

whangarei 20/20 plus
introduction

01

Introduction



CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Whangarei is the regional centre for Northland, a growing region which has an extensive coastline. It has a broadening economic base and benefits from being relatively close to New Zealand's largest city Auckland.

The Whangarei district has a population of 68,000 (2001) and a large regional catchment. The city has an extensive water-oriented edge and dramatic bush clad mountain backdrop, which creates an attractive setting to the development of the city centre. The development of the town basin waterfront area in the early 1990's indicated Whangarei's potential as a vibrant centre and visitor destination.

Even though the current development of Whangarei city centre is hampered by a number of classic urban planning issues, such as traffic congestion, lack of an after-hours lifestyle and poor coordination between development projects, there is tremendous opportunity to link the city to nearby landscape attractions, develop key facilities in-town and broadly evolve Whangarei as a national attraction for business and visitors.

To orientate the direction of the growth of Whangarei's city centre for the coming 20-30 years, this study aims to provide an integrated conceptual framework as a guideline to development. The process is based on input and feedback from recent studies, aligns with government protocol and adheres to international best practice models. Fundamentally a design approach has been taken, selecting from diverse information and testing options to develop specific conceptual proposals.

The document is essentially a discussion that consists of five sections. These proceed from analysis, development of a concept framework plan, precinct plans, town basin concept options and a forward program. The Whangarei city centre (also referred to in this document as the CBD) is reviewed at a larger scale than previous studies in order to capture opportunities within a broader context.

From analysis, the study proposes a concept framework plan, which is based on the identification of precincts and possible catalyst projects. As an example of a design-led development process within the proposed framework, several design options are proposed for the extensions to the Town Basin which can range from open space to built-out possibilities.

The concept framework does not aim to be self-conclusive. It is to be flexible to allow design lead process for individual developments while accommodating changes overtime.

In the face of other urban developments trends such as peripheral shopping malls, the city of Whangarei is in a great position as it possesses strong elements (physical, social and economic) which can be coordinated and developed together to form an outstanding and sustainable city.



CBD location map



City view from Parihaka looking south

DESIGN LED PROCESS

The appointed consultant team brought together the original authors of the 20/20 report (1996); urban designers Isthmus Group and the Traffic Design Group, and added local landscape architects Littoralis. Working intensively with Council, the team sought to; address fundamental issues, draw on wealth of recent material and information, develop a series of achievable and imaginative options which include short term "runs on the board", together with longer term concepts.

From the outset it was agreed that the project would not be successful by focusing on streetscape enhancements alone. Therefore an integrated planning of broader elements such as land use, open space provision and urban form would necessarily be involved. The team developed a creative process of working concurrently on a series of tasks and workshopping ideas, using benchmarks and developing rough concepts at the outset for further discussion and ongoing refinement.

To get the project started a number of assumptions were stated such as the requirement for more mix of land use to minimise additional expensive roading work and to provide a pedestrian orientated centre. The key amongst these, was the willingness of Council to pro-actively work to facilitate the broader development of the CBD.

A 'powerpoint' presentation became a central feature of the process providing a series of sketches which were refined and added to on a frequent basis. This created a "live" sense to the project and engendered an engaging discussion with a broad range of contributors.

INITIAL VISION WORKSHOP

In order to kick start the program a vision workshop was held at the start of the process with a small group of Councillors, Council officers and representatives of commerce and community groups. Across the meeting there was a clear consensus that the big issue was the sense that the CBD suffered from the "doughnut phenomenon" - the city as an empty centre.

