Creating great places to Live + Work + Play

LIVABLE URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: process, strategy, action
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LIVABLE URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: process, strategy, action
A great place to live, work and play

The Ministry for the Environment has created this guide to provide a clear process for helping to create liveable urban environments. A liveable urban environment is a place that is good to live, work and play – a place that meets the needs and expectations of the people who live there. Councils can help to create these environments by developing well-planned and coordinated strategies to achieve the things the community wants.

This guide presents a simple five-stage process for a successful strategy:

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3. Design your strategy ............................................................... 21
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5. Act on your results! ............................................................... 33
Throughout each stage you’ll find checklists, review lists, and icons that point you to useful resources on the CD Rom at the back of this guide or the website. Here’s how to use them.

Follow the icon to the templates you can use at specific points of the process, and to resources like sample questionnaires for consultation.

Follow the icon for information sheets about technical terms in this guide. For instance, the phrase ‘liveable urban environment’, along with other terms in this guide, has a specific and carefully developed meaning. The icon will take you to an explanation of all these terms.

Follow the icon for background information about the Urban Amenity Project and the cross-sectoral group that did a lot of the work for this guide.

Follow the icon for detail on the council case studies, and project trials that describe how councils have used different stages of the process.

Within the guide itself:
- the checklists highlight important information
- the review lists remind you to review your work as you go
- the summaries of case studies and project trials highlight different parts of the process in action. The icon will take you to more information about each one.

A liveable urban environment is a place that is good to live, work and play – a place that meets the needs and expectations of the people who live there.
A strategy draws together things that council and the community can do to help create a liveable urban environment. It clearly states what council will do, what the community can do, and who will be responsible for each activity.

Designing a strategy, then, is at the centre of this guide – stage three. But the stages before and after it are of equal importance. You need to do the groundwork and learn from the community before you start to design your strategy. And, once your strategy is in place, you need to keep measuring its success, and making changes when necessary.

You need to do the groundwork and learn from the community before you start to design your strategy.
**Do the groundwork**

Think about what you want to achieve, the urban environment you’re working with, and the community that lives there.

**Learn what the community wants**

Learn what the community likes about its urban environment, what it wants to change, and what it expects from council.

**Design a strategy**

Design a coordinated strategy to help create a liveable urban environment, based on what you’ve learned during consultation.

**Measure the success of your strategy**

Develop a monitoring programme that will tell you whether your strategy is working.

**Take action on your results**

Use the information you get from monitoring – change your strategy if you need to.

These five stages are based on the ten-step framework developed by the Urban Amenity Project.
Some groundwork is essential before you start to consult the community, or to design a strategy to help create a liveable urban environment. Think about:

- what you want to achieve
- the urban environment you’ll work with
- the kind of community that lives there.

Do the groundwork first
Whether you call your strategy a ‘Plan’, a ‘Programme’, a ‘Project’, or indeed a ‘Strategy’, you need to identify what you want to achieve. This might be very broad – a better town centre – or it might be very specific – better night-time safety in the Business One Zone.

The Urban Amenity Project developed this broad objective for an urban amenity strategy: liveable built environments in which people live, work, play, and visit. This objective may be right for you, or you may develop one that is more specific. The level of detail can vary greatly, as these examples from case studies show.

1. Christchurch City Council and Housing New Zealand developed a Community Renewal Programme with members of the community. It aimed to ‘enhance Aranui as a good place to live’.

2. Palmerston North City Council developed an Assessment Project that aimed to determine the effectiveness and suitability of the package of monitors that are used to address the adverse effects on amenity from non-residential development in a defined Inner Business Zone.

Checklist
To run an effective consultation exercise:
■ decide who to talk to, and what you need to learn
■ choose the best consultation method for methods for the community
■ create a plan that covers all the essentials.
What urban environment will you work with?

Think about the size and characteristics of the urban environment you’ll work with.

- Is it a city, a town, a suburb, or a specific street? Identify the boundaries - draw lines on a map.
- Are you working with different types of environment in one area? For example, Whakarewarewa and Ohinemutu are villages within Rotorua city.
- What's significant about the environment? Think about the distinctive landforms, natural hazards, planned zoning changes, or historical connections.
- Is the environment residential, commercial, or a mixture of both?

