frey (1999), *Designing the City: Towards a More Sustainable Urban Form*, pg.17

- that it is well designed, aesthetically pleasing and physically recognisable.

Questions to Consider

- *to what extent do you consider that Palmerston North embodies those qualities that "make a city a 'good' place to live"?*
- *Are there any of these qualities that you consider are either non-existent or need to be strengthened in the city?*

Liveability - What is it and Why it is important?

Liveability can essentially be defined as "the degree to which an urban area provides a safe, inclusive and environmentally benign basis for the social and economic life of all its citizens".¹³ The important role that livability assumes within cities is highlighted in a recent report prepared by the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment where it notes that:

"The livability of urban environments is dependent on unique combinations of amenity values (eg. open space, design features, urban vegetation); historic and cultural heritage; location; and intangible attributes such as character, landscape and 'sense of place'. Livability contributes to both 'sense of place' and 'sense of community' and allows for more successful community ownership and enjoyment of urban areas. The design of cities and towns is a crucial factor that influences the way people interact with their environment and an appropriate urban form is a critical factor for urban sustainability".¹⁴

Important elements encapsulated within the concept of livability include, for example:¹⁵

- creating or improving places, spaces and buildings that work well, wear well and look well;
- encouraging the scale and form of places to be responsive to peoples' needs and aspirations;
- valuing and protecting diversity and local distinctiveness and strengthening local community and cultural identity;
- providing opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation that are readily available to all.

A range of principles that have been typically identified as necessary pre-requisites to liveability include:¹⁶

¹³ Environment Australia (1998), Environmental Indicators for National State of the Environment Reporting - Human Settlements, pg.11.

¹⁴ Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (1998), The Cities and their People: New Zealand's Urban Environment, pg.37.

¹⁵ Derived from the consultation paper prepared by the UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions entitled "Sustainable Local Communities for the 21st Century: Why and How to Prepare an Effective Local Agenda 21 Strategy", 1998

¹⁶ Based on the principles identified in the City of Sydney Council discussion document entitled "Living City Beyond 2000 - City Spaces", 1999, pg.4

- **Sense of Place**
The 'memorable' or distinctive characteristics that differentiate one place from another
- **Legibility**
The existence of entrances, exits and throughways that are easily identified and understood.
- **Amenity**
The creation of a physical environment that is relatively free from nuisance, overcrowding, noise, danger and pollution and allows people to live and work in reasonable comfort.
- **Diversity and Choice**
The availability of public and private places that cater for all sections of the population and that provide for a diverse range of activities and experiences.
- **Robustness/Fit/Responsiveness**
The degree to which the elements (eg. building form, public space) that make up a city are versatile enough to accommodate and support the range of activities that people might want to engage in and their changing social/cultural needs and expectations.
- **Accessibility**
The ease with which it is possible to reach other places, people, activities, resources and services in a relatively direct and comfortable manner.
- **Efficiency**
The extent to which opportunity costs and travel time is reduced and use of existing roadways and services (eg. sewer, stormwater, water) is maximised.

Questions to Consider

- *Do you consider that improved liveability is an objective that should be actively promoted in Palmerston North? Is it a concept that is being strongly promoted in the city at the moment?*
- *Do you support the series of liveability principles identified above and, if not, what would you suggest as a suitable alternative/s?*

APPENDIX 2 - LIVEABILITY PRINCIPLES

- **Sense of Place**
The 'memorable' or distinctive characteristics that differentiate one place from another
- **Legibility**
The existence of entrances, exits and throughways that are easily identified and understood.
- **Amenity**
The creation of a physical environment that is relatively free from nuisance, overcrowding, noise, danger and pollution and allows people to live and work in reasonable comfort.
- **Diversity and Choice**
The availability of public and private places that cater for all sections of the population and that provide for a diverse range of activities and experiences.
- **Robustness/Fit/Responsiveness**
The degree to which the elements (eg. building form, public space) that make up a city are versatile enough to accommodate and support the range of activities that people might want to engage in and their changing social/cultural needs and expectations.
- **Accessibility**
The ease with which it is possible to reach other places, people, activities, resources and services in a relatively direct and comfortable manner.
- **Efficiency**
The extent to which opportunity costs and travel time is reduced and use of existing roadways and services (eg. sewer, stormwater, water) is maximised.

