

WAITAKERE CITY COUNCIL

URBAN AMENITY TRIAL REPORT

This report provides a review of the New Lynn charrette community engagement process, assesses its value as a method of defining urban amenity, and discusses the relationship between this work and the conceptual framework developed under the Ministry for the Environment's Urban Amenity Project

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FEBRUARY 2001

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to record the results of an urban amenity trial conducted in Waitakere City.

The trial falls within the scope of work being undertaken by the Ministry for the Environment that attempts to explore the concept of urban amenity, and provide a framework to assist local authorities to define and monitor urban amenity within their own districts.

The Waitakere trial is a review of the work conducted by the Council in 1996, when it engaged the community to define urban amenity through an urban design exercise known as the New Lynn charrette. The charrette was an intensive consultation and group design process that aimed to establish a sustainable city form for the New Lynn town centre and advance the regional debate on transportation and urban land use. Extensive community consultation was an integral component of the charrette, to the extent that the community was asked to define the urban environment that they wished New Lynn to become in the future.

This report reviews the approach taken to defining urban amenity through the New Lynn charrette, and relates it to the urban amenity conceptual framework developed under the Ministry for the Environment's Urban Amenity Project.

2.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW LYNN COMMUNITY

This section of the report provides some context to the urban amenity trial by describing the New Lynn community in terms of characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, education and employment status.

New Lynn is a sub-regional town centre located at the south-eastern end of Waitakere City. Along with Henderson, New Lynn is the dominant commercial centre within the City and provides a wide range of shops, offices, entertainment and transport facilities. Waitakere City has a population estimated at approximately 170,000 people, growing at the relatively fast rate of around 2% per annum.

The following table summarises the relevant demographic and statistical information, and provides comparative data to enable the New Lynn community to be viewed relative to residents of the wider Waitakere City area, and nationally. The information in the table is sourced from the 1996 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwelling, which was conducted by Statistics NZ shortly before the trial took place. The statistical information for "New Lynn" is derived from the New Lynn North census area unit, which covers the town centre and most of the surrounding area that was the focus of the New Lynn charrette.

Characteristic		New Lynn	Waitakere City	New Zealand
Age	<15	22%	25%	23%
	15-24	14%	15%	15%
	25-44	35%	33%	31%
	45-64	18%	19%	20%
	>65	12%	8%	12%
Gender	Male	48.3%	49.2%	49.1%
	Female	51.7%	51.7%	50.9%
Ethnicity (main ethnic groups)	European	57%	68%	75%
	Maori	13%	14%	15%
	Pacific Island	18%	11%	5%
	Asian	12%	7%	5%
Education (highest academic qualifications)	None	41%	34%	35%
	Secondary	29%	32%	31%
	University	3%	5%	9%
	Other tertiary	23%	27%	26%
Employment Status	Full time	46%	51%	46%
	Part time	10%	13%	14%
	Unemployed	6%	5%	5%
	Non Labour Force	37%	31%	35%

The significant characteristics of the New Lynn community are the relatively high number of residents who identify themselves as Pacific Islanders or Asians, and also the high number of older adults (aged 65 or over) who reside in New Lynn relative to the wider Waitakere City community. It is also evident that New Lynn residents generally have a lower level of educational achievement than residents living within other parts of the City or nationally.

In general terms though, it would be fair to say that the characteristics of the New Lynn community represent the characteristics of the Waitakere community as a whole. The most obvious differences relate to ethnicity and age distribution. However, the extent of divergence is not considered to be so significant as to raise substantially different issues when attempting to define urban amenity, compared to the potential issues that may be encountered if the same exercise was being conducted in other parts of Waitakere City.

3.0 METHODOLOGY USED FOR THE TRIAL – NEW LYNN CHARRETTE

3.1 Introduction

Over five consecutive days from 28 March to 1 April 1996, Council facilitated an intensive consultation and group design process known as the 'New Lynn charrette'. The charrette aimed to establish a sustainable city form for the New Lynn town centre and advance the regional debate on transportation and urban land use. The extensive consultation and "enquiry by design" exercise resulted in the drafting of comprehensive drawings that detailed a structure for the New Lynn centre and surrounding neighbourhoods. Essentially, the charrette was the vehicle for defining current and desired urban amenity in New Lynn.

The charrette produced a number of key outcomes. For example, it developed recognition of the importance of providing housing, at higher densities than those found traditionally in the suburban areas of the City, within the walkable catchment of the town centre. Residential accommodation in town centre locations will provide housing choice, in terms of type and affordability, for a range of people. The ability to walk to shops, workplace, recreational facilities or public transport terminals reduces the need for car use, and moves toward creating a more sustainable urban fabric. Other outcomes related to such matters as environmental protection, economic development, and transportation. The outcomes were invariably interrelated, and are all relevant factors in relation to urban amenity considerations.

Waitakere City Council convened the New Lynn charrette, with assistance from Auckland City Council. The charrette concept that was used in New Lynn is the brainchild of Chip Kaufman and Wendy Morris of Ecologically Sustainable Design Pty Ltd. Chip and Wendy were engaged by the Council to act as the charrette leaders.

It is noted that there are a number of similar approaches or adaptations of this basic concept that could have been utilised by the Council.

3.2 Community Participation – Defining Urban Amenity in New Lynn

Extensive publicity ensured that New Lynn residents were well aware of the significant event that was to occur in their community. All residents and business owners within 800 metres of the town centre were invited to attend the charrette through letters and flyers (Refer Appendix 1). Press releases made sure the event was in the public eye, in an attempt to encourage active participation by as many members of the community as possible. Invitations were also extended to organisations and agencies that may have had information that would be of benefit to the process, such as TranzRail, Housing New Zealand, and the forerunner to Work and Income New Zealand.

As a result of the Council's efforts to publicise the charrette, approximately 300 people attended the public meeting that was held on the first night of the

event. The audience comprised a range of people, from local residents and business owners, through to developers and design professionals.