Be flexible. The boundaries or significant features of the environment may change as you work through the process.
What kind of community will you work with?

The last ‘groundwork’ step is to learn about the community living in the urban environment – the people you will consult with. The timing, method, and venue for your consultation will depend on the age, ethnicity, literacy, and income levels within the community.

Use Census data, local newspapers and radio, the local library, and the knowledge of community groups, councillors, and council staff to learn about the make up of the community.

Don’t rely on old information – communities change over time. Make sure you have up-to-date information on the community.

Groundwork review

- Are you clear on what you want to achieve – even if it’s very broad?
- Have you clearly defined the urban environment you’ll work with?
- Have you learned enough about the community to create a successful consultation exercise?
- How will your work fit in with other council projects? Is it possibly part of a bigger project?
Creating liveable urban environments – places that are great to live, work, and play – starts with the community. A consultation process that’s well planned, well carried out, and the right style for the community, will let you learn what people value, what things they want changed, and what they want council to manage. Remember that consultation without action is meaningless. Make sure you use the information you get, and let the community know how you’ll use it.

Checklist

To run an effective consultation exercise:
- decide who to talk to, and what you need to learn
- choose the best consultation method (or methods) for the community
- create a plan that covers all the essentials.
Who should you talk to?  
What do you need to learn?

Be as clear as you can, right now, about why you’re consulting and who you want to consult with.

- **Why** are you consulting – what’s your purpose? Do you want information about specific parts of the urban environment? If so, which ones? Or do you want broader information on whatever the community thinks is important?

- **What** information do you want – and how much? Do other council units want to use it for other projects? Are there any local issues, like long-running zoning or parking disputes that might affect the questions you ask?

- **Who** do you want to involve from council and the community? What’s the best way of getting them involved – invitation, advertising, public notices? Do you want to consult with a wide cross-section of people, or with interest groups only? It all depends on your purpose.

When you choose your consultation method, be aware of the features (age, ethnicity, literacy levels, and so on) of the community you’ll be consulting with.

**Should you include people from outside the urban environment?**  
For example, you may need to include people who have made a submission to an annual plan.
Choose the right way to consult

There are almost as many ways to consult as there are people to consult with. Councils around New Zealand and overseas use a huge range of creative and effective consultation methods.

This guide describes the consultation methods used by the councils involved in the case studies and project trials for the Urban Amenity Project. They are:

- list of qualities: asking people to say how their environment fits qualities like ‘safety’ or ‘sense of place’
- three questions: asking people what they do and don’t like about their environment, and what they’d like to change
- public satisfaction surveys: asking people specific questions about their urban environment
- focus group workshops: getting people together for questions and discussion
- hui: holding marae-based consultation to learn Maori views on their urban environment
- charette: running an extended, interactive workshop about creating a good urban environment
- participatory appraisal: encouraging people to use visual feedback, like maps and photographs.

Consultation doesn’t have to be expensive or drawn-out. Follow the links in this section to resources you can use to help create your own cost-effective surveys and questionnaires.

Many of these consultation methods work well together. You might, for example:

- distribute a three questions flier and hold a focus group workshop to discuss its results
- use the list of qualities during a charette or a hui
- hold a participatory appraisal exercise to establish the right questions for a survey.

Checklist

Whatever method or methods you use, make sure that:

- people know why you’re consulting them, and what the information will be used for
- you are using the methods that fit the community
- you are flexible, and can adapt your methods if you need to
- your consultation plan covers all the essentials to make consultation a success.
Always ask participants how they want you to measure the improvements and changes they want. If they tell you they want a ‘beautiful city’, for example, how do they want you to measure whether that’s been achieved?

List of qualities, three questions, public satisfaction surveys
You can use these three consultation methods on their own, or as part of a bigger exercise.

List of qualities involves people describing how well their environment does (or doesn’t) achieve a set of qualities. This method is useful for broadly identifying what people do and don’t value in their environment.

The standard qualities and related questions you can use are:
- **Accessible**: how easy is to get around, to drive, walk, and cycle?
- **Choice**: are there varied lifestyle and work options?
- **Comfortable**: is the environment comfortable?
- **Easily understood**: can you find your way around?
- **Flexible**: is there potential for change? Does the environment meet its purpose?
- **Healthy environment**: is the environment healthy and pleasant?
- **Safe**: do you feel safe and secure?
- **Sense of place**: what gives the place its personality? Does it have a good feeling?