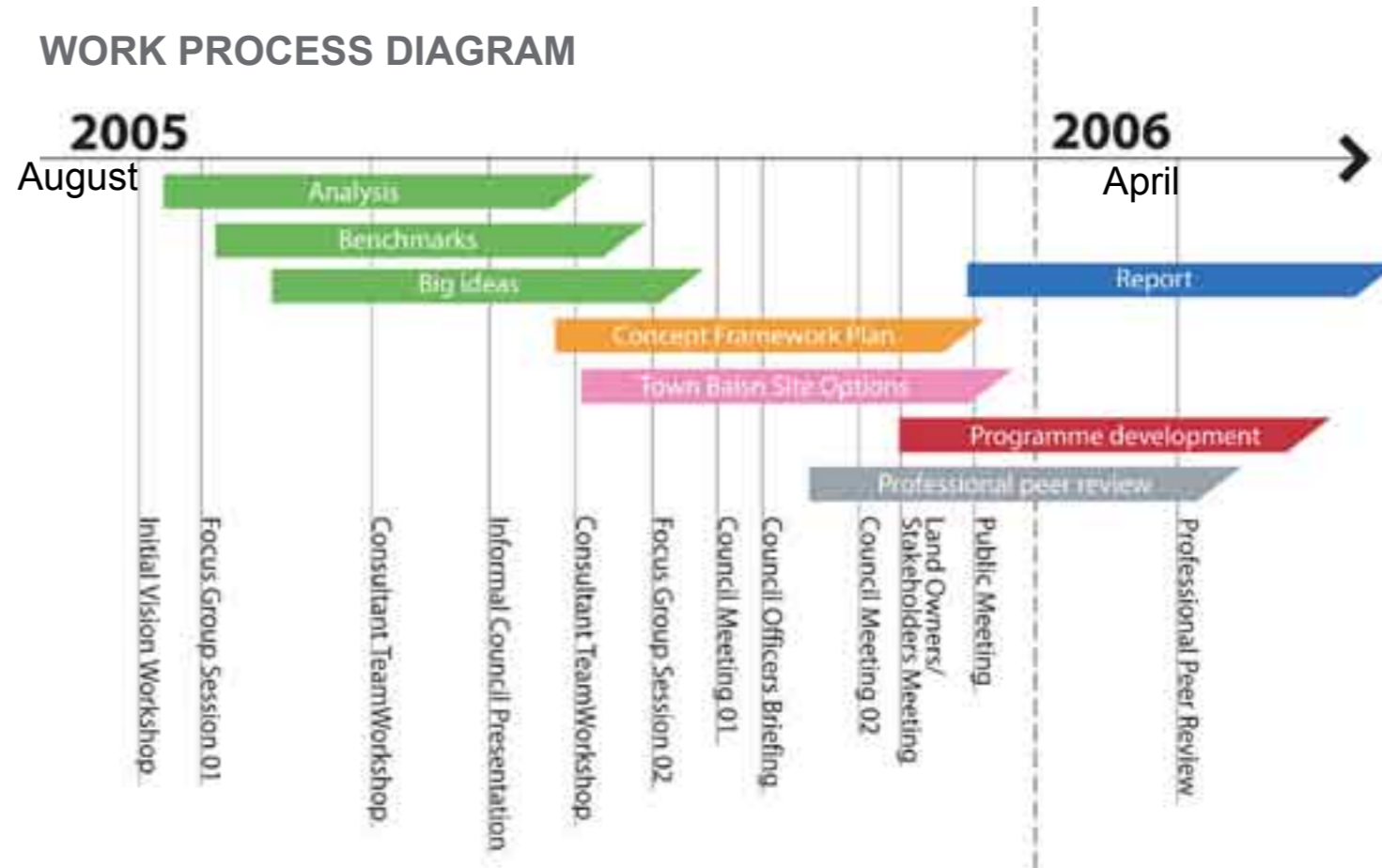
AGREED OBJECTIVES

- More green space
- Better and measurable quality of life for all
- Champion the arts and the landscape setting as forest clad hills and stunning harbour
- Desire to create a globally outstanding city
- Emphasis on being the regional centre for Northland
- Develop with broader consultation over a wider area

VISION STATEMENT

A series of initial vision statements have been generated to encapsulate the goals of the project and link it to earlier work. The following draft vision statement is intended to be the basis for further development with wider consultation.

