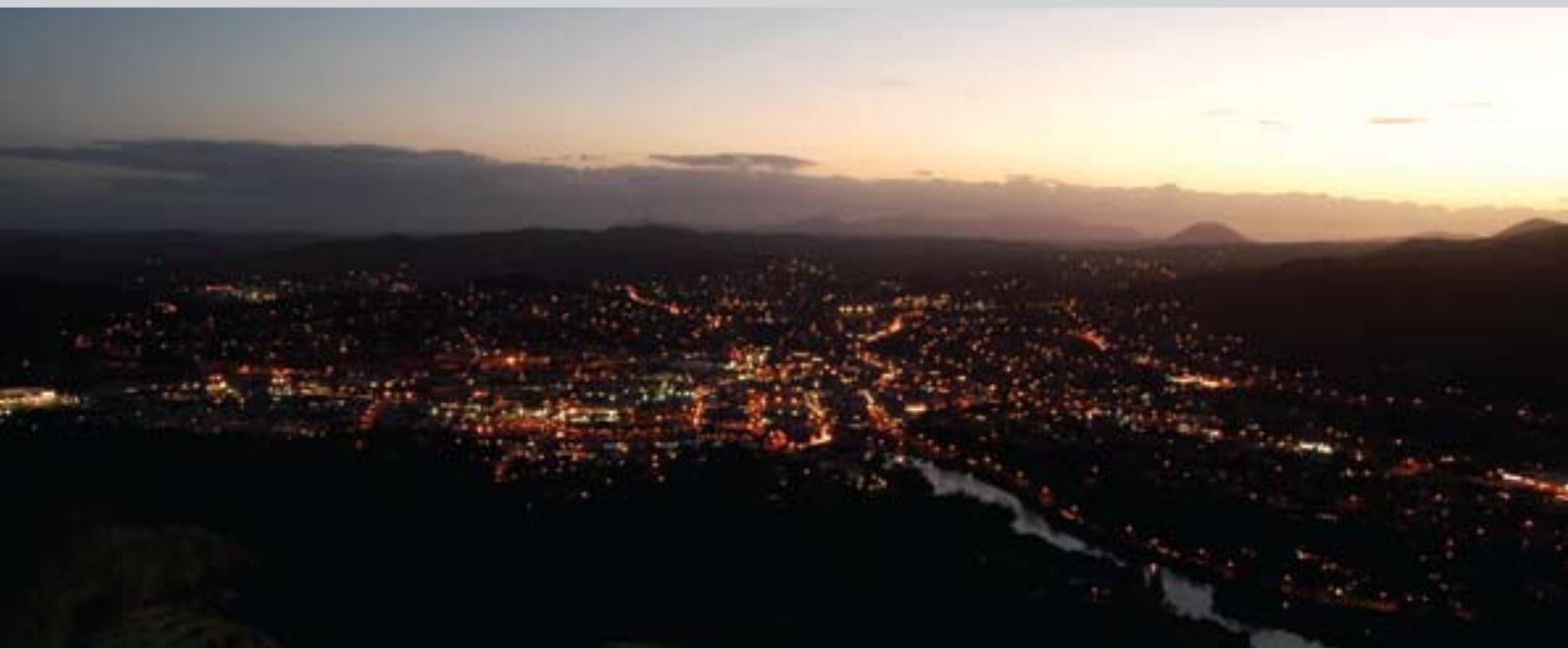


making great places to shape our future

An Urban Design Strategy for Whangarei District

Adopted 9 March 2011



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1. Introduction

Whangarei is Northland's commercial heart, and the gateway to the region. Its close proximity to Auckland, mature industrial sector, key ports of entry, sub-tropical climate, unique rural-urban setting, and good reputation for healthy work/life balance, can make Whangarei a leading destination for migrants, students, investors, and tourists. Despite these positive characteristics and the District's huge growth potential, Whangarei has lagged behind other districts in some key areas.

Over the last 20 years, there has been a lot of discussion, thinking, and planning made to help harness the potential of Whangarei. However, the lack of sustained strategic support, vision, and project initiatives relating to urban design remains one of the pressing issues that constrain development and growth. The potential role that Whangarei's growing cosmopolitan city centre and the District's villages play as engines of growth is not articulated in urban design and development. To maximise this potential and secure our District's sustainable future, it is important that the built environment be enhanced to leverage off Whangarei's natural beauty and to allow more people to live, work, study, play in and visit the District. The time is now right for Whangarei to move on to a new level and approach to urban development.

Council signed the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol in December 2008 as a commitment to increasing urban design practice in Whangarei. The Urban Design Strategy is the first-level document from a three-tier design guide that Council expects to complete as a manifestation to its commitment to the Protocol. The Strategy provides an ongoing high-level direction for the design and development of the urban environment in a manner that helps contribute to the sustainable future and success of the whole District of Whangarei. Further design guides such as a second-level urban design framework for the city centre and third-level design guidelines for intensification will be formulated to give effect to the Urban Design Strategy.

1.1. What is Urban Design?

Urban design is the art and process of making better places for people by designing buildings, spaces and infrastructure that enhance the function, feel, and form of towns and cities. It helps to make the interface and relationship between buildings and spaces, between public and private domain, and between the natural and built environments work well and function efficiently in the context of urban growth and development.

Urban design equally considers aesthetics and the social, environmental, and economic consequences of development as well as the identity, character, and heritage that make up the fabric of towns and cities.

Urban design can be applied in various scales, ranging from larger towns and cities down to smaller streets, sections, buildings, their surrounding landscape or urban space. On a larger scale, urban design looks at how well connected and integrated the different parts of the city are and where synergies can be created between different activities. On a smaller scale, urban design ensures that the placement of street furniture or other elements of a specific place works well for diverse uses and people and contributes to their continued use, comfort, safety, and the overall look of the community.