Use these qualities as a starting point, and add to or redefine them as appropriate.

Checklist
If you use the list of qualities:
- use plain language
- add to the qualities if you need to.

CD and web reference material
- Using the standard list of qualities
- Using the qualities in a survey
- Using the qualities to assess the District Plan

Learn what the community wants...
If you use the list of qualities, three questions, or public satisfaction survey, make sure your language is clear. Most people don’t know council jargon – they’ll misunderstand or ignore very detailed, technical questions.

Three questions involves asking people, in telephone, questionnaire, or face-to-face surveys, these three open-ended questions:
- What do you like about (place)?
- What don’t you like about (place)?
- What would you like to change about (place)?

This consultation method is useful for getting wide-ranging information from the community.

Waimakariri District Council used the three questions in a questionnaire to all residents in the district’s four main towns and small settlements. The Council found that the three questions:
- prompted information on a wide range of matters
- let people ‘talk’ directly to the Council
- was cost-effective
- was easy to repeat.

In a follow-up focus group, the Council learned that the language used had to be absolutely jargon-free – the phrase ‘urban amenity’, for example, meant nothing to the participants!

Checklist
- use plain language
- pre-test the questionnaires
- use the right sample size – you need a cross-section that is small enough to follow up.

CD and web reference material
- Three questions flier
- Case study: Waimakariri
Public satisfaction surveys ask people specific questions about their satisfaction with council services and facilities. They're useful for identifying significant issues for the community.

Tasman District Council posted a satisfaction survey to every 10th person in the telephone directory. Council staff found that using the survey was time and cost-effective, and that the information was easy to code and analyse. The survey was very successful in identifying what residents were highly satisfied with, and what most concerned them – such as levels of residential development. The Council plans to repeat the survey in five years.

Think about what questions you could ask again in 3-5 years to monitor the success of your actions. Feed these into your monitoring programme.

Checklist
- use plain language
- offer a prize – it greatly increases the response rate!
- pre-test the survey
- release the survey just after a new edition of the telephone directory
- hand deliver the surveys if possible in areas of low telephone ownership

CD and web reference material
- Satisfaction survey
- Case study: Tasman
Focus group workshops, hui, charrettes, participatory appraisal

These four consultation methods are public events. They often work together; a charrette, for example, might begin with a focus group workshop. You can also use the list of qualities, three questions, and surveys at one of these events.

Focus group workshops bring people together in small groups to answer questions and talk about their environment. Workshops can be open to any member of the community, or just for specific groups. They’re an excellent way to stimulate ideas, debate, and creativity, and give people a strong sense of ownership of the process.

Palmerston North City Council used the list of qualities in a focus group workshop as the first part of a process to create an Urban Design Strategy. They found that using a focus group was an excellent way to stimulate debate and encourage a design vision for the city.

Checklist
- send background information to participants beforehand
- use lots of visual imagery (slides, etc)
- work with an urban design professional
- use a structured, rather than an open, format
- be aware that some participants might want to be paid for their time

CD and web reference material
- Resources to engage the community
- Project trial: Palmerston North
A hui is the best way to learn about Maori views on their urban environment. A hui helps to build relationships, strengthen communication, and encourage an iwi perspective.

Rotorua District Council held a marae hui to demonstrate its commitment to hearing the opinions of Maori about urban amenity. Many Maori had said they would not attend meetings in the Council’s public meeting hall. The hui provided a forum where Maori felt comfortable participating, and opened the door for further meetings to be held on a marae.

To organise the hui, Council staff first met the marae chairman. The chairman then invited people from four marae to attend, and the hui was advertised in local papers. A week before the hui, staff discussed protocols and procedures with the chairman.

Hui on a marae have a long lead-in and preparation time, and you must know the protocol.
A charette is an extended workshop for the community to discuss and record its vision for the future. It can last anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks, and aims to design an urban environment that matches the community’s vision.

Waitakere City Council’s ‘New Lynn charette’ ran for five consecutive days. The opening night consisted of a slideshow presentation on sustainable development, followed by the 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?