The charrette leaders opened the meeting with a slideshow presentation that illustrated some of the problems that urban areas were facing, and explored the way in which such problems could be countered. The thrust of the message was that the principles of 'new urbanism' – a sustainable development philosophy that combines urban design, environmental protection and economic development - could deliver the outcomes that urban communities were seeking. The objective is to create a sustainable urban environment that is a pleasant, attractive and desirable place in which to live. The slideshow was a conscious attempt by the charrette leaders to capture the imagination of the community. The images were aimed at creating a vision of the way in which New Lynn could develop, as well as trying to make the community understand that such change was both desirable and necessary.

Once the presentation was completed, the audience was split into a number of small groups, each comprising between six and ten participants. A facilitator and a scribe were allocated to each group. These people were Council staff members who had received prior training in the requirements of their roles. The Council chose to use trained staff rather than external facilitators as it sought to create a staff resource that could be utilised for future events of this nature. Each group was asked to consider three questions:-

“What do you like about New Lynn?”

“What don't you like about New Lynn?”

“How would you like to see New Lynn change?”

The open-ended questions were designed to elicit responses that could inform the urban design exercise that would follow over the next few days. Participants were urged to be “place-based” – that is, specific about real elements of the urban landscape that could be eliminated or enhanced. It is through their responses to these questions that the New Lynn community collectively defined the concept of urban amenity in the local context. The questions generated a vision of how the community wanted to see their town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods develop in the future.

The groups discussed the questions for 45 minutes. The facilitator attempted to encourage participation from all group members, so that a wide range of views could be obtained. At the conclusion of the discussion, the public had a break for refreshments whilst the scribes from each group conveyed the results of the discussion to the charrette leaders. Each new point raised was hastily added to an overhead transparency. The combined responses to each of the three questions were then reported back to the whole public meeting, and the audience was asked to confirm the responses and add any that had been omitted previously. This process of gaining approval for the way things

were written was an important part of the process because the community involved took some ownership for the ideas.

The meeting was concluded with an explanation of the programme for the remaining four days of the charrette, and an invitation for the public to attend the design workshop at the open design sessions that were scheduled.

In summary, the first night public meeting fulfilled two important functions. Firstly, it motivated the community and provided a vision that they could adopt. This is important if the charrette outcomes were to achieve some degree of ownership by the community. Secondly, the responses from the public meeting provided the information and direction required by the designers in order to achieve the urban environment that the community desired.

3.3 The Design Phase

The following days were filled with intensive design work, interviews with government and community agencies, and discussion with members of the public who visited the design studio to view the plans as they progressed.

The design team was split into several groups, each tasked with producing a specific plan or plans. For example, groups were engaged in designing the most intensive commercial area at the town's centre, whilst others focussed on the transport network or potential development areas around the periphery of the town centre. All of the design work was continually scrutinised to ensure that it was achieving the clear directions that had been set by the community on the opening night of the charrette, whilst also meeting the urban design objectives of the Council.

In relation to this latter point, it is important to note that the design professionals and planners employed by the Council have an important role to play in defining urban amenity in a particular community. It may not be sufficient to simply accept the community's concept of urban amenity as the total answer, as their vision may be either unsustainable or unachievable. Planners need to be able to point out the choices that must be made in order to get the best possible outcomes, and to advise the community if their ideals are inconsistent with statutory imperatives such as those relating to sustainability that derive from the Resource Management Act.

By way of example, the community may like the idea of a land development pattern that provides for the majority of dwellings to be built in quiet cul-de-sac locations, but the same community may be urging the Council to reduce traffic congestion. In a situation like this, planners have a role to explain that the two conditions – widespread cul-de-sac living and reducing traffic congestion – are largely mutually exclusive. This relationship may not be fully appreciated by the community generally, so the planners and urban designers would need to illustrate that a strongly hierarchical roading system fuels congestion relative to a well-connected roading network.

For these reasons, it is essential that any community engagement process aimed at determining urban amenity have available sufficient technical expertise to guide the community in relation to sustainable development issues. In the case of the New Lynn charrette, a team of overseas based urban designers and planners were appointed to work with local professionals to ensure that a high level of technical expertise was available to guide the process. It is acknowledged however, that the New Lynn charrette was very much an urban design focussed exercise, and different approaches may not require the same level of technical input.

3.4 The Outcome

The final few hours of the charrette occurred at a frenetic pace. The designs were finalised and sent by courier to a professional photographer to be made into slides. An artist was engaged to transform some selected details from the two-dimensional plans into perspective sketches. These sketches were also photographed, to be shown as slides.

This material formed the basis of the public meeting held on the final night. The charrette leaders briefly recapped on the urban design fundamentals, and the positive and negative aspects of urban environments for those in the audience that did not attend the meeting on the opening night of the charrette. Then the presenter introduced and explained the slides that were the culmination of the design phase of the charrette process. Again, the emphasis was on demonstrating how the series of designs represent a translation of the community's urban amenity vision into a tangible product that can be progressively implemented.

The following project plan and methodology summary provide a concise account of the steps involved in the New Lynn charrette and the resources required to undertake an exercise of this nature.

PROJECT PLAN: <i>New Lynn Charrette</i>	
Purpose:	<i>To provide a catalyst for the revitalisation of the New Lynn town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods</i>
Objectives:	<i>The charrette aimed to establish a sustainable city form for the New Lynn town centre and advance the regional debate on transportation and urban land use.</i>
Community:	<i>The community includes approximately 5,000 residents and business owners who live and work in and around New Lynn, one of Waitakere City's two dominant commercial centres. The community is largely typical of those that exist within Waitakere City, although it comprises relatively higher numbers of Pacific Island and Asian residents as well as persons 65 or over.</i>

Anticipated output: *The charrette was required to produce a series of plans that detailed a structure for the New Lynn centre and surrounding neighbourhoods. The comprehensive drawings were intended to guide private and public actions to ensure that New Lynn developed into the future in a sustainable manner, and provided an attractive and liveable urban environment.*