The success of an urban design project relies on stakeholders working together to develop outcomes that encourage people to live, work, play in and visit public spaces. These undertakings should not occur in a piecemeal way but in an incremental fashion where all elements of the design are consciously brought together at different points in time to reinforce each other and arrive at a harmonious and sustainable whole. Urban design should work in a collaborative and comprehensive way at different scales and across economic, social, and environmental policies.



Figure 1. What is urban design?

The art and process of making places where 'the pedestrian is the design imperative' – Dom Nozzi.

1.2. The Value of High Quality Urban Design

The importance of high quality urban design to the economic vitality of towns and cities is recognised internationally. Urban design policies played a crucial role in the transformation, economic development, and social rejuvenation of great cities. High quality urban design can help enhance sense of place, pride, and security. It helps make settlements function more efficiently by building on existing strengths, complementing the mix and variety of resources, and thereby achieving greater efficiency in the use of resources. This will help attract investments and create greater economic vitality. All these result in a higher quality of life, which, essentially, is the important basis upon which towns and cities compete for investment and skilled workers.

Poorly designed public spaces can have significant adverse effects on the environment, economy, and the community. They can lead to degradation of natural resources, limit the opportunities for employment and growth, and generate widespread social costs to the community. People living in areas of poor urban design tend to have little pride in their environment, perceive it as unsafe, and its degradation and marginalisation can be ongoing.

Projects with good urban design may entail significant investment upfront but can be more profitable for developers and the wider community in the long term. Well-designed urban projects promote mixed-use activities that can help make the city adaptable and resilient in changing economic and business climate. Quality, safe, and secure public spaces encourage exercise, walking, and cycling which help increase the amount of street activity, making urban places the centre of economic interaction that advance enterprise, innovation, and tourism.

High quality urban design is expected to help enhance Whangarei's cultural identity and character, increase awareness and sense of pride, integrate decision-making, increase business productivity and property value, make urban environments healthier and safer, attract the creative sector, investors, and visitors needed to propel local growth. It will also help to create a sense of place for the District and make it a choice destination rather than a halfway place.

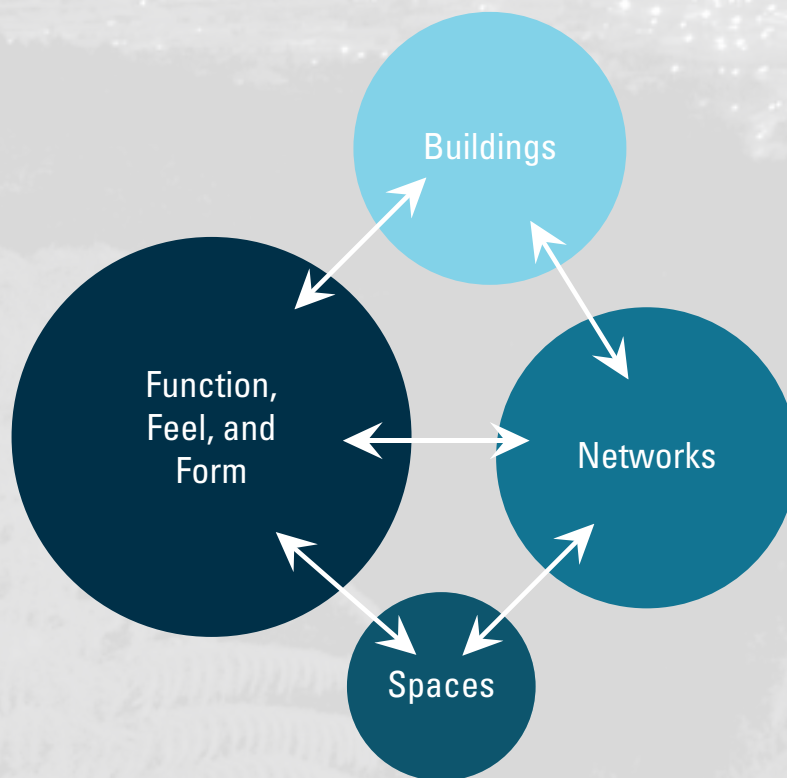


Figure 2. Elements of Urban Design

Urban design ensures that these components of town and city development work well to enhance the environmental, economic, social, and cultural well-being of the community.

2. What is the Urban Design Strategy?

Council is already a signatory to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol but urban design is still a relatively new area of focus for Council. The Urban Design Strategy recognises urban design issues that constrain Whangarei's full growth potential. The Strategy sets out, through the promotion of high quality urban design, the vision and the means for addressing those issues. It outlines what the community expects that a high quality urban environment in Whangarei should look, feel, and function. The Strategy outlines the direction Council wishes to take regarding the future of our built environment and uses quality urban design as the main instrument for achieving this vision.

The Strategy essentially consists of the Action Plan that Council has submitted to the Ministry for Environment as part of its commitment under the Protocol. Rather than following a fixed timeframe, the Strategy promotes an ongoing implementing mechanism. It pays particular attention to medium and long-term plans, to allow the community's desire and appreciation of quality urban design to become more clearly expressed as ongoing strategic actions are met.

2.1. Rationale

The Urban Design Strategy for Whangarei is motivated by the need to:

1. describe Whangarei's uniqueness, character, and sense of place
2. guide Council and the community by influencing future projects, plans, and policies to promote integrated and high quality urban design
3. provide clarity to investors, developers, and designers about Council's urban design aspirations and direction
4. inform the public about the way urban design can improve Whangarei's built form and the experience of people living, working, playing in, and visiting the District
5. leverage off Whangarei's wide-ranging and outstanding natural capital
6. translate Council's vision of 'making Whangarei a vibrant, attractive and thriving District by developing sustainable lifestyles based around our unique environment, the envy of New Zealand and recognised worldwide' so that this is achievable in urban design terms.