In the following days, design teams produced plans for areas of the city centre, basing their work on the outcome of the opening night. The completed designs were shown as slides on the final night of the charette. The community saw its vision translated into a tangible product.

The organisers of the charette made sure they had highly-skilled urban planners and designers involved, and that they targeted particular groups to contribute.

Checklist
If you hold a charette:
- advertise it widely
- include urban designers and planners, and skilled facilitators
- hold extra meetings if necessary, to get the views of people not at the first public meeting
- keep feeding back the results of the charette to the participants, and make the design phase open to the public
- create a plan that becomes a permanent record of the community’s vision.

CD and web reference material
Project trial: Waitakere
Participatory appraisal uses visual aids, like maps and photographs, to encourage the community to identify the positives and negatives about their environment. It can be used in public meetings, and in venues like schools, bowling clubs, and downtown streets. It includes people who may not participate in more formal consultation processes.

Rotorua District Council used participatory appraisal to encourage people to record their views on Ngongotaha. At a range of venues and events, people were encouraged to put coloured Post-Its on a map of the area to indicate things they liked, things they didn’t like, and things they’d like to change. At a final public meeting, people had the opportunity to comment on all the information gathered. The Council was able to create a list of projects to work on immediately.

Other techniques you can use for participatory appraisal are: photographic records, SpeakOut, and urban modelling.

Photographic records involves participants being given a disposable camera and photographing what they do and don’t like about their environment.

SpeakOut events give people the change to speak while the professionals and council staff listen.

Urban modelling gives participants the chance to construct their own ideal neighbourhood.

CD and web reference material
- Using participatory appraisal methods
- Project trial: Rotorua

Checklist
If you use participatory appraisal:
- be creative about the techniques you use, and make sure they’re right for the community
- use qualified trainers and facilitators
- train council staff as facilitators for future projects
- use a range of venues and advertise each one widely.
Decide the time, the place, the details

Once you’ve decided what you want to achieve, who you’ll involve, and the consultation method or methods you’ll use, you need to do the ‘nuts and bolts’ planning.

Think about the right venue, the timing, materials, protocol, and hospitality. Even when you don’t need a venue, you need to plan the publicity, timing, and resources for the exercise.

Use whatever form of publicity will get the best response. Print and radio advertising, press releases, public notices, fliers (posted or handed out on the street), and posters are all effective. If you need to send out background information, do that as part of the publicity.

Plan your timing for the consultation itself and for the follow-up. What is the right time of day or night for a meeting? When is the best time to hold it? Avoid clashes with major sports, political, or cultural events. Remember that some methods, like hui or charrettes, need a lead in time of several months. Decide on a timeframe for when you’ll gather your results and give feedback.

The right venue (or venues) can make or break a consultation event. What is right for the community – a church hall, sports club, council chamber, marae, or community centre? Is the venue the right size, near transport routes, and accessible to everyone? Does it have good acoustics and layout, and a kitchen and toilets?

Checklist
To make consultation a success:

- focus on your purpose and people
- use whatever works best for the community
- plan for the time and resources you’ll need
- follow consultation with action.
Make sure you’ve got all the **materials** you need (pens, paper, blu-tak, Post-Its, whiteboard, overhead projector). Make sure you have someone appointed to **record** workshop or hui proceedings (in te reo if appropriate).

Make sure you use the right **protocol** and **hospitality**. Who will welcome people to the venue? Will you need to include a karakia or waiata? Who is the best ‘host’? What refreshments will you provide, and at what times?

The table below is a broad guide to the resources and amount of planning required for each consultation method.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of qualities</td>
<td>Council staff</td>
<td>Least of all the methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three questions</td>
<td>Council staff</td>
<td>Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public satisfaction surveys</td>
<td>External facilitator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Council staff</td>
<td>Extensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marae hui</td>
<td>Marae chairman</td>
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<td>Minute taker fluent in te reo</td>
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<td>Charette</td>
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<td>Design professionals</td>
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<td>External facilitators</td>
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<td></td>
<td>External trainers and facilitators</td>
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**Consultation review**

- Did the approach you used for consultation work well? (Think about methods, venue, timing, protocol, etc.)
- Were the right people involved?
- What lessons did you learn about the process?
- How could you do things differently?
- What were the positives – how did consultation help you identify the things the community values?
- Did you learn how people want you to measure the outcomes?