Steps	Time	Resources	
		Who is Responsible?	Other Resources
<i>Appoint a project leader.</i>		<i>Senior staff, acting as project sponsors.</i>	<i>Funding for the project would need to be secured.</i>
<i>Engage technical input as required.</i>	<i>Two weeks to review CV's, evaluate tenders.</i>	<i>Project leader.</i>	<i>Technical support staff.</i>
<i>Arrange a venue.</i>	<i>One week to review suitable venues.</i>	<i>Project leader.</i>	<i>Technical support staff.</i>
<i>Undertake extensive publicity to promote the charrette.</i>	<i>Commence two months prior to charrette. Letter drop / flyers two weeks prior.</i>	<i>Project leader.</i>	<i>Council's communications staff.</i>
<i>Hold the event</i>	<i>Five days</i>	<i>Charrette leaders.</i>	<i>Council planners, traffic engineers, iwi, artist, photographer.</i>
<i>Publicise the outcomes and outputs.</i>	<i>Within one month of the charrette concluding.</i>	<i>Project leader</i>	<i>Council's communications staff.</i>

The table provides a very basic synopsis of the elements comprised in the New Lynn charrette process. These steps could generally be applied to similar urban design exercises.

One important aspect of any community consultation process is the need to ensure that the views of all groups within the community are obtained. This may require different approaches depending on the group concerned, and may be particularly relevant in terms of ethnic groups. When it comes to consultation, one size does not necessarily fit all. Residents from minority ethnic groups may be reluctant to speak out in public meetings and, as a result, it is possible that issues of significant importance to them could be overlooked. Possible solutions are likely to involve Council staff discussing

issues with such groups in an environment in which they feel comfortable, such as a church or cultural centre. Interpreters may be necessary.

In respect of the New Lynn charrette, the Council did target certain groups to ensure that they were represented in the process. In particular, a session with young people was conducted to obtain their opinions as to how their needs could be accommodated in a redeveloped town centre.

4.0 RESULTS OF THE URBAN AMENITY TRIAL - NEW LYNN CHARRETTE

4.1 Urban Amenity Issues for the New Lynn Community

The following table summarises the key issues that were of importance to the New Lynn community in respect of urban amenity, and assigns them to one of the qualities identified through the work of the Ministry for the Environment's Urban Amenity Focus Group. It is not an exhaustive list, but is representative of the issues of most significance.

<p>Sense of place <i>(Memorable or distinctive characteristics that differentiate one place from another)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Lynn needs a “heart”. • Brick and clay heritage that characterises New Lynn. • War memorial in the town centre needs to be preserved and respected. • Keep the rose gardens! • Create a village green in the town centre.
<p>Understandable <i>(Existence of entrances/exits/throughways that are easily identified and understood)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The New Lynn town centre is fragmented into separate areas. • Old and new parts of New Lynn need to be linked. • Lynnmall needs to “open out” to face the rest of the town centre. • Provide good signposting around the town centre. • Promote ground floor retail.
<p>Comfortable and Safe <i>(Creation of physical environment that is relatively free from nuisance /overcrowding danger – allows people to live and work in reasonable comfort).</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic safety is an important issue. • Increase after-hours activity to enhance personal safety. • Provide shelter for older people. • Ensure rail crossings are safe. • Public spaces should be well lit and clean.

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)

- Reduce noise from industrial premises and railway.
- Clean up graffiti and litter.
- Recognise and enhance the streams that flow through New Lynn.

Choice

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

- Provide more restaurants, eating and seating places.
- Establish medium density housing close to the town centre.
- Maintain industrial development in order to provide employment options.

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)

- Central plaza or open space should be created to accommodate public events.
- Develop a town centre that is able to cope with growth.
- Mixed use development can create more flexibility for employment.

Accessible

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

- Enhance pedestrian access between bus terminal and shopping centre.
- Connect neighbourhoods with new roads and pedestrian linkages.
- Establish a reliable and frequent rapid transit system.
- Bottlenecks around New Lynn cause traffic congestion.

Quality of services

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

- Sufficient parking should be provided in the commercial area.
- Community facilities need to be upgraded and integrated into the town centre.

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)

- RSA building should be retained, and adequate parking provided for members.

4.2 Questions Arising From the Trial

The Urban Amenity Trials Report also identified the concept of ‘well-being’ as being a potential quality of urban places. The report asked the participating Council’s to consider whether well-being was a true quality of an urban environment or whether well-being and liveability are similar concepts.

In response to this question, the urban amenity trial did not identify any issues that fell within the concept of well-being. The community engagement process that formed part of the New Lynn charrette generated a number of issues that assisted in defining urban amenity. However, all of these issues could be associated with one of the *other* qualities of urban amenity that have been identified by the Focus Group. On this basis it is concluded that well-being may be a superfluous element to the framework derived to define urban amenity and, therefore, should not be included as a quality of an urban place. It is also not directly related to the physical conditions of the urban environment in the way that the other qualities are, but rather would result from all the other qualities being present.

The Urban Amenity Trials Report also raised several other questions in relation to the qualities that have been identified as being desirable in urban environments. These questions are discussed in the following paragraphs.

It is not considered that the qualities actually *define* urban amenity. However, it is evident that an urban environment would have a high level of amenity if all of the qualities were present. The difficult issue is that the qualities are, as the name would suggest, qualitative rather than quantitative. The extent to which they are to be found in a particular location is therefore far more important than the mere fact that they may be able to be identified in that environment. In addition, each quality is likely to exist at different levels.

The strength of the qualities is that they provide a framework within which each community can define its own concept of urban amenity. The urban amenity trial did not identify any issue that could not be accommodated within at least one of the qualities, nor did it identify any new qualities. As such, the list of qualities would function as a comprehensive “checklist” that can be used by communities to ensure that they are addressing all of the elements that are necessary to create urban amenity at the local level. If some of the qualities are missing in an urban area, then the potential of that area in terms of achieving liveability could not be maximised.

The qualities have successfully been described in plain English, at least to the extent possible for concepts that are largely based on perceptions and as such are inherently difficult to define. The brief explanations that accompany each quality are useful and should be retained.