2.2. Purpose

It is expected that the Urban Design Strategy will help initiate activities that address the urban design needs of Whangarei. The short-term goal of the Strategy is to enable Council and the community to start to appreciate and promote the merits of a high quality urban design. In the end, it is expected that through the Strategy, Whangarei will emerge as a highly preferred District to live, work, study, play in, and visit in New Zealand. To achieve this, the Urban Design Strategy aims to:

1. state our vision and aspirations for promoting and delivering high quality urban design that will work well for Whangarei now and into the future
2. provide a framework for the physical context and guidelines to advance Whangarei's existing and underrated strengths
3. better align, integrate, inform, and direct urban development to maximise Whangarei's full growth potential while promoting high quality urban design
4. establish a programme of specific and cumulative urban design initiatives that is consistent with our Action Plan under the Protocol and with existing plans and strategies
5. provide a tool kit for determining the best solution for proposed urban development and preparation of further strategic documents such as the urban design framework and urban design guidelines
6. provide a platform for reviewing significant development proposals by Council's interim in-house Urban Design Panel.

2.3. Strategic Fit

Although there is no statutory obligation for Council to formulate an Urban Design Strategy, the decision to do so is strongly influenced by a raft of legislations, policies, strategies, and plans at national, regional, and local levels. At the national level, the Urban Design Strategy is consistent with the intentions of the:

- New Zealand Urban Design Protocol
- New Zealand Transport Strategy 2008
- New Zealand Disability Strategy 2001
- National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy 2001
- Legislation which resulted in regional and local plans, policies, and strategies outlined below.

At the regional level, the Urban Design Strategy will support specific provisions in the:

- Northland Community Plan (LTCCP)
- Northland Regional Policy Statement
- Regional Land Transport Strategy for Northland.

At the District level, the Urban Design Strategy will complement and assist the following key plans, policies, and strategies for Whangarei by providing the physical and design context within which urban development is encouraged:

- Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP)
- Sustainable Futures 30/50
- The Operative District Plan
- Urban Growth Strategy 2003
- 20/20 Plus Living the Vision CBD Guideline Development Plan 2006
- Coastal Management Strategy 2003
- Urban and Coastal Structure Plans
- Walking and Cycling Strategy 2007
- Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy 2009
- Open Space Strategy 2001
- Positive Ageing Strategy 2005-2015.

Taking the overall picture, the Strategy sits under a spectrum of planning documents as outlined in Figure 3.

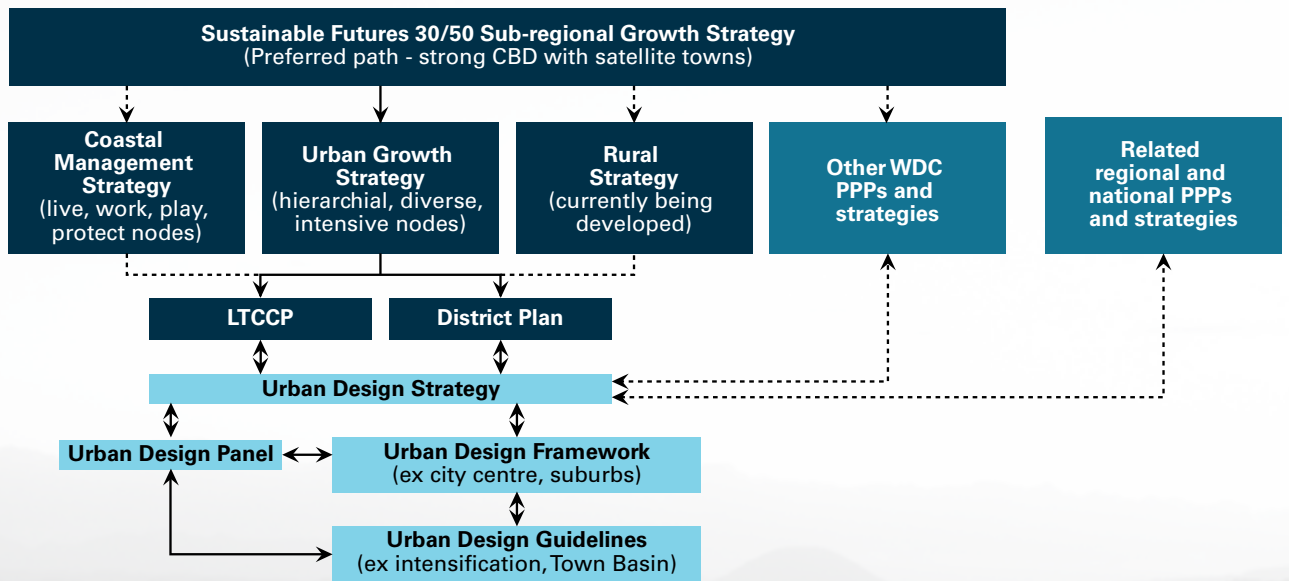


Figure 3. Strategic fit of the Urban Design Strategy

Essentially, to achieve Council’s strategic vision through high quality urban design, the Urban Design Strategy seeks to address the following six outcomes sought by the community under the LTCCP:

Community Outcome 1

A sustainable, environmentally responsible District which values its natural uniqueness

Community Outcome 2

A District which is safe and crime free

Community Outcome 3

A community which is healthy and educated

Community Outcome 4

A vibrant and growing local economy

Community Outcome 5

A District with community programmes and facilities for all

Community Outcome 6

A community which values its culture and heritage

2.4. Structure

The Urban Design Strategy sets out Whangarei's vision of a high quality urban design outcome and suggests ways to achieve that outcome. The components of the Strategy are:

1. Urban Design Issues

Eight major urban design challenges contribute to Whangarei's lagging economic performance. These are location, sprawl, grain, focus, vitality, style, articulation, and equity. This section outlines these issues, their potential long-term economic effects to Whangarei, and the benefits of using urban design to address those issues.