WORK PROCESS DIAGRAM



VISION STATEMENT

Whangarei 20/20 Plus - "Living the Vision"

With a network of regional destinations, colourful precincts, a pedestrian structured city centre laced with tropical green and edged by harbour waters, brings diverse people together to express the art of creating an ultimate living environment.



Initial Vision Workshop

EXISTING WORK AND POLICY REVIEW - GAPS ANALYSIS

There have been a number of studies conducted over the last 15 years address various aspects of the city centre. Key studies include:

- Whangarei CBD 20/20 Report 1996
- Town Basin Variation 2000
- Urban Growth Strategy 2004

Each of these investigations has involved a process of public consultation and the feedback from that community input has provided much of the foundation for this update of the 20/20 strategy. Public response to the 2004 Urban Growth Strategy has been of particular value, shaping the 20/20 approach to linkages between the CBD and the harbour, other spatial connections between precincts, enhancing pedestrian environments, better provision of public transport, roading challenges, parking provision and optimizing reserve spaces – including riparian opportunities.

Despite the very useful guidance offered by the documents and consultation outlined, there are a number of areas – particularly from a technical perspective – where reporting is very limited. There is a need for the 20/20+ strategy to be refined in response to growing knowledge of particular constraints and opportunities, with some current studies due to deliver directions over coming months. The following gaps have been identified.

- Retail / economic – a lack of detailed analysis of:
 - a. Existing retail patterns or trends.
 - b. Potential retail development scenarios for the city or the impacts of those possibilities.
- Stormwater:

This is a significant determinant and potential limiting factor related to development. A Floodplain Management Strategy is currently under preparation and scheduled for completion in late 2006.

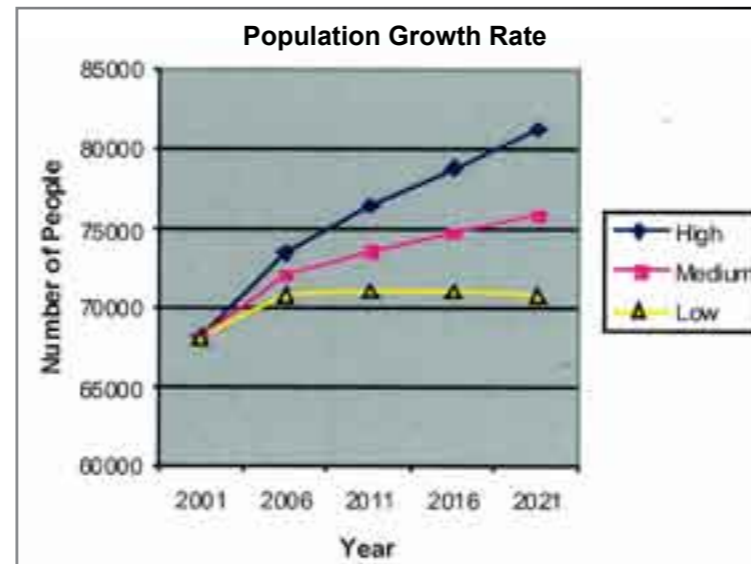
CURRENT ISSUES

There is widespread recognition of a number of issues that affect the CBD. Some of those to emerge from consultation and analysis are:

- Increasing traffic congestion.
- Mounting parking pressures and limited parking areas.
- Poor pedestrian connections and traffic conflict.
- Disruptions resulting from the Dent Street realignment.
- Limited community facilities or amenities.
- Little after-hours activity and some anti-social behaviour.
- Concern about personal safety, particularly outside of business hours.
- Providing for safe cycling opportunities.
- Realising spatial and pedestrian links to the hills and along the rivers.
- High demand for limited commercial space.
- Increasing interest from developers and larger land holdings being pursued.
- Parts of the CBD are in decline.
- Sprawling commercial activity weakening the CBD hub.
- Restricted retail “energy” and limited opening hours.
- The lack of a strong ‘heart’ to the city.