The trial did generate several community issues that could have been associated with more than one quality. This demonstrated a degree of overlap, but did not seem to be of any consequence and would give some comfort that issues would not be likely to fall “between the cracks”. For example, the community’s desire to see a connected street network could sit comfortably under either ‘*accessible*’ or ‘*quality of service*’. In the end, it became simply a matter of preference that had no implications. The important point is that the issue was captured by the qualities.

The two qualities that would appear to be the most difficult for communities to comprehend are ‘*quality of services*’ and ‘*included*’. There may be room for confusion with the former, as residents are more likely to be thinking about retail service or community facilities than what is intended. As an alternative, it may be worth considering framing this quality around the more-easily understood concept of efficiency.

In relation to the quality of ‘*included*’, the trial did not identify many issues that the community chose to raise that would be encompassed by this quality. This may be a quality that needs to be addressed more by the Council than the community, in order to satisfy legislative requirements and to meet its obligations as a representative of the community as a whole. This would not detract from its significance in achieving urban amenity. It may also be more readily understood if it were to be rephrased as ‘*inclusive*’ rather than ‘*included*’.

Finally, the Urban Amenity Trials Report sought opinions as to whether the qualities tell us if our urban environments are sustainable over time and place. The qualities are designed to include elements of current planning philosophy that are known to enhance sustainability of urban areas, such as accessibility, efficiency, adaptability, choice and environmental protection. If all the qualities are present in an urban environment, then it follows that such an environment would be more sustainable than an urban area that did not exhibit these same qualities. Analysis of a community to determine the extent to which the qualities are present would therefore provide a useful mechanism to judge whether that community and the urban place in which they live would be sustainable over time.

4.3 Methods for Managing Urban Amenity

The following table includes a range of methods for managing urban amenity, and indicates whether each method is chosen by the Council and / or the community. It also states whether the particular method is a regulatory or a non-regulatory approach.

Potential Methods	Methods Chosen by Council	Methods Chosen by Community	Regulatory	Non-Regulatory
<i>Rules</i>	X		X	
<i>Design Guides</i>	X			X
<i>Council's Works</i>	X			X
<i>Mainstreet Programmes</i>	X	X		X
<i>Beautification Programmes</i>	X	X		X
<i>Bylaws</i>	X		X	
<i>Provision of Information</i>	X	X		X
<i>Other Council Plans (i.e. Reserve Management Plans)</i>	X	X	X	
<i>Strategic Property Development</i>	X			X
<i>Education</i>	X			X
<i>Incentives</i>				X

Interestingly, the table illustrates that the majority of methods for managing urban amenity are non-regulatory. They are also likely to be the most effective in many instances as they can be more targeted to the particular circumstances of individual communities and urban areas than regulatory methods such as district plan rules. Such rules are a relatively blunt instrument, and are rarely flexible enough to actually *create* elements of urban amenity. Rather, they are focussed on avoiding urban characteristics that are deemed to be undesirable in the majority of cases.

In the Council's experience, non-regulatory methods have been more effective in providing urban amenity. Waitakere City has produced a number of design guides that can be used by private developers when undertaking subdivisions or residential, commercial and industrial development.

These design guides are supported by expertise from Council staff. Developers are encouraged to attend pre-application meetings at the Council

prior to firming up their concept for a particular site. A range of Council staff with expertise in relevant disciplines such as planning, traffic engineering, stormwater management, ecology and reserves management are in attendance. Staff review a draft proposal and then provide advice as to how the proposal can be modified (if required) to satisfy the objectives of the Council whilst still achieving those of the developer if at all possible. This approach works because the Proposed Waitakere City District Plan is an effects-based planning document that empowers Council staff with a relatively large degree of discretion. As such, the pre-application meetings are valuable to the developers as they can provide more certainty in the process, and avoid the drafting of plans that may subsequently need to be changed at great expense. A significant component of the Council's input is aimed at maintaining and enhancing urban amenity.

Strategic property development is another effective technique for managing urban amenity, at least in Waitakere City. The Council has created a property development company, Waitakere Properties Limited. The company undertakes a number of strategic residential and commercial developments with the intention of furthering the Council's strategic objectives relating to sustainable urban development. Whilst the company is required to make an overall profit, many of the individual developments represent a direct approach to the implementation of Council's urban strategy, or are intended to lever and encourage private development in a way that is consistent with that strategy. Essentially, the property development company provides a mechanism through which the Council can lead by example.

It is noted that in Waitakere City's case, the community has not identified any methods for managing urban amenity that were not already known to the Council.

4.4 Outcomes of the Charrette – Improvements in Urban Amenity

As the New Lynn trial is retrospective, and reviews a community engagement process undertaken nearly five years ago, the implementation of the charrette outcomes can also be reviewed. This review can be used to determine which methods of managing urban amenity have been most successful in achieving the desired urban outcomes that were identified by the community.

As discussed in the preceding section of this report, it is the non-regulatory methods that have been most successful. The regulatory regime has largely remained unchanged from before the charrette to the present day, without having any significant impact on development that has occurred either in a positive or negative way. By contrast, the following list highlights a few of the developments that have been made possible through non-regulatory initiatives, all of which have addressed issues raised by the community through the charrette process:

- Lynnmall shopping centre undertook a \$42 million redevelopment, including providing a new retail frontage facing the rest of the town centre. Design requirements such as this were specified as conditions

of a sale and purchase agreement when the owners of the shopping centre purchased an area of Council land to facilitate the redevelopment.