2. Assumptions

Certain circumstances are assumed critical to Whangarei's success and sustainable future. These are that development should allow growth to occur in the urban environment, that any urban design solution should be as cost-efficient as possible for the size and scale of Whangarei, and that any undertaking should help enhance the District's unique yet hidden environmental and cultural strengths, to help the economy achieve the desired outcomes.

3. Vision of High Quality Urban Design

The vision represents the community's interpretation of high quality urban design that will fit and work within the context of Whangarei now and into the future.

4. Design Qualities

To help achieve the vision of high quality urban design and the six desired community outcomes under the LTCCP and help resolve the eight urban design issues, eight qualities of a high quality urban design have been identified to describe the success and future of Whangarei's urban environment. These are that the built environment should be compact, connected, distinctive, diverse, attractive, appropriate, sustainable, and safe.

5. Urban Design Objective

The urban design objectives are the detailed road map to achieving the desired qualities. They highlight what needs to be done in design terms, over which level of priority, and on which elements of design should they address.

6. The Means

These are the strategic actions needed by all stakeholders to ensure that the design objectives can be implemented. They address how stakeholders can participate in delivering high quality urban design. While most of these initiatives apply to Council, many rely upon other stakeholders for Council to perform its duties well. While urban design initiatives tend to be costly in the outset, those selected as part of the Strategy are cost effective, proven, practical, and politically palatable ways to address multiple objectives and they are appropriate for the size and economy of Whangarei.

3. Urban Design Issues

Whangarei faces a number of significant economic, environmental, social, and cultural issues that challenge the aspirations and practice of urban design. This section describes those issues and outlines how urban design can help address them.

3.1. Location

Whangarei benefits from three key strategic advantages - being relatively close to Auckland, being the principal commercial district north of Auckland, and being directly accessible to State Highway 1. The benefits of this strategic location are perceived to be constrained by a number of problems, which when properly addressed may work to the District's advantage.

First, the expansion of the city centre is geographically confined by the surrounding hills and harbour. This limitation may however work to the District's advantage in terms of creating compact urban environments; making home to work, facilities and amenities easily accessible by foot or cycle; and ultimately controlling sprawl.

Second, although the first limitation creates opportunities for further intensification, future vertical development will be confronted with technical building constraint and potential flood risk since the central business District (CBD) was built on reclaimed land. This limitation may open doors for the development of alternative and innovative methods of building construction while at the same time preserving certain building height, massing, and scale that is appropriate for Whangarei.

Third, although the city centre and key suburban centres (Ruakaka, Waipu, Kamo, and Hikurangi) are directly accessible through State Highway 1, they are visually detached from the highway. Current improvements to the highway will even make it easier for visitors to pass straight the District, thereby reducing the ability of these centres to attract visitors or at least to function as halfway towns.