POPULATION TRENDS

Whangarei District is experiencing strong growth. The 2005 population of 72,800 is expected to reach approximately 79,700 by 2026, although a high growth scenario may see up to 87,400 people living in the District. This latter outcome represents an increase of almost 15,000 new Whangarei inhabitants over 15 years. The city is similar in many ways to other regional centres, like Tauranga and New Plymouth, where the population characteristics are tending towards an aging population and an increasing range of ethnicity.



Source: Statistics NZ Census

Geotechnical:

There are a number of land strength or suitability constraints to development in Whangarei, particularly in the lower-lying areas of the CBD. These include marine sediments and past land use. No technical reports relating to this issue have been found.

Culture and arts:

Arts and culture facilities within the city suffer from limited use and poor integration. Venues are reportedly inadequate to serve the population of Whangarei. To date no study has been undertaken, however the Arts Culture and Heritage Strategy is in preparation and this document should address these issues.

Tangata Whenua:

Little material is readily available about current tangata whenua associations and aspirations for the city centre. A newly-established consultation body may assist in this area.

Built heritage:

With the exception of those buildings identified in the Proposed District Plan and a relatively brief overview for the Urban Growth Strategy there has not been an indepth study or research to identify heritage buildings or sites within the CBD or their values.

Recreation provision:

Management plans are being prepared for a number of individual reserves, or groups of reserves related to the central area. Meanwhile the Open Space Strategy has focused on open space provision at a broad ‘objectives’ level, but no overall guiding recreation strategy at a ‘policy’ level appears to have been prepared.

Education facilities:

No information related to the strategic provision of educational facilities and location has been found.

Transport:

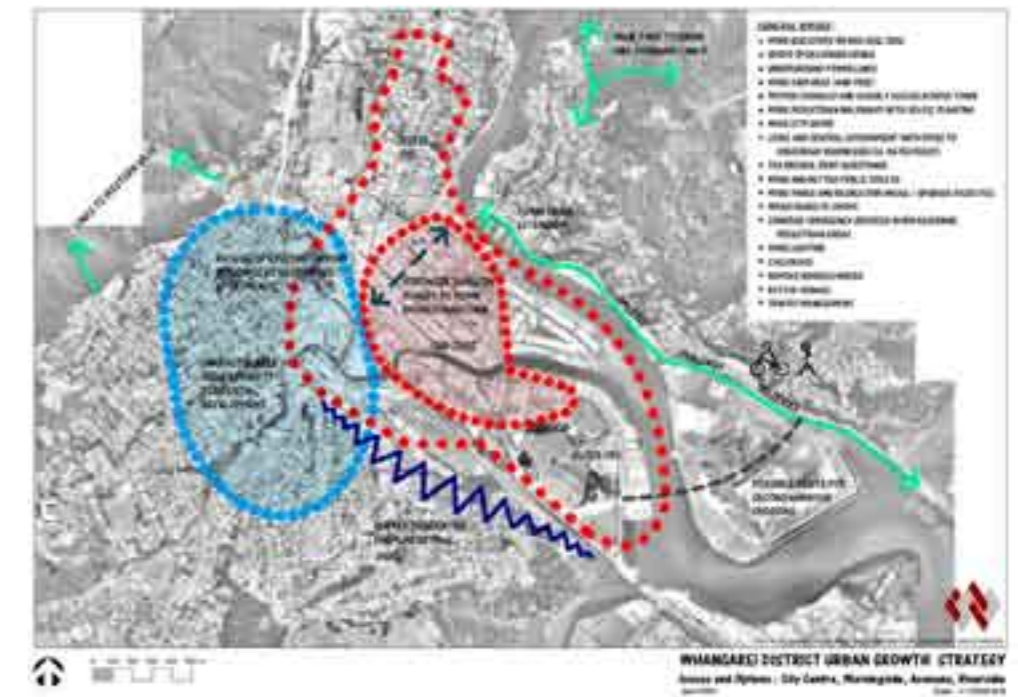
Whilst studies related to the provision of roading appear to have provided fairly comprehensive background to that issue, there is a lack of research or strategy focusing on integrated transport provision. The cycling strategy has been in preparation for a number of years but no completion date is scheduled. The Council Policy Division has recognised, in the Urban Growth Strategy, that a walking strategy is required, but no study has been budgeted or scheduled.