- Council constructed a new road that has become the “heart” of the retail area, creating an attractive environment that is pedestrian-friendly and provides outdoor seating areas.
- Approximately 500 medium density housing units have been constructed within an easy walk of the town centre, and transport terminals. Many of these units have been designed to encourage mixed use opportunities such as home-based businesses. The charrette sparked interest in development of this nature, and there are now in excess of 2000 medium density housing units across the City, providing a level of choice that did not previously exist.
- A new pedestrian link was created via a footbridge that crossed a stream to provide direct access to the town centre from a residential neighbourhood. The award-winning pedestrian bridge was constructed by the Council in accordance with a concept developed by an artist that reflected characteristics of the Rewarewa seed pod.
- A new community centre is under construction and work will commence shortly on a replacement library. These buildings provide modern facilities to upgrade those that previously existed but were not adequately meeting the needs of the community.
- With their agreement, the RSA were relocated to alternative premises in the town centre that provided more space and better parking facilities. A new war memorial was designed and constructed in consultation with the RSA and other members of the community, to take a prominent position in the town centre that better reflects its status and significance.

4.5 Monitoring Urban Amenity

The Ministry for the Environment’s Urban Amenity Project has developed a framework for monitoring urban amenity at the local level. This trial is aimed at testing the effectiveness of that framework. The approach is to identify the raw ‘attributes’ that give rise to the qualities that are present in a high amenity urban environment. These attributes are the building blocks that contribute to the qualities and, importantly, they are generally measurable or quantifiable.

Identification of the relevant attributes is a key step in monitoring urban amenity. Progress toward the vision of urban amenity sought by a particular community can be measured over time through identification and monitoring of the relevant attributes that create the conceptual qualities. Each community would select a series of urban amenity indicators that were relevant to the end result that was desired. The results of the New Lynn charrette trial highlight that each community is likely to be seeking generally

similar urban qualities, but there will also be peculiarities and distinctions that suggest that it is more appropriate to define urban amenity at the local community level, rather than nationally.

The following table summarises the key components and attributes that were associated with each quality in New Lynn. The results are a synthesis of the issues raised through the community engagement process that formed an integral part of the charrette.

Qualities	Key Components	Attributes
<i>Sense of Place</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>History</i> • <i>Landscape</i> • <i>Creating a ‘heart’</i> • <i>Architecture</i> • <i>Urban design quality</i> • <i>Respect for the war memorial</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Vegetation type</i> • <i>Architecture</i> • <i>Cultural Heritage</i> • <i>People’s perceptions</i> • <i>Defined entrances and exits</i> • <i>Open Space</i> • <i>Safety</i> • <i>Accessibility</i> • <i>Sense of belonging</i> • <i>History</i>
<i>Understandable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Navigable urban areas</i> • <i>View shafts</i> • <i>Person scale</i> • <i>Cohesive</i> • <i>Avoid fragmentation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Location/type of signage</i> • <i>Landform</i> • <i>Viewing points</i> • <i>Retail frontage</i> • <i>Architecture</i>
<i>Comfortable and safe</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Personal safety</i> • <i>Traffic safety</i> • <i>Comfortable</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Protection from weather</i> • <i>Quality of public/private spaces</i> • <i>Lighting</i> • <i>Fencing</i> • <i>Passive surveillance</i> • <i>Road design</i> • <i>Landscaping</i> • <i>24 hour activity</i>
<i>A healthy environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Streams</i> • <i>Air</i> • <i>Microclimate</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Air quality</i> • <i>Water quality</i> • <i>Solar access</i> • <i>Noise</i> • <i>Odour</i> • <i>Trees</i> • <i>Litter</i> • <i>Graffiti</i> • <i>Weeds / noxious plants</i>

Qualities	Key Components	Attributes
Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Range of experiences cultural sporting etc.</i> • <i>Variety of Open Space</i> • <i>Entertainment options</i> • <i>Recreation</i> • <i>Housing choice</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Availability of public transport</i> • <i>Passive open spaces</i> • <i>Active open spaces</i> • <i>Medium density housing</i> • <i>Mixed use</i> • <i>Employment opportunities</i>
Ability to adapt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Responsive to technology</i> • <i>Capacity for physical form to absorb changing land use demands</i> • <i>Capacity to accommodate range of activity</i> • <i>Capacity for growth</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Transport routes</i> • <i>Design of neighbourhoods</i> • <i>Characteristics of public spaces</i> • <i>Flexibility of public spaces</i> • <i>Adaptable infrastructure</i>
Accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Direct routes</i> • <i>Range of transport options</i> • <i>Quality of routes</i> • <i>All levels of ability ('disabled')</i> • <i>Safe routes</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Availability of different transport options</i> • <i>Accessibility of different transport options</i> • <i>Reliability of different transport options</i> • <i>Quality of streets</i> • <i>Safety of streets</i> • <i>Ability to switch modes</i> • <i>Connectivity</i>
Quality of Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reliability</i> • <i>Availability</i> • <i>Meet present and projected demand</i> • <i>Adequacy</i> • <i>Quality</i> • <i>Efficiency</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sewage</i> • <i>Water</i> • <i>Stormwater</i> • <i>Roads</i> • <i>Public Transport</i> • <i>Telecommunications</i>
Included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sense of belonging</i> • <i>All views represented</i> • <i>No/limited socio-economic and cultural barriers</i> • <i>Respect for others</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Representation on local council</i> • <i>Perspectives of all groups are considered</i>

4.6 Development of Urban Amenity Indicators

From the information summarised in the above table, a series of urban amenity indicators were derived through the trial. The indicators reflect the way in which New Lynn has defined urban amenity, and are comprised in the following table.