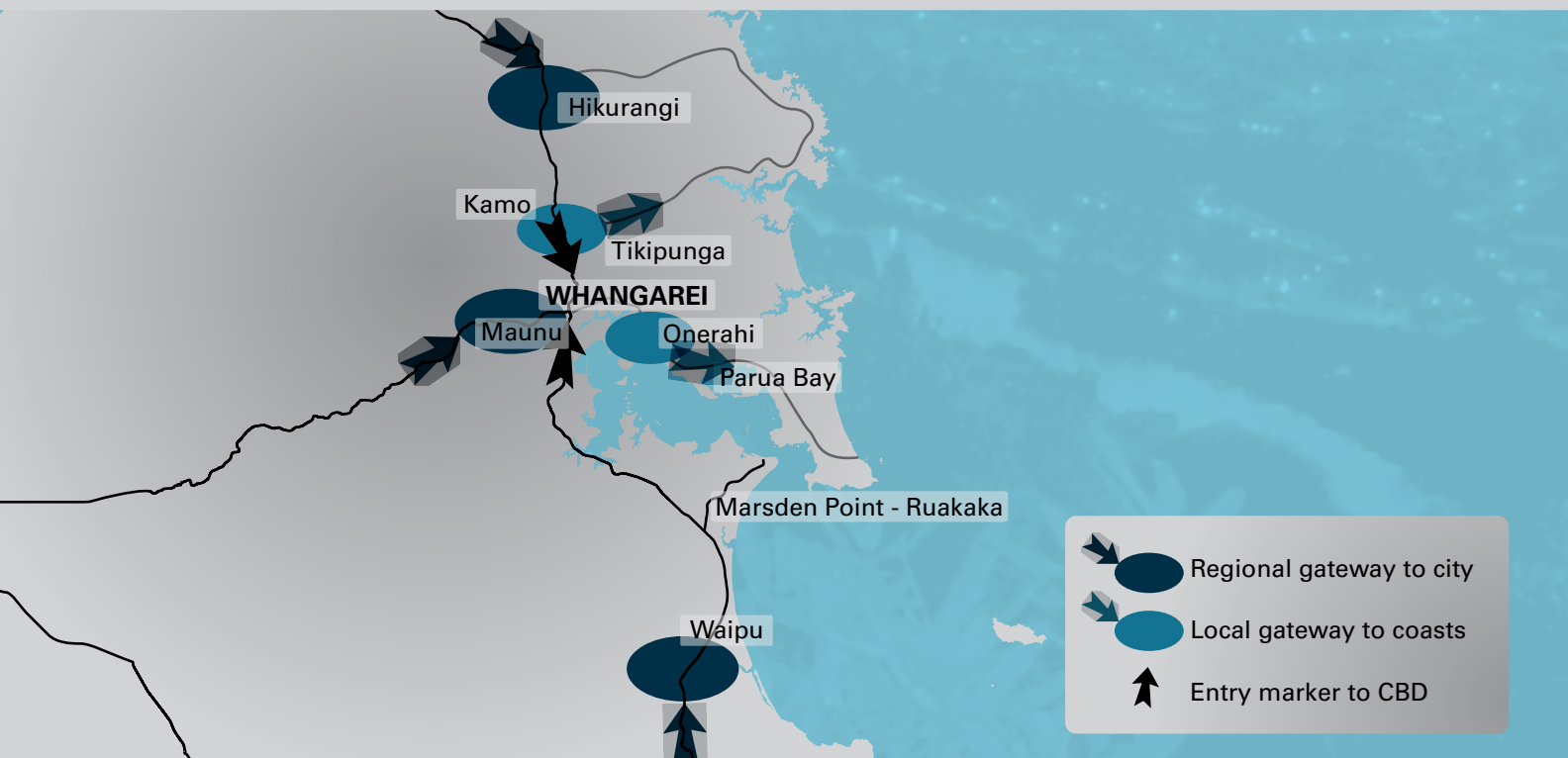


Figure 4. Gateway Concept

Gateway developments can help create a sense of arrival to urban environments. The long linear approaches to urban centres provide opportunities for the creation of excitement to these gateways.

Although a constraint to attracting visitors to the centres, the physical detachment from State Highway 1 contributes, in the long run, to the following positive urban design outcomes for the city, suburban, and local centres:

1. It allows the centres to grow and evolve as compact mixed-use areas with high levels of pedestrian amenity and safety, within the edges of State Highway 1.
2. It assists in ensuring that intensification of land use around such centres does not conflict with and compromise the through-route function of State Highway 1.

Urban design can help address Whangarei's geographical barriers by enhancing the city and satellite service centres to contain sprawl, developing legible gateways and markers to these centres to increase visibility, and using appropriate treatment of the physical environment that links the centres and gateways to increase connectivity. The long stretch of the State Highway 1 provides opportunities to identify places and sequences of arrival and departure between centres in the District and within Northland along the highway. Apart from increasing economic vitality throughout the District, enhancing physical and visual connectivity will help increase legibility of the centres in terms of directing future growth and promoting the District as an attractive integrated destination rather than just an uncoordinated halfway place to Northland.

3.2. Sprawl

Whangarei's urban centres are characterised by a distinct separation of land use, with residential in the periphery and a centre ringed in commercial and light industry. As with other peripheral districts in the country, the influx of cheaper cars, poor public transport, lack of affordable housing, inadequate appreciation of the benefits of urban intensification, and abundance of relatively inexpensive rural land, all contribute to Whangarei's problem of urban sprawl. The sprawling of commercial activity, including small businesses slipping into residential zone areas, further reduces the importance of the CBD as centre of commerce, trade, and urban living.

Though relatively low-income, the District has a high car-dependency ratio of 1.5 cars per household. The city centre is therefore congested which makes it less attractive and safe to walk around, and it has a high level of associated economic and environmental costs. The congestion may be due partly to a lack of parking strategy for the CBD. The increase in vehicle trips and car parking is already undermining the special character and amenity of the Town Basin.

Sprawl essentially leads to inefficient delivery of urban services, increased carbon dioxide emission from vehicles and increased Council costs for servicing remote residential developments. The spread of residential development also results in loss of rural character, high-class fertile soils, and reduces the economic sustainability of rural farms.

Urban design helps connect people, places, and spaces enabling them to function more efficiently and effectively. It can control sprawl by increasing the density of the city and suburban centres and their adaptability to allow mixed-use activities. The gateway concept, as shown in Figure 4, can also help contain and delineate the boundary between rural and urban areas and control urban sprawl. Congestion in the city centre can be reduced by providing all-day parking around the CBD fringes and limited parking within the CBD. This will encourage people to walk or cycle more within the CBD. With increased intensification, improved parking strategies, more vertical mixed-use developments and quality public spaces in urban areas, the rural areas can better be preserved, the rural-urban interface clearly defined, and sprawl can be effectively reduced.

Though sprawl into rural villages offers opportunities for the development of satellite towns for efficient servicing, in the Whangarei setting, more than a third of detached vacation houses particularly in coastal areas remain unoccupied on most of the year, so residential intensification in those areas is slow.



Figure 5. Typical countryside development

Increased sprawl can reduce the ability of urban areas to attract inner city living.

3.3. Grain

Grain refers to the pattern and arrangement of streets, building blocks, sections, open spaces, and other features within an urban area. Whangarei is an unplanned city that grew only in response to various uncoordinated developments. Although the District's rural villages and towns have clearly defined street lines and urban form, the city centre suffers from weak grain and thereby poor legibility particularly to visitors.

The city centre has large block sizes that discourage walking and poor street hierarchy where streets are wide and all seemingly function as main non-pedestrian orientated streets. Although there are elements that could help identify points of entry and exit (e.g. railway embankment, Bank Street), they are however unclear or underutilised. Connectivity between streets, open spaces, and amenity areas is also poor.

Historically, Cameron Street was Whangarei's main street but with the transformation of a small segment mid-length into a pedestrian mall, the flow of traffic into the CBD has become even more complicated. Nevertheless, due to recent developments, the triangular route formed by Dent, Bank, and Walton Streets appears to be the emerging main collector ring road that helps define the CBD. Although Bank and Walton Streets are increasingly becoming the CBD's main streets, they remain less pedestrian-oriented and poorly related.

Urban design can help address the CBD's street pattern by redirecting sightlines and establishing obvious entry points. For example, Mount Parihaka and the water edge can add visual amenity to CBD streets, encouraging pedestrians to walk towards the Town Basin precinct. Also, considering the walkability of the CBD being only 1 km in diameter, three entry points which are currently car-intensive, can serve as filtering points if these were provided with large public parking areas to reduce entry of cars and allow more people to walk into the CBD.



Figure 6. Grain of Whangarei CBD

The grain of towns and cities can significantly affect the legibility and connectivity of their public places.