APPENDIX 3 - SAMPLE LETTER TO IWI/COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Title
Company
Address
CITY

Dear "salutation"

PALMERSTON NORTH URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY - INVITATION TO A WORKSHOP

The way in which the public spaces within our cities are managed is of vital importance as they strongly influence how people respond to or experience a city. With respect to Palmerston North, a couple of observations that can be made regarding such spaces is that their past management appears to be somewhat uncoordinated and a number do not appear to be achieving their full potential.

In an endeavour to address this situation the Council recently agreed to commence a process to develop an urban design strategy for the city. The objective of this strategy is to apply a more systematic and integrated approach to improving the city's unique character and image and to managing its public spaces.

To facilitate progress on developing the strategy you are invited to attend a workshop with fellow community representatives on **Thursday 14th September** from **5.00 - 6.30 p.m.** in **Committee Room 1** to discuss a suggested design objective for the city (ie. 'To make Palmerston North a liveable city' - one that provides the physical support necessary to meet the social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations of its residents) and a series of design principles that underpin the achievement of this objective.

It is hoped that this discussion will help to identify and confirm an appropriate design objective for the city along with a series of design principles or qualities that workshop participants would like to see reflected in Palmerston North. If some common ground can be reached on these matters it is anticipated that the resulting design objective and associated principles will usefully influence and inform further stages of development of the urban design strategy (eg. development of a design vision for the city, identification of future public space initiatives).

To help prepare yourself prior to the workshop I have identified three questions that you might like to ponder over:

- What aspects of the physical environment contribute to making Palmerston North a good place to live?
- What aspects of the physical environment do not contribute to making Palmerston North a good place to live?
- What are the physical qualities that you would like to see promoted/improved in the city in future?

As the intent of the strategy is to attempt to improve the positive perception that residents and visitors alike have about the city the views you hold on these questions will provide an invaluable means of identifying the physical characteristics or qualities that you value about Palmerston North.

If you are interested in attending this workshop could you please ring (*name*) on (*phone number*). However, if there are any matters that you'd like to raise prior to the workshop please don't hesitate to give me a ring on (*phone number*) otherwise I look forward to your involvement on the 14th September.

Yours sincerely

Name
Position

LIVEABILITY QUALITIES

Sense of Place

- **identity/character**
- **image**
- **physical/landscape setting**

Legibility

- **landmarks**
- **sense of arrival**
- **orientation/wayfinding**

Amenity

- **comfort**
- **shelter**
- **safety**

Diversity

- **mixed use**
- **choice of experience**
- **sensory 'richness'**

Robustness

- **ability to adapt (buildings/public spaces)**
- **flexible spaces/places**

Accessibility

- **ease of movement/ quality of routes**
- **transport choice**

Efficiency

- **maximising infrastructural potential**
- **adaptive reuse**

APPENDIX 5 – COMPLETED TEMPLATES FROM TRIALLING REPORT

TEMPLATE 1 – Project Plan and Checklist for Community Engagement Processes

Steps to be carried out:

1. Fill out the project plan for defining urban amenity
2. Use the check list to assist in setting up the community engagement process.