Quality	Attribute	Indicator
<i>Sense of Place</i>	<i>People's perceptions</i>	<i>% of people who respond that New Lynn is a good place to live</i>
<i>Understandable</i>	<i>Retail frontage</i>	<i>% of property frontage in main shopping streets developed as retail floor space</i>
<i>Comfortable & Safe</i>	<i>Protection from weather</i>	<i>% of property frontage in main shopping streets developed with verandas</i>
	<i>Traffic safety</i>	<i>Number of injury accidents to pedestrians per annum</i>
	<i>Personal safety</i>	<i>New Lynn residents consider that their neighbourhood is either 'safe-ish' or really safe</i>
<i>Number of assaults in defined parks and other public places per annum</i>		
<i>Healthy Environment</i>	<i>Air quality</i>	<i>Micrograms per m³ of carbon monoxide (CO)</i>
		<i>Micrograms per m³ of particulate matter (PM₁₀)</i>
	<i>Water quality</i>	<i>Quantity of dissolved oxygen present in water samples taken from a designated stream</i>
		<i>Quantity of ammonia present in water samples taken from a designated stream</i>
		<i>Temperature of water samples taken from a designated stream</i>
<i>Noise</i>	<i>Daytime background noise levels within the neighbourhood</i>	

Choice	<i>Housing stock</i>	<i>Number of medium or high density housing units within a 1km radius of the town centre</i>
Ability to Adapt	<i>Infrastructure capacity</i>	<i>Number of sewage overflows within a given area per annum</i>
Accessible	<i>Connectivity</i>	<i>Degree to which the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods are connected (through space syntax computer modelling)</i>
	<i>Proximity to parks</i>	<i>% of residential properties located within a 400m safe walk of a quality park</i>
Quality of Services	<i>Additional capacity exists within the reticulated stormwater system</i>	<i>Number of reported flooding events per annum in a defined area that is provided with a fully reticulated stormwater system</i>
Included	<i>Council takes into account the perspectives of all areas of the community</i>	<i>Residents are satisfied that Council considers the needs of all residents</i>

The indicators were then assessed against the selection criteria developed by the Ministry for the Environment. This part of the urban amenity trial was intended to ensure that the chosen indicators were policy relevant, measurable, analytically valid, cost effective and understandable. The results are indicated in the following table:

Indicators	Criteria				
	<i>Policy relevant</i>	<i>Measurable</i>	<i>Analytically valid</i>	<i>Cost effective</i>	<i>Understandable</i>
<i>% of people who respond that New Lynn is a good place to live</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>% of property frontage in main shopping streets developed as retail floor space</i>	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Maybe
<i>% of property frontage in main shopping streets developed with verandas</i>	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Maybe

<i>Number of injury accidents to pedestrians per annum</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>New Lynn residents consider that their neighbourhood is either 'safe-ish' or really safe</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Number of assaults in defined parks and other public places per annum</i>	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	Yes	Yes
<i>Micrograms per m³ of carbon monoxide (CO)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes
<i>Micrograms per m³ of particulate matter (PM₁₀)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes
<i>Quantity of dissolved oxygen present in water samples taken from a designated stream</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Quantity of ammonia present in water samples taken from a designated stream</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Temperature of water samples taken from a designated stream</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Daytime background noise levels within the neighbourhood</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Number of medium or high density housing units within a 1km radius of the town centre</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Maybe
<i>Number of sewage overflows within a given area per annum</i>	Maybe	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Yes
<i>Degree to which the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods are connected (through space syntax computer modelling)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe

<i>% of residential properties located within a 400m safe walk of a quality park</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes
<i>Number of reported flooding events per annum in a defined area that is provided with a fully reticulated stormwater system</i>	Maybe	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Yes
<i>Residents are satisfied that Council considers the needs of all residents</i>	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Yes

Generally, the indicators met the requirements suggested by the Ministry for the Environment.

The selection criteria used to evaluate the indicators are both helpful and relevant. To a certain extent though, it was fairly evident which of the indicators would satisfy the selection criteria without needing to utilise the matrix. The benefit of the matrix is simply that it provides a record to demonstrate that the appropriateness of the various indicators has been considered. Adoption of the selection criteria within an urban amenity “toolkit” will ensure that local authorities throughout the country will be using a consistent approach when attempting to monitor urban amenity.

Most of the indicators will be measured annually. It is important to carefully select the most useful and robust indicators from the outset of a monitoring project, in order to get the maximum analytical benefit from results obtained over time. Whilst the effectiveness of the indicators can and should be reviewed annually (even if this is just a cursory appraisal), emerging trends can only be accurately observed if the indicator is monitored consistently over time. Departure from a monitoring indicator will represent a significant setback to an urban amenity monitoring programme, as it will compromise the longitudinal nature of the monitoring.

Thresholds could be set for some of the indicators, dictating a need for action if the recorded values fell below a certain pre-determined level. Such environmental “bottom lines” would be most readily applied to the biophysical indicators such as those relating to noise, water quality, and air quality. These indicators are more quantitative than qualitative. For example, there are already thresholds in existence in respect of air quality monitoring, which suggest that action be taken if samples exhibit certain levels of carbon monoxide and particulate matter.

4.7 Urban Amenity Monitoring Since the Charrette

This urban amenity trial looks back at an event that occurred almost five years ago. In this respect it provides something of a control group amongst the four trials that are being conducted.

A significant difference between the New Lynn charrette trial and the other trials is the length of time that has elapsed since the charrette. This creates a situation where some analysis of changes that have occurred in relation to urban amenity can be undertaken. Such analysis can attempt to quantify whether the initiatives arising from the charrette have had any appreciable impact on urban amenity in New Lynn.

A number of monitoring indicators were reviewed, originating from the Council's satisfaction surveys. Several of these indicators are consistent with the suggested indicators that were generated by the urban amenity trial. Unfortunately, most of the surveys that have been undertaken since the charrette did not monitor the same indicators for more than one year. The result is an absolute figure that does not give any indication of positive or negative change over time.

However, there were two important indicators that did provide some information relating to trends. These indicators covered overall satisfaction with Waitakere City as a place to live, and perceptions of the safety of the neighbourhoods in New Lynn. The results are summarised in the following two tables, and indicate an improving perception of the City as a place to live, and a significant improvement in the percentage of New Lynn residents who consider their neighbourhood to be either "safe-ish" or very safe.