3.4. Focus

The CBD also suffers from a continuing loss of central focus spatially and in terms of its traditional role as commercial hub. This is due to reduced legibility, poor entranceways, lack of a strong focal point, fragmented amenity development, heavy traffic around its edges, and presence of three other shopping centres within just a kilometre radius of the CBD. The nearby Okara Shopping Centre effectively competes with the CBD, offering cheaper large format retail and free long-term parking. Ironically, there exists a long-term tension between the CBD core and much nearer and similar retail precincts such as the Town Basin and Tarewa Centre, where competition and separation further reduce the central importance of the CBD.

Apparently, the lack of large central open spaces characterise the urban landscape of the entire District. Public squares not only promote social interaction and community activities, they provide a focal point for towns and cities. Although Cameron Street Mall serves as the CBD's main public place, it remains a street just transformed into a pedestrian mall and therefore has a limited space. Although the rural villages have defined main streets where community activities concentrate, they too do not have large central open spaces.

Urban design plays a key role in enhancing the centrality and attractiveness of towns and cities. For example, the shopping centres at the edges of the CBD can help strengthen the importance of the city centre if public transport, visual connectivity, and streetscape amenity are enhanced to link these centres with the CBD. Improvements to the entrances can also help increase the centrality of the CBD. The Hatea River from the north and east, the railway embankment over-bridges from the west, and the Waiarohia Stream from the south, all provide design opportunities for a strong gateway and sense of approach to the CBD.

3.5. Vitality

Although a number of events happen daily in a number of venues around the District, they generally do not occur in public streets or open spaces. The lack of vitality in Whangarei's urban environment is due to the cumulative effects of inadequate central open spaces; poor amenity of city streets and public spaces; lack of public transport; absence of a strong creative sector, religious and educational institution; and restricted retail energy brought about by the lack of an after hours economy in the centre.

The size and location of Cameron Street Mall limits the commercial space available for retailers to take advantage of increased pedestrian traffic. Footpaths around the CBD have low amenity due to poor gradient, furniture, and detailing. Unnecessary use of street furniture does not increase the quality and area of public space.

The creative sector is increasingly becoming a major player in the development of cities worldwide due to its ability to attract investments. The creative class consists of scientists, engineers, artists, musicians, architects, managers, professionals, and technicians. Although there is a growing arts industry in the District, this is not properly utilised to increase vitality. Further, though the natural beauty of the landscape can attract skilled workers in the outset, there is a lack of permanent, quality urban spaces to provide new employees with a pleasant and enjoyable working environment, particularly in the CBD.

Urban design can enhance the vitality of towns and cities through the development of larger, quality public spaces and streetscape that entice people to walk more and drive less. Apart from providing venues for community interaction and entrepreneurship, quality public spaces and streets also increase the vitality and success of shops around them. When shops around urban spaces cater to mixed-use activities, they offer, in return, extended retail hours and surveillance that keeps public spaces safe during the night.



Figure 7. Cameron Street Mall

Cameron Street Mall has traditionally been the centre of shopping in Whangarei.



Figure 8. Bank Street entry into Cameron Street

Vitality should be measured by the ability of successful towns and cities to attract more people rather than cars into public environments.

3.6. Style

Another significant challenge to urban design practice in Whangarei is its eclectic architectural character. While a few rural villages (e.g., Waipu and Hikurangi) have retained distinct historical styles, the city centre does not have a single prominent architectural heritage.

Over 150 years of unplanned development, three styles emerged and contributed to the eclectic character of the city centre – early 19th century colonial architecture along the Town Basin; late 19th century Art Nouveau design along the crossroad of Bank and Cameron Streets; and recent post-war influences on light industrial buildings constructed on the reclaimed flat lands. The only new modern building in the CBD is the Police Station. Although the eclectic style is a distinctive character of the city centre, it creates problems in terms of providing the opportunity to bring new designs, legibility, order, and direction for future developments.

Urban design facilitates the protection and enhancement of heritage buildings and the existing environment, ensuring that new developments co-exist and blend with not only the dominant architectural style in the vicinity but also the feel and function of the environment. It therefore considers in the design not only shape and colour but also the pattern of land use, road network and interface, streetscape, materials, verandahs, proportion, and other attributes that define the local character,

With eclectic styles, several design solutions may be adopted to develop a harmonious building fabric. To blend facades of different styles, such treatments may include the use of a unifying colour, architectural detailing, and similar building materials. To combine varying designs of building blocks visually into a harmonious whole, a unifying streetscape such as pavement, furniture or landscape may be needed.



Figure 9. Architectural styles of the City Centre

The distinct eras of architectural influence shown by Cameron Street Mall, Reyburn House, and Whangarei Police (clockwise) contribute to the eclectic character of the city centre.

3.7. Articulation

Whangarei's natural and historical environments provide a unique backdrop to the city centre and rural villages. The District has rich Maori history and cultural heritage, expansive white sand beaches, and wonderful lush green spaces. These elements can create a sense of place for Whangarei but are neither integrated nor expressed in the design of its built environment. Although the Town Basin precinct does provide such a distinct experience, it has not been fully utilised to help articulate a sense of place for the entire city centre.

Existing city parks and streams provide opportunities for quality urban design. However, they are not utilised to their full potential as good public spaces for the city centre. Laurie Hall Park has the right location, topography and size to be a central open space and a northern gateway icon for the CBD but it does not function as such. Probably due to shape, location, and access, Cafler Park appears to function as a backyard to Council buildings and the Central Library. Waiarohia Stream defines the southern edge and gateway to the city but has low amenity value. Note that the 20/20 Strategy identified this stream as a key resource for the Green Necklace concept that will help connect all the parks around the CBD area.

There is also a lack of way finding and interpretative signage that could help integrate and tell stories between different elements of the public space and with the environment.

Urban design plays a key role in developing public spaces that reflect the physical and historical character of the locality. It ensures that development enhances the natural and historical environment through the design of the appearance, position and function of the buildings and advocates greater collaboration and communication to promote local stories and perspectives.

