

## **Auckland City Centre Resident's Group**

Submission to Auckland Council on the National Policy Statement on Urban Development

### **Background**

NZ has a long recognised shortfall in appropriate housing.

This situation has been decades in the making with an outcome of high predictability.

NZ lost a very high proportion of males during both WW1 and WW11.

After WW11, Councils were offered 3% loans to build pensioner housing units for the numerous widows who had lost husbands/sons during these wars.

The need for these houses, and the state houses in hundreds of small villages across NZ fell rapidly as widows died, mills closed and building remote railways and roads was largely completed.

From that point there has been a blind paralysis from various governments around changes in employing industries, urban drift to match those changes, very active immigration and little new housing being built where it was needed.

The outcome of the above is evident today where NZ is experiencing a major employment and housing crisis resulting in somewhat panicked legislative changes designed to remedy 50 years of hand sitting inertia.

It is worth noting, that the RMA, when it went to consultation prior to the 1977 Act, was predicated on National Policy Statements to provide as much clarity as possible for those implementing the Act. Sadly, most of those NPS's were never completed, thus allowing this Act to become the most litigious in the country and it is this that has impacted so negatively on housing development.

Had the NPSUB been prepared back in the late '70/early 80's we would likely have enough houses, in the right places, for everyone. It is a national embarrassment that the lack of political will from all subsequent governments, together with continual litigation, has prevented New Zealand from providing the most essential of all human needs - a safe, warm dry home to live in.

### **Resource Management Act 1991**

Of specific relevance to the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 is the purpose and Interpretation of the RMA –

#### **Purpose**

(1) The purpose of this Act is to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources.

(2) In this Act, **sustainable management** means managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being and for their health and safety while—

(a) sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and

(b) safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and

(c) avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.

The definition of **environment** in the RMA includes —

- (a) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; and
- (b) all natural and physical resources; and
- (c) amenity values ( as defined in the RMA - **amenity values** means those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes.
- (d) the social, economic, aesthetic, and cultural conditions which affect the matters stated in paragraphs (a) to (c) or which are affected by those matters.

CCRG would expect that the purpose and interpretations of the RMA will have the same meanings in any related National Policy Statement.

### **National Policy Statement on Urban Development.**

Overall this is a good first start albeit, in its current form, there are a lot of very confusing statements and intentions. The major issue for city centre residents, is that the cost of successive government failures is being blamed on Local Government, and residents of city centres are now being asked to accept lower environmental standards (i.e. those defined in the RMA) in order for more houses to be developed – see Policy 3.

CCRG consider that this is neither constructive nor necessary.

We need to note that New Zealand now has a population density of just 18 people per square kilometre whereas Auckland’s is 1,210 persons and in our city centre it is already 42,000! There is no legislation that suggests some citizens of New Zealand have more rights to a liveable environment than others. The logic of connecting city centres with efficient public transport requires high density buildings in the closest suburbs to city centres as occurs in almost every city in the world. That often negates the need for unrestricted heights in city centres thus ensuring a better living environment for all residents.

There is in fact, every indication that a large number of people would be happy to live outside of our city centres and travel only when they needed to. However, that is not possible without a wider spread of housing density and when our current public transport system is treated as a second class citizen compared to private vehicles.

For decades, billions have been spent every year in NZ building more roads, which of course allows even more vehicles to be imported and to use those roads (see attached vehicle stats). Public transport, on the other hand, is a very poor second cousin evidenced by the recent negative feedback related to a proposed new parking strategy from Auckland Transport that is designed to ensure dedicated bus routes make public transport more reliable.

There is a strong, albeit covert suggestion in the NPSUD, that forcing unrestricted high density city centre housing development is a deliberate compromise for our inability to build efficient, reliable and affordable public transport systems. These factors, in turn, are heavily dependent on all properties, except heritage listed properties as per Heritage NZ guidelines, in all suburbs surrounding our city centres, being permitted to build to heights ranging from three to six stories. That level of housing intensity is what will ensure a safe, efficient and affordable public transport system for Auckland.

Experience from the recent two years of Covid outbreaks, teaches us that there are key elements of urban planning that are essential aspects of the environment described in the RMA. These are -

- Ample clean air
- Parks and open spaces within walking distance of homes for safe exercise, recreation, and social gatherings such as shared picnics.

- Homes with high quality natural ventilation.
- Access to sunlight – both interior via windows and/or exterior via balconies
- Within walking distance of most essential items – medical, groceries, home office supplies
- Essential services support – plumbers/electricians/telephone/internet/home delivery, etc.
- Flexibility of work places and structures that support liveability.
- Quality, reliable, affordable, clean and safe public transport.

These elements are not ‘nice to haves’ but ‘environmental essentials’ and there is every reason to plan for these being a larger requirement of our lives than what has been the case over the past fifty years. On this basis CCRG would expect that a “well-functioning urban environment’ incorporates these points as a minimum (see Policy 3 NPSUD “In relation to tier 1 urban environments.....etc”)

In addition, we would expect that the Auckland City Centre Master Plan (CCMP), which implements the compulsory Auckland Plan for this specific area, would have precedence in terms of defining relevant aspects of what “as much development capacity as possible” means for our city centre i.e. what is necessary and reasonable to ensure the Auckland Plan Outcomes are achieved.

Looking further at Policy 3 (a) we therefore suggest that ‘as much development capacity as possible’ is measured by the purpose of the RMA, the RMA environmental definitions as applied to a specific area, the Outcomes of the Auckland Plan and the NPSUD definition of a ‘well-functioning urban environment’.

None of these suggest that a ‘free for all/build anything you want’ approach will achieve any of the expected outcomes of either the RMA or the NPSUD.

Qualifying matters apply when giving effect to a NPS and CCRG would suggest that ‘giving effect’, in relation to the NPSUD, needs to be interpreted as achieving the eight Objectives of the NPSUD.

On that basis, CCRG would expect Auckland Council to consider every Resource/Building consent in the city centre against a set of criteria that matched these key planning documents and for each particular development site. It is not feasible to expect that one rule for an entire city centre area can be applied to every site as though each site were identical.

In terms of implementing Policy 3(a) of the NPSUD we would therefore offer the following suggestions –

1. Sustainability and liveability, as encapsulated in the RMA definition of environment, needs to drive NPSUD implementation of policy.
2. Fewer, simpler more flexible controls that can be targeted to an individual site as/if required.
3. Protecting sunlight, daylight to all city centre open spaces.
4. Protecting city centre amenity (as defined in the RMA) and retaining the ‘human scale’ of streets i.e. ‘people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes’.
5. Ensure that tall buildings maximise sunlight, daylight and ventilation to enable all people and communities to provide for their social wellbeing, health and safety now and into the future.
6. Protecting local and regional views and the relationship between the city centre and the Waitemata Harbour
7. Protect the historic heritage of the city centre and the outcomes already achieved by existing precincts that enable all people and their communities to provide for their economic and cultural wellbeing.
8. Ensuring city centre development around the Outcomes and Transitional Moves identified in the Auckland Plan with a major focus on mana whenua engagement and Maori Outcomes.
9. Requiring active climate change initiatives, such as the city centre Zero Emissions Area, in all city centre resource and building consents.

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