“The Government is looking at ways to make our cities perform better by making room for growth, investing in transport to drive more efficient and liveable urban forms, and ensuring active travel that provides health benefits is a more attractive and accessible choice.”

It is generally agreed that, New Zealand urban environments are failing to meet the quality of living needs for some sectors of our society and failing to grow a sustainable ecosystem that supports a shared sense of community wellbeing in a 21st Century world.

It is also a fact that New Zealand’s population is rapidly transforming and ageing. Around the world people are living longer as birth rates decline. Demographic change is a well evidenced urban transformation. As this dramatic shift in global and local demographics escalates both public policymakers and the private sector business must reevaluate their long term strategies. It is vital that urban development is considered in the context of a 21st Century paradigm to foster inclusive wellbeing within a sustainable silver economic paradigm. Many nations have responded, with strategic policy programs in place for liveable age-friendly communities, long term care and growing a silver economy.

It is clear that Local Governments do not have the capacity, understanding or motivating tools to activate a significant breadth of impact outcomes or opportunities that arise from communities ageing rapidly over the next ten years and beyond. Nor are they challenging the institutional segregation of our Elders into retirement reservations which profit from limiting lifetime community contribution and the transfer of family wealth. As a nation we have not undertaken the restructuring required nor heeded the global examples of moving to age-friendly housing, transport and business environments. We do have a secure and sustainable income platform which is an excellent basis for a basic level of social stability.

I commend the Ministry to stimulate a wider conversation on what a successful smart city of tomorrow will look like, what amenity is desirable when there are more old than young, and where people will live, work, learn, play and connect in communities that care. Where successful ageing is possible.

However, the fiscal challenge lies in unplanned, unaffordable elder health, social and long term elder care. This is because our urban, transport and business environment planners have not understood, adapted and innovated the structural change vital to maximising wellbeing and the silver opportunity that comes with an engaged 100 year life. We cannot afford to ignore the imperative for building community social capital and capacity for independence, by adopting technological innovation and urban planning principles that enable connectivity and productivity throughout the life-course.

Acknowledging the many consultation complexities, the focus of this submission is to further highlight the impact of, and advantage potential in harnessing three major global megatrends: climate change, population-ageing, fourth industrial revolution, in the context of the demographic transformation for future urban development strategies aligned to the new National Policy Statement on Urban Development.

Examples of Urban Development Actions to enhance Liveability in New Zealand
Perhaps there are simple sustainable solutions that enhance environments for future generations. These actions support a recognition of the impact of three major global megatrends that influence the future of the way we live, work, play, learn and care.

1 CLIMATE CHANGE  
2 POPULATION-AGEING  
3 FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

CLIMATE CHANGE  
CARBON REDUCTION

◊ PLANT ONE TREE IN A COMMUNITY PARK FOR EVERY HOUSE BUILT  

Enable healthy active environments

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

◊ NO MORE RETIREMENT VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS  
◊ DESIGN FOR CONNECTED CARING COMMUNITIES  

Enable a 100 year life of purpose and meaning.

SMART CITY MOBILITY

◊ URGENTLY ACT TO ACHIEVE ACCESSIBLE SAFE, CLEAN,SHARED AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY  

Enable transformation of public transport provision

Despite New Zealand being a slow responder to the potential linkage of the key global megatrends, there is hope on the horizon given future outcomes from Government efforts to mobilise social responsibility for greater public good, improved well-being, and a smart sustainable future through the Living Standards Framework.

The NPS-UD will ensure we develop well-functioning, inclusive and better connected cities that reflect the diversity of their current and future communities.
International responses to the impact of the demographic transformation currently example the integration of policy platforms to provide for lifelong learning, active ageing and digitilisation as a core aspect of inclusion to support longevity and social and economic sustainability. New Zealand is woefully backward in developing a longevity dividend discourse in the urban planning field. It is called ageism.

In my region of the Western Bay of Plenty, there is a 232% increase in the number of Elders over 75 years in the next twenty years. Are we prepared?

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development consultation document contains worthy aspirations. A key urban planning challenge, given the new demographic realities, requires a social transformation policy focus to meet tomorrows demand for inclusive stability. It is not a climate of ‘growth as business as usual’, but one of radical rethink, and co-design because ageing and longevity is a new phenomenon that requires more attention to accessible community social infrastructure.