3.8. Equity

The lack of access to public transport, affordable housing, central open space, and local perspectives in Whangarei is an urban design issue that can reduce use of the CBD by the disabled, elderly, and lower-income residents who constitute more than 20% of the population. This can lead to concerns about personal safety in the CBD outside business hours, anti-social behaviour, and perceived loss of pride that constrain any increase in commercial activities in the city centre.

High quality urban design can be misconstrued as a costly activity catering only to high-income communities, but it can also address social inequality in towns and cities. With rising land and housing costs, urban design can ensure that towns and cities maintain affordable, diverse, yet high-quality environments that people will enjoy living and working in, and visiting. By creating affordable, high-density, mixed-use neighbourhoods, expensive urban land is used more efficiently, urban services and facilities can benefit many rather than a few, and greater choice of housing types and activities is promoted. By improving the location and quality of key community services such as open space and public transport, walking is encouraged particularly for those who do not have to use the car. By positioning houses where they can maximise northern solar lighting and heating, low-income communities can save on energy costs. Urban design also adopts the principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) to promote efficiency and safety in public places so that they become accessible and available for all to use.



Figure 10. Laurie Hall Park during Anzac Day

Source: Northern Advocate, 26/04/2010



Figure 11. Spanish Steps, Rome

Due to similarity in location and terrain, Laurie Hall Park can be developed into a central plaza and parking at times, similar to the Spanish Steps piazza, but in a more rustic setting where walls of buildings help define the park's centrality and provide natural surveillance.



FIGURE 12. Shared Space

Shared spaces promote equity by allowing for diversity in use and activities as well as natural access for people of all ages and abilities.

4. Assumptions

High quality urban design can be measured by its ability to address both the aesthetics and context of the built environment. While the Urban Design Strategy seeks to address the eight major urban design issues, future developments should also be based on three principal economic assumptions. These are (1) that the city continues to grow and change, (2) that any initiative is appropriate to the size of the population and economy of the District both now and into the future, and (3) that Whangarei's existing yet hidden natural and cultural strengths are fully utilised in terms of adding value to the built environment.

4.1 Change

The city is an open system that has direct links with other regions both nationally and internationally. As such, it is constantly changing physically, socially, and economically to accommodate growth. The Strategy allows for changes to occur to Whangarei's built form through quality urban design but that will help protect and enhance its natural and historical environment.

The changes can occur through a range of solutions: from restrained designs to large-scale demonstration projects, from random to piecemeal yet incremental solutions, and from immediate to long-term methods. Solutions can also come in the form of catalysts simply to allow further changes to occur. Urban design initiatives should be ongoing and take advantage of opportunities as they occur. The Strategy does not therefore impose rules but only suggests ways to accommodate these opportunities. Good design is evolving. Thus, it cannot be achieved by mere prescription or regulation.



Figure 13.
Landscaped
Embankment

The rail over-bridge embankment west of the CBD can be landscaped or treated as a stone wall to provide a high quality entrance gateway to the CBD. This provides a potential surgical solution to an untapped resource amenity being offered by the over-bridge embankment.

4.2 Size

Whangarei is a small economy relative to the national average. Although its population of around 75,000 represents 3% of the country, it contributes only 1.3% to the New Zealand economy. GDP per capita is therefore 20% lower than the national average. However, with 26 people per square kilometre of area, the District is relatively denser at 10 persons more than the national average of 16 people per square kilometre. The inverse relationship between GDP and density demonstrates that the District suffers from low productivity. It is therefore important that quality urban design is able to increase the District's level of productivity through initiatives that are consistent with scale of the economy now and as it grows into the future. These initiatives should be able to allow business to flourish in the District while protecting and enhancing its natural and cultural assets to sustain its future.

4.3 Utility

Whangarei has a host of unique natural, historical, and manmade elements that, when fully utilised, can help contribute to a good sense of place, structure, and form for the built environment. As well, Council has a number of properties District-wide that can be used to influence high quality urban design. The Open Space Strategy 2001 has shown that out of the 3,152 hectares of open space land that Council manages, the economic benefit was only 11% of the maintenance costs. In the spirit of efficiency and Council leadership, the Strategy ensures that future developments build on current clear and unforeseen strengths of the District, its environment, location, economic, and cultural base. These should be recognised, identified, and therefore integrated in the design and development of the urban environment.