<i>Persons in the New Lynn ward who rated Waitakere City as a "good or very good" place to live</i>	
1996	76%
1997	83.8%
1998	81.2%
1999	83.4%
2000	81.8%

Safety of neighbourhood	New Lynn sample	
	December 1997 (326) %	December 1999 (101) %
Unsafe 0-3	6	8
4-5 Iffy	38	25
6-8 Safe-ish	56	60
9-10 Really safe	0	7

In both instances the trends are relatively significant in the context of Waitakere City as a whole. In respect of the indicator of Waitakere City as a good or very good place to live, the percentage increase in the New Lynn result is almost twice that of the City as a whole. The indicator relating to safety shows that New Lynn residents perceive a significant improvement in safety in the face of an overall City trend of residents finding their neighbourhoods to be less safe.

Given that there are only two reliable indicators, it would take a large assumption to suggest that these results in themselves demonstrate an improving level of urban amenity. However, they do begin to paint a picture of how useful and effective a suite of relevant indicators could be if they were carefully chosen to represent the full range of urban environmental qualities, and were monitored over time.

5.0 THE CHARRETTE AS A METHOD FOR DEFINING URBAN AMENITY AND KEY LESSONS LEARNT

This section of the report summarises the advantages and disadvantages of the charrette as a method for defining urban amenity. The process framework that was adopted for engaging the community is analysed to highlight the key lessons that were learnt from the charrette, and these lessons are implicit in the advantages and disadvantages of the process that are discussed below.

5.1 Advantages

The community engagement process that formed an integral part of the New Lynn charrette was a successful method for defining urban amenity at the local level. It is considered that the advantages of this method represent sound concepts of successful community consultation that can be adapted for use by other local authorities. The advantages are summarised in the following bullet points:

- The process is inclusive in that it specifically seeks the views of a variety of stakeholders through a series of focussed meetings that are additional to the public meetings that are held with the public generally.
- The process has a report back loop – firstly through an opportunity to collectively endorse the views that were generated at the first public meeting, and then through a presentation of the outcomes at the public meeting held on the final night of the charrette. This allows the charrette leaders to confirm with the public their understanding of the vision of urban amenity that is being sought.
- The slideshow presentation at the public meeting on the first night of the charrette encourages residents to think outside of the familiar and to picture a vision for the future of their urban environment that they may not have previously considered.

- The extensive publicity – almost to the stage of ‘hype’ – that is associated with the charrette process ensures that a high level of community participation occurs.
- The open-ended nature of the questions that are asked at the first night public meeting elicit responses that are “place-based” and specific. These responses then become very useful in reproducing the collective vision of the community onto a series of comprehensive drawings.
- The plans that are produced become a permanent record of the future urban environment that is sought by the community. The power of a plan can be such that it acts as a strong catalyst for change. Judging by the relative success of the charrette process in encouraging positive development, it would appear that people relate well to such visual images. They provide tangible outputs that are more accessible and understandable to many members of the community than a lengthy written document.
- The process has a means of drawing out the opinions of all members of the audience who attend the charrette, through the use of small groups and skilled facilitators at the opening night public meeting.
- The questions that are posed for the community at the first public meeting are designed to gain an understanding of which negative conditions in the particular urban environment need to be eliminated, in addition to merely focussing on positive elements. This provides essential information to the charrette leaders and core design team.

Where local authorities are designing a community consultation process aimed at defining and improving urban amenity, it is suggested that the positive elements of the New Lynn Charrette process - as outlined above - could be of substantial benefit if incorporated into such a process.

5.2 Disadvantages

Even the most successful processes are likely to have some elements that could sustain some improvement. The following bullet points highlight some potential disadvantages of the community engagement component of the charrette process. These issues have come to light through an original review of the charrette in the months after it occurred, and through the further consideration that has formed part of the urban amenity trial.

- The charrette is a very intensive form of urban design exercise that gathers information and generates potential solutions in a relatively short space of time. As such, the potential for issues to be overlooked is always going to exist. Subsequent urban design exercises that have been facilitated by the Council have tended to allow more time for each phase of the project.

- The short duration of the charrette, where potential urban design and amenity responses are produced within five days of the information being gathered, may lead some people to question the integrity or credibility of the results. In the case of New Lynn, this did not become a major issue although much of people's reaction will depend on how well the charette leaders are able to capture the imagination of the community.

Despite these relatively minor potential disadvantages, the charrette process provides a robust and effective framework for engaging the community when dealing with urban amenity issues. It is adaptable, and could be easily modified to fit the particular needs of different local authorities.

The framework of the process should be considered for inclusion in the Urban Amenity Good Practice Guide, which is being prepared by the Ministry for the Environment.

6.0 **RESOURCES REQUIRED TO COMPLETE THE CHARRETTE**

An important point to stress in considering the resources required to complete a project like the New Lynn charrette is that the process is adaptable enough to allow local authorities to "cut the cloth to fit the budget". As such, the resources used by Waitakere City are indicative only of what the Council wished to apply to the charrette, as opposed to what resources are actually required as a minimum.

The following table summarises the approximate resources that were used by the Council for the New Lynn charrette:

Expertise	Source	Extent of Resources Utilised <i>(Full Time Equivalents)</i>	Duration of Resources Required <i>(Days)</i>
Urban design consultant	External	6	7
Planner	Internal	4	5
Geotechnical Engineer	External	0.5	1
Perspective Artist	External	1	1
Stormwater Engineer	Internal	2	2
Traffic Engineer	Internal	2	5
Traffic Engineer	External	1	5
Community Development Advisor	Internal	4	7
Public Relations Advisor (Media)	External	1	1
Photographer	External	1	1
Landscape Architect	External	2	5

The table indicates a total person resource in excess of 120 days for the intensive few days of the charrette alone. This does not include the pre-planning undertaken by the project leader, which probably amounts to half as much time again.

However, while the process appears to be extremely resource hungry, it is somewhat distorted by the other objectives that the Council sought to achieve from the charrette. In addition to its primary function, it is noted that the Council utilised the charrette as a staff training exercise. For this reason, there were a greater number of internal and external resources applied to the charrette than would normally be the case. Some of the resources used by the Council would not be entirely necessary. For example, the perspective artist would be more of a luxury than an essential part of the process.