PROJECT PLAN: *Determinants of Liveability*

Purpose:

- *To identify what makes Palmerston North a liveable city*

Objectives:

- *To identify the attributes associated with Palmerston North's urban environment that contribute/do not contribute to the promotion and/or enhancement of liveability in the city;*
- *To identify and confirm a series of generic principles/qualities that encapsulate these attributes.*

Community:

- *a median age of 29 years compared to the national median of 32;*
- *more people aged 15-29 (31%) than New Zealand generally (22%);*
- *fewer people under the age of 14 (34%) and over the age of 40 (34%) than the national average (which is 23% and 39% respectively);*
- *a higher proportion of people who identify themselves as European (76%) than the national average (71%);*
- *a marginally lower proportion of Maori residents (13%) than New Zealand generally (14%) along with the proportion of those who describe themselves as Pacific Islanders being half (2%) the national average (4%);*
- *a slightly higher Asian population (5%) than the national average (4%);*
- *an increasing degree of ethnic diversity which is evidenced by a decline in the proportion of those who categorise themselves as European (down 7%) and a corresponding increase in the proportion of those who categorised themselves as Maori (up 3%) and Asian (up 1%) since 1991;*
- *a greater proportion of women (52%) to men (48%) than the national average (which is 51% and 49% respectively);*
- *an age distribution which sees slightly more men represented in the 20-29 year age category with women predominating in the 40+ years age categories.*

Anticipated outcomes/outputs:

- *identification and confirmation of a commonly agreed set of key liveability qualities/principles;*
- *identification of a series of urban amenity attributes associated with these qualities.*

Methodology: <i>(Describe the steps involved in the methodology chosen using the table below)</i>			
Steps	Time	Resources	
<i>(Describe the sequence of steps involved in the methodology)</i>	<i>Indicate the time required to undertake the different steps</i>	<i>Provide a list of resources required in each step including staff resources including who is responsible and any other resources required</i>	
		Who is responsible?	Other resources
1.Research and identification of generic 'liveability' qualities/principles	35 hrs/5 hrs	Principal Planner	Urban Designer
2.Preparation of liveability discussion paper	20 hrs	Principal Planner	
3.Development of workshop format & content and identification of range of participants	20 hrs/5 hrs	Principal Planner	Urban Designer
4.Organisation of visual material & presentation notes	20 hrs/10 hrs	Principal Planner	Urban Designer
5.Organisation & convening of 4 community workshops	25 hrs/15 hrs	Principal Planner	Urban Designer

Checklist for community engagement process / Questions to consider:

Do you understand the characteristics of the community?

- *Age*
- *Gender*
- *Culture*
- *Literacy levels etc*

(A description of the characteristics of the community will need to be included in the trialling report. Template 2 has been designed to assist in the recording of the characteristics of the community).

Given the characteristics of the community, will all people in the community be able to participate effectively? Have you trialled the methods with people concerned? Visual material will assist in explaining terms.

Is representation of different groups important to the purpose of the process?

In terms of venue:

- *Appropriate for community concerned (may need to ask local people about this)*
- *Size*
- *Layout*
- *Audio/visual equipment*
- *Proximity to transport routes*
- *Disabled access*
- *Material needed (pens, paper etc)*

How will the information/responses be recorded?

On OHP transparencies by the workshop facilitators

What methods will be used to feed information back to the community?

A summary document of the workshop results was prepared and has been circulated to all invited workshop participants.

TEMPLATE 2 – Community Characteristics

This template provides the steps to be followed to record the characteristics of the community. There are two stages involved in completing this template. These stages are described below:

Steps to be carried out:

1. Fill out the characteristics of the community from information gained from the census or other information sources that the council may hold.
2. Fill out the characteristics of the community that have been consulted or engaged as part of the methods chosen to define urban amenity.

Description of Characteristic	Characteristics of the community (sourced from census or other data)	Characteristics of the people who were 'engaged' in defining urban amenity
<i>Age</i> (proportion in different age brackets)	1-14 = 20% 15-29 = 31% 30-39 = 15% 40-59 = 20% 60+ = 13%	1-14 = 0% 15-29 = 14% 30-39 = 24% 40-59 = 57% 60+ = 4%
<i>Gender</i> (proportion of males and females)	Male = 48% Female = 52%	Male = 62% Female = 38%
<i>Ethnicity</i> (proportion of people in different ethnic groups)	European = 76% Maori = 13% Pacific Island = 2% Asian/Other = 6%	European = 86% Maori = 14% Pacific Island = 0% Asian/Other = 0%
<i>Literacy</i> (proportion of people who are considered literate)	N/A	N/A
<i>Employment status</i> (proportion of people in different employment groups)	N/A	N/A
<i>Any other characteristics that is of importance to the community concerned</i>	N/A	N/A

Questions:

1. *Do the characteristics of the community that have been engaged as part of defining urban amenity represent the characteristics of the community as a whole?*

No - there was under-representation in such areas as youth & young adults, women and Pacific Island and Asian ethnic groups.