Rail:

The rail embankment and marshalling yards influence the physical flows within the CBD. The line may also offer commuter service potential. No information relating to their use or future has been found.

Town Basin marina:

No information relating to the long-term use or direction for the marina has been found.



URBAN DESIGN APPROACH AND PROTOCOL

Quality Urban Design

This proposal is Urban Design based and is approached as a process compliant with the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (Urban Design Protocol) which is part of the Government's Sustainable Development Programme of Action. The Urban Design Protocol is a key deliverable of the 'Sustainable Cities' action area, which seeks to make our cities healthy, safe and attractive places where business, social and cultural life flourish.

Quality urban design is important for people because our lives are connected through our common built environment. We all live and work in buildings, and use streets, public spaces, transport systems, and other urban infrastructure. Quality urban design creates places that work and places that people use, value and remember.

The value of quality urban design needs to include economic, environmental, cultural and social aspects. The economic importance of towns and cities to national economies is increasingly being recognised. The key competitiveness factors for successful towns and cities include quality of infrastructure and quality of life - both factors on which urban design can have a significant influence.

Quality urban design also adds social, environmental and cultural value through creating well connected, inclusive and accessible places, delivering the mix of uses and facilities needed by people, adding to the identity and pride of a place, enhancing safety and reducing fear of crime, improving energy efficiency, and revitalising heritage.

The Protocol identifies seven essential design qualities that create quality urban design: the "Seven C's". They are: Context, Character, Choice, Connections, Creativity, Custodianship and Collaboration. These have been used both as a guide and a checklist during the design process.



An outline of the "7 C's" is produced here as part of the discussion.

1. Context

Towns and cities are more than the sum of their parts. Quality urban design is about seeing buildings, places and spaces not as isolated elements but as part of the whole town or city.

2. Character

Quality urban design reflects and enhances the distinctive character of our natural environment, heritage and Kiwi culture. Character is dynamic and evolving, not static. Reinforcing character ensures new buildings and spaces are unique to their location and add value to our places by increasing tourism, investment, identity and community pride.

3. Choice

Quality urban design is about planning for diversity and offering people choice within our urban areas. Diversity of urban form, densities, building types, public spaces, transport modes and activities increases choices for people as well as making a more attractive urban form. Flexibility and adaptability provides for unforeseen uses and creates resilient and robust places.

4. Connections

Good connections enhance choice, strengthen transport networks, support social cohesion and make places lively and safe. Quality urban design is about recognising the importance of how all forms of infrastructure, including roads, railways, cycle tracks, paths, pipes, and power and communication networks connect. Places with good connectivity between activities and with careful placement of facilities reduce travel distances and times and environmental impacts. Where physical layouts and activity patterns are easily understood, residents and visitors can move around easily.

5. Custodianship

Quality urban design reduces the environmental impacts of our places through environmentally sustainable and responsive urban design solutions. Stewardship of our towns and cities ensures enjoyable, safe public spaces and a quality environment that creates a sense of ownership and responsibility in all residents and visitors.

6. Creativity

Quality urban design encourages creative and innovative approaches. Creativity adds richness and diversity, and turns a functional place into a memorable place. Creativity facilitates new ways of thinking, and willingness to think through problems afresh. Creative urban design supports a dynamic urban cultural life and fosters strong urban identities.

7. Collaboration

Exceptional places are designed incrementally as people make decisions on individual projects. Quality urban design requires good communication, real dialogue and a shared vision and understanding among all those making decisions: central government, local government, professionals, transport operators, stakeholders, developers and occupants. To improve our urban design capability we need integrated training, adequately funded research and shared examples of best practice.