The process is also flexible enough to allow it to be tailored to the size of the task at hand. The New Lynn charrette was a substantial community-based urban design exercise, and many of the situations where local authorities may choose to utilise a similar process would not require the same input of resources.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual framework that has been developed during the Ministry for the Environment Urban Amenity Project would be a useful resource for local authorities throughout the country. The framework provides a valuable toolkit to assist communities to define urban amenity at a local level.

As the circumstances, characteristics and aspirations of communities will differ from place to place, there would be little value in attempting to define urban amenity at a national level. Such an exercise would result in a broad definition that had minimal relevance for local communities. However, the urban environmental qualities that have been developed are sufficiently generic to provide a checklist that is able to be applied universally by local communities to ensure that they are capturing all the elements that are required to define, manage and monitor urban amenity.

The Ministry for the Environment should finalise the conceptual framework and provide it as a resource for local authorities. The urban amenity trial has confirmed that the methodology is effective. Only minor fine-tuning may be required, along the lines suggested in this report.

APPENDIX 1

Flyer advertising the New Lynn Charette

Do you want to help design a place that's . . .

- safe
- attractive
- easy to get around - walking, driving, riding train, bus or bike ?

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
Please phone the New Lynn Service Centre ,
phone 827-1094 (8:30 am - 4:30 p.m.) or
Joanna Smith, Community Development & Projects, phone
836-8000, ext. 8539.

Come and be part of our Public Sessions

DAY 1 THURSDAY 28 MARCH
7.30pm **Public Meeting:** Introduction - choices for growth, what do they mean for you?
What do you want for New Lynn and the surrounding area?

Everyone is strongly urged to attend this first meeting as information exchanged during this meeting is essential for constructive participation in the rest of the sessions.

DAY 2 FRIDAY 29 MARCH
Today's sessions are focused meetings for key decision-makers. Selected public representatives will also be invited.

9am-noon Government/Social agencies
1.30-2pm Public Transport
2-3pm Housing, real estate, development
3.15-4.30pm Business, employment, retail
4.45-5.30pm Environment, habitat, parks, heritage

DAY 3 SATURDAY 30 MARCH
10-11am Young people's Meeting
10-2pm Design studio opens to public

DAY 4 SUNDAY 31 MARCH
2-4pm Studio opens to public

DAY 5 MONDAY 1 APRIL
7.30pm **Public Meeting - Results of the design exercise, action plan, where to next?**

A "new" New Lynn is on the line...

help plan your future ... now

Auckland's huge growth in the next decade offers us a challenge.

Waitakere City Council invites you to join in co-operative design workshops to develop the kind of communities you want to live, work and shop in.

You don't have to be an expert - just care about New Lynn and the neighbourhoods along the railway line.

All events at the New Lynn Community Centre,
Memorial Drive, New Lynn
(Opposite Lynmall South Entrance)

**MARCH 28 -
APRIL 1
1996**

What's happening?

- ✓ a 5-day co-operative design workshop called a "chârette"
- ✓ **Introductory Public meeting Thursday 28 March**
Everyone is strongly urged to attend this first meeting as information exchanged during this meeting is essential for constructive participation in the rest of the sessions.
7:30 pm; final public meeting **Monday 1 April**
7:30 pm (both at the New Lynn Community Centre - see back for complete programme and "Open House" times)
- ✓ a team of designers, traffic engineers, public transport experts, planners work with the community - residents, businesses, developers, interest groups - to develop a long term plan for New Lynn and surrounding areas
- ✓ public meetings and smaller work groups discuss their needs and wants, which are incorporated into a real plan for the area
- ✓ watch the design take shape on paper, feedback on what does and doesn't work

Who's coming?

- ✓ **YOU - people who live, work, shop or visit New Lynn**
- ✓ residents of New Lynn and all the Waitakere neighbourhoods within 1 km of the railway line
- ✓ local businesses and retailers, representatives of employment, industry and tourism
- ✓ government agencies and community/social services
- ✓ interest groups - iwi/pan-tribal, environmental, service organisations, sports clubs
- ✓ developers, real estate interests
- ✓ teams from Waitakere City Council, Auckland City Council, Auckland Regional Council, Transmetro railways

Why?

- Auckland is facing a huge growth in population - over 300,000 new residents are predicted in the next 20 years
- how will we cope with the growth? - extra demands for housing, transport, jobs, community facilities?
- urban sprawl cannot continue at its present rate - suburbs are already spilling into farmlands or special natural areas like the Waitakere ranges
- traffic congestion is a visible sign of rapid growth - widening roads can no longer solve the problem

What are the options?

- Waitakere residents want the ranges preserved and further development to focus in the urban areas - around town centres, railway stations and transport lines
- "urban villages" are where development is concentrated - town centres which are friendly, easy to walk around in, with a mixture of shops, workplaces, houses and parks, efficient enough to support public transport
- the success of railways - light rail or existing heavy rail - depend on getting riders to and from the station (preferably by walking, cycling, buses)
- a mixture of uses - such as flats above shops or offices, job opportunities close to houses - reduces the need for car trips or shortens the trips
- more people living close to the town centre reduces suburban sprawl on cherished open space
- a range of housing types meets the needs of changing households - singles, elderly, extended and single-parent families
- landscaped streets with calmed traffic flows are safer for pedestrians

What's an "urban village"?

- ◆ an "urban village" is a name for centres which provide the best of both worlds - the range of services and housing of a city, with the friendly, easy-to-get-around-in quality of a small village
- ◆ overseas the term "urban village" refers to neighbourhoods where houses and businesses are concentrated around an important centre - especially a railway station or traditional town centre
- ◆ centres that work best are easy to walk around in - lots of streets which connect to each other so pedestrians aren't trapped in cul-de-sacs or forced to walk along busy arterial roads
- ◆ a mixture of services, houses and public spaces cuts down on the need to travel far to work or shop - and creates a sense of home town and belonging
- ◆ medium density housing offers a choice of size and types for different households, and means public transport can run more efficiently
- ◆ more people living and working close to the railway station means more train riders and better service - developers are attracted to build closer to stations which in turn attract more riders.