2. *If there are differences, do you feel that the issues involved are significant?*

Not of sufficient significance to undermine the integrity of the trial results. However, as a means of verifying these results it could be instructive to discuss the workshop results with members of some of the groups that were under-represented in the trial (eg. youth, Pacific Islanders/Asians) in order to determine the extent to which their views correspond with those articulated by workshop participants.

TEMPLATE 3 - Defining urban amenity

This template provides the steps to be followed for collating the information gained from defining urban amenity.

Steps to be carried out:

1. From the information that has been gained from the community summarise the information under the headings of the different qualities as follows:

Sense of place

(Memorable or distinctive characteristics that differentiate one place from another)

- the Tararua windfarm;
- the Tararua ranges;
- the 'iconic' value of the Square.

Understandable

(Existence of entrances/exits/throughways that are easily identified and understood)

- highly visible church spires (eg. All Saints, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit);
- its 'logical' layout - it is easy to find your way around;
- a strong sense of visual and physical connection throughout the city (eg. to the Tararua ranges, between places of residence and places of work and between the urban area and its rural hinterland).

Comfortable and Safe

(Creation of physical environment that is relatively free from nuisance /overcrowding danger – allows people to live and work in reasonable comfort).

- clean air;
- 'generous' footpaths;
- wide streets;
- expansive tree coverage;
- widespread underground services (eg. phone, electricity, sewer);
- the 'untapped' potential of the Manawatu River;
- an extensive public walkway system;
- the emerging development of 'green corridors' in the city;
- generally safe for children (ie. for biking, skateboarding, rollerblading) and elderly.

Healthy environment

(A sustainable urban environment that is relatively free from noise and pollution and also where the natural features of the environment are looked after)

(Note: refer comments below)

Choice

(Availability of places that cater for all sections of the population – That provide for a diverse range of activities and experience)

- a wide array of bars/restaurants/cafes and cultural and sporting facilities (eg. Showgrounds, Regent Theatre, George St., City Library, Adidas Rugby Institute) that reinforce the feeling that Palmerston North is a 'happening place' and contribute to creating a sense of vitality and vibrancy in the city;
- a variety of living environments (eg. rural/urban, infill/large lot) and a wide range of educational facilities (eg. Massey/UCOL/ secondary schools) and social and cultural opportunities available.

Ability to adapt

(Degree to which the elements that make up a city are versatile enough to accommodate and support the range of activities that people might want to engage in and their social/cultural needs)

- a number of large public spaces that are able to accommodate a wide variety of community events;

Accessible

(Ease with which it is possible to reach other places / people / activities / resources / services in a relatively direct and comfortable manner)

- the right 'scale' - the city is compact and everything is accessible;
- it is easy to get around;
- commercial activities and development that are spatially contained;
- flat terrain that allows for ease of movement by young and old;
- good access to local parks and provision of neighbourhood parks for kids in residential areas;
- accessible by air, road and rail;
- topography that provides visual access to the Tararua ranges (ie. the flatness of the city enhances the vista of the ranges when viewed down many city streets).

Quality of services

(Extent to which opportunity costs and travel time are reduced and use of existing infrastructure is maximised)

(Note: no explicit responses provided regarding this quality)

Included

(Extent to which there is a wide constituency of community members empowered to participate in the process and the extent to which people from different cultural backgrounds feel included)

(Note: refer comments below)

Well-being¹⁷

(The overall sense of satisfaction that people feel)

(Note: refer comments below)

2. We are also interested in your answers to the following questions:

- *Do the qualities provide a means to define urban amenity?*

The qualities appear to encapsulate the broad range of attributes that a community might identify as important constituents of urban amenity.