Further the basic assumptions on ‘growth’ expressed in the document, suggest that a growth agenda that gobbles up more land is inevitable and somewhat desirable. Not so, in a global culture of declining birthrates, climate change fear and food poverty. Population growth in cities is, as in most parts of the world, a shift from rural environments and a shift “massaged” by inward migration, both of which are open to the influence of socio-political climates.

New Zealand does not have an appetite that supports massive immigration, even to solve growing workforce shortages, when digitalization is rapidly solving many challenges created by a diminishing workforce. It appears that there are two shifts occurring. A shift from highly congested “unhealthy” city environments is now clearly evident, as people seek a healthier pace of regional life in which to raise a family and particularly to manage and enjoy later life. Equally there is a shift by old and young to enjoy quality high density city environments that enable affordable access to amenities, transport, work, health care and culture. In addition, there is an undeniable context where elders state that they wish to live in their own homes as long as possible.

People appreciate that increased urbanization on valuable soils creates poverty, isolation and emissions but find it difficult to engage in meaningful policy that achieves sustainability and capital investment.

◊ Are New Zealanders saying, we don’t like the scale and impact of rapid poorly managed growth?

◊ Does the data show that we have social ills exacerbated by unsustainable practices that benefit a few and lack meaningful engagement of those who are busy trying to keep home and family together?

◊ Has growth diminished their democracy and the ecosystem in which they live?

◊ Young and old are worried about the future of housing, work, mobility, affordability of daily living, income security and the demands of local government in a climate of uncertainty and rapid environmental degradation over which they experience a lack power? Is sustainability a better term than growth?

◊ How well does a “growth” assumption “fit” or prepare New Zealand for tomorrows climate change, population ageing and utilize the Fourth Industrial Revolution? Especially given the downturn economic impact of a rapidly ageing China and the Asia Pacific region on New Zealand and the global economy. Leading global monetary institutions are clear about much slower “growth.”

The truth is we have a “dirty little secret” in a land of milk and honey.
The truth is we are not prepared. We lack leadership on the big issues at a local level.

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1 Please note that MSD evidence shows that National Superannuation is affordable and that the Silver Economy produced $43 billion in 2016, in excess of the $12 billion Govt cost of Superannuation. The silver economy global figure of $15 Trillion by 2020 estimate is stated by World Economic Forum, OECD, IMF, Bank of America.
We have not activated lifelong education and innovation to harness the transformative potential of the three global megatrends, climate change, population ageing and longevity, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution to enable sustainability, or grow a silver economy in liveable age-friendly communities.

We New Zealanders need to get passionate about the future, structural reform and our role in it.

The consultation summary suggests that we need room for growth up and out. The reality is we will not have milk and honey if we continue to cover productive land in concrete and marginalize the poor in the outer suburbs without access to adequate social infrastructure and essential services. It is a social and economic disaster that we enable the segregation of our Elders in ‘retired’ reservations, isolating our communities from their wisdom and valuable social and economic contribution.

Given the capacity and influence of the megatrends and our urban planning imperative, efforts to enable processes that support the redevelopment of sustainable urban environments to Smart City capacity is urgent.

I commend that the redevelopment of existing outdated urban environments should be given higher policy priority and focus than investment in greenfield development.

It is an exciting opportunity for connecting the megatrend dots. For integrating ‘right size’ affordable housing typologies, public transport, community green space and waste management that provide for diversity and life stage, universal design, urban pocket park spaces for ‘the tui to sing’, new digital generational work opportunities and community care in a shared on-demand autonomous travel Smart City environment.

I commend that the final report creates a new narrative to inspire and lead a course of action for structural change, to retool our frameworks for enhancing urban environments so that longevity can have purpose and meaning.

This submission is deliberately brief, despite having much to share. I have been active in wider education health and urban planning issues, including engagement in SmartGrowth planning process in the Western Bay of Plenty. As a social scientist specializing in social and political gerontology research and advocacy, I have presented papers on responding to the demographic transformation, and developing age-friendly environments, at international forums and New Zealand conferences. I chair a SmartGrowth Social Sector Forum, have initiated Tauranga City Age-Friendly City community processes, organized Symposia, and undertaken a number of research projects related to spatial planning, age-friendly cities, population-ageing and Bay of Plenty silver Economy for SmartGrowth, including a recent public transportation planning project for ageing communities for the Bay of Plenty Regional Council.

I am keen to discuss the issues raised in this brief paper should the opportunity arise.

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