- *In your opinion should well-being be included as a quality of urban places?*

No - although well-being plays an important role in influencing our responses to urban amenity the reality is that individual perceptions of well-being are likely to be a pivotal consideration in the identification of the attributes associated with the other tangible urban amenity qualities and consequently should not be considered in isolation of this wider physical context.

- *Have our attempts to put the qualities into plain English been successful? Do you think there are clear boundaries between each of the qualities?*

Yes, with the exception of the distinction between 'Comfortable and Safe' and 'Healthy Environment'.

- *From the work that you have been involved in terms of defining urban amenity are there qualities that are missing?; and*

No, the qualities have sufficient breadth to incorporate the wide range of physical attributes that a community might identify during the course of defining urban amenity at the local level.

- *Are there qualities that should be re-worded?*

Yes - the distinction between the qualities 'Comfortable and Safe' and 'Healthy Environment' is unclear and has the potential to create confusion in relation to the determination of their respective attributes. A more practical alternative might be to integrate these qualities into a single entity entitled 'Comfortable, Healthy and Safe'.

¹⁷ *A question has been raised as to whether well-being is a quality of urban places or whether well-being and liveability are in effect similar things. In other words by gaining an understanding of all the qualities then a picture of the well being of the community will be obtained. We are interested in your feedback on this issue.*

- *Do the qualities tell us whether our urban environments are sustainable over time and place?*

With the identification of appropriately targeted indicators that align with each of the urban amenity qualities there is good scope for these qualities to form a useful basis for future sustainability reporting.

TEMPLATE 4 - Managing urban amenity

Steps to be carried out:

1. List the full range of methods available to manage urban amenity.
2. Identify the methods that are currently selected by the council to manage urban amenity locally.
3. Identify methods that may have arisen through engaging the community in defining urban amenity.
4. Identify whether the methods chosen are regulatory or non-regulatory.

Potential methods	Methods chosen by Council	Methods chosen by the community	Regulatory	Non – regulatory
Rules	District Plan		Yes	
Design guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBD Urban Design Guidelines • Savage Crescent Design Guidelines • P.N. Housing Design Guide • Aokautere Design Guide • Elmira Ave/ Manapouri Crescent Design Guide 	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>		Yes
Councils works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Square Redevelopment Programme • Walkways Development Programme • Reserve Development Programmes • Street Tree Planting & Maintenance Programme • Catalytic Development (eg. City Library, Regent Theatre) • Street Enhancement Programmes 			Yes (subject to Annual Plan funding)
Mainstreet programmes				
Beautification projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turitea Stream Green Corridors Project • City Entrances Improvement Project 	Yes		Yes (subject to Annual Plan funding)
Bylaws	Yes		Yes	
Provision of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Guides • Environmental Education Programmes 			Yes

Other council plans/strategies/policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Vision & Strategic Plan • Urban Design Strategy • CBD Revitalisation Strategy • Traffic Management Plan • Environmental Policy • Reserve Management Plans • Bike Plan • Natural & Cultural Heritage Incentive Programme 			Yes
---	---	--	--	-----

Once this table is filled out we are interested in your answers to the following questions:

- *How effective are the different techniques?*
Individually each of the techniques have limitations but in combination they offer the potential to provide an effective, tailored package of instruments to manage urban amenity at the local level.
- *Has the community identified any different methods for managing urban amenity than are presently used by the council? If so what are these? Would you consider adopting these methods?*
N/A
- *Do the methods presently used by the council assist in managing urban amenity – given the way in which the community has defined urban amenity?*
Although the identified methods provide sufficient latitude for inventive and effective approaches to be developed to manage the more tangible attributes of urban amenity these methods may not be either flexible or extensive enough to address some of the less tangible aspects of urban amenity associated with such qualities as 'sense of place' ('lifting' the image of a city, strengthening the 'sense of culture' associated with a place).