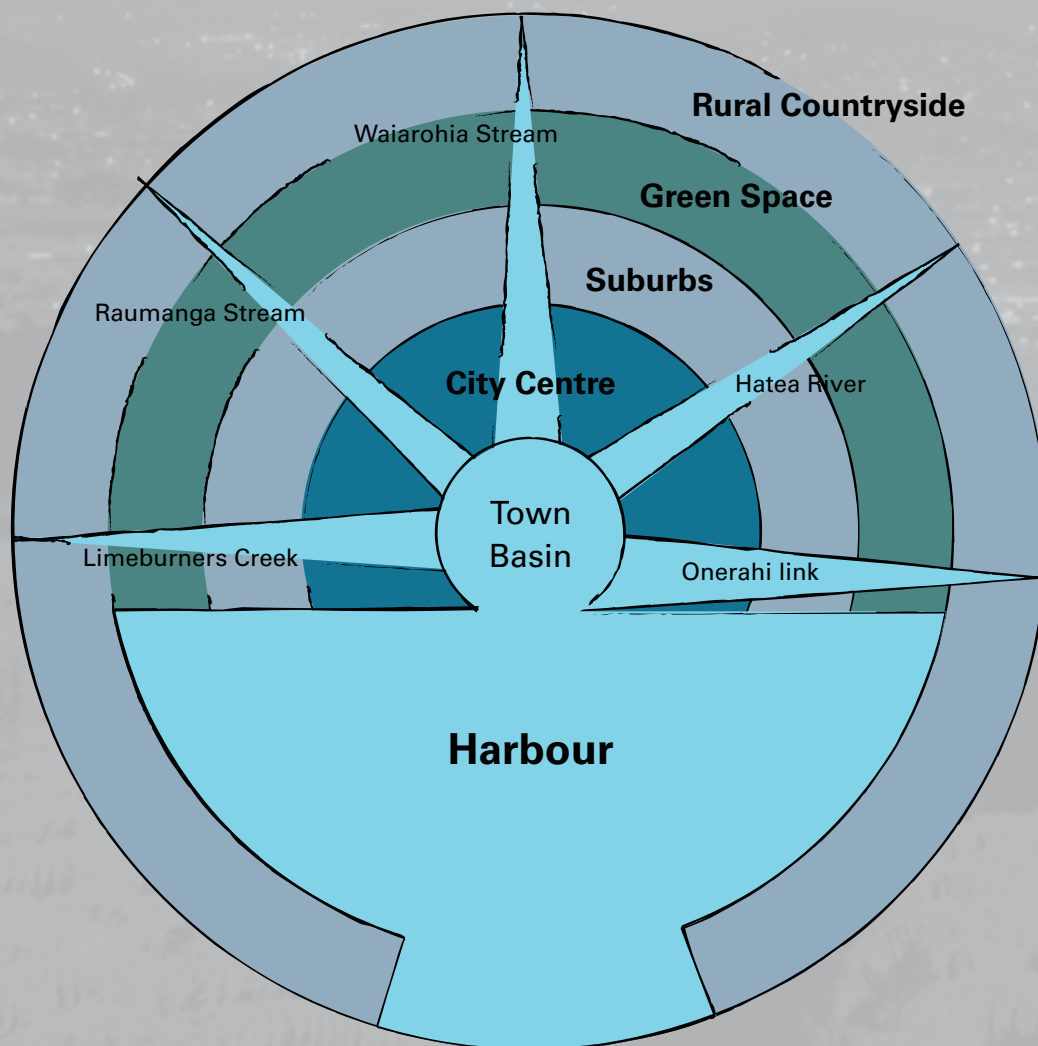


Figure 14. Open Space Concept for Whangarei

High quality urban design will enhance the conservation, recreation, landscape, and cultural heritage values of the open spaces in the Whangarei Harbour, Town Basin, City Centre, Stream Corridors, the Suburbs, Green Space, and the Rural Countryside.

5. Vision of High Quality Urban Design

The name Whangarei comes from the Maori word Whangarei-te-rerenga-par oa which means ‘a swimming or gathering place for whales’ and that can be further interpreted as ‘a meeting place of chiefs.’

Under the LTCCP, Council envisions Whangarei ‘as a vibrant, attractive and thriving District by developing sustainable lifestyles based around our unique environment, the envy of New Zealand and recognized worldwide.’ In addressing this vision and the challenges at hand, it is imperative that Whangarei operates under one working urban design vision that will help express its uniqueness, traditional role, aspirations, and the art of fulfilling Council’s mission of creating the ultimate living environment.

The vision of a high quality urban design for the District is that Whangarei thrives as a leading meeting and destination place that successfully draws people to settle to live, work, and re-visit the District, now and through the future. The CBD, which is the heart of both Whangarei and Northland, is envisioned to transform into the best place it can possibly be to fulfil this role. Consistent with the qualities of a successful meeting and destination place, our urban environment needs to be compact, connected, distinctive, diverse, attractive, appropriate, sustainable, and safe.



Figure 15. The Town Basin Marina

The Town Basin can be used as an iconic representation of Whangarei’s traditional role as ‘a gathering place for whales.’

6. Design Qualities and Objectives

To achieve Whangarei's vision as a leading destination and meeting place, it is important that future developments possess the following eight urban design qualities, expectations, or elements of a good public environment: compact, connected, distinctive, diverse, attractive, appropriate, sustainable, and safe. Each of these qualities will be assessed against their ability to address the desired outcomes of the community under the LTCCP, to resolve the urban design issues, and to contribute to high quality urban design. A number of strategic design objectives, their order of priority, and the elements of the physical environment that the urban design objectives are expected to influence in planning and design, are also identified to set the framework for achieving each of the desired qualities. These qualities will be used as basis for preparing further design and implementing guidelines and ultimately for determining the design and development of future urban projects and Council initiatives.

6.1. Compact

Compact towns and cities can help define the physical boundaries and public perception of boundaries between rural and urban environments. To preserve the natural beauty of Whangarei, it is important that the interface between urban and rural areas avoids a looming homogeneity. The difference between the two environments would be greater if the difference between their densities was greater. Compact environments enable the build up of the critical mass needed to provide, sustain, and achieve greater efficiency of public transport systems, land use, infrastructure, local services, and amenities - that will help counter ongoing suburban sprawl.

Outcomes

If we make our urban environment as compact as possible, we will be able to achieve the community's desires of valuing the natural resources and heritage, of promoting safety, of creating a vibrant and growing economy, and of promoting equal access to facilities.

Issues

Location | Sprawl | Grain | Focus | Vitality | Equity

It is imperative to make Whangarei's city centre and villages as compact as possible since their



Figure 16. Concept of Mander Park intensification

The area around Mander Park can be developed into a compact gateway community that is properly integrated with the proposed four-laning of State Highway 1 and linked with the CBD and waterfront.

expansion is constrained by the geographical limits of its hills, native forest, harbour, and estuarine environment which also compose the District's natural beauty. Compact urban centres will need to have a high quality environment, buildings, and open space amenities to successfully attract residents into them. By containing high quality, compact, walkable, mixed-use environments, the need to travel long distances for everyday tasks will be reduced and sprawl can be controlled.

As the urban area continues to evolve and grow, it is important for urban land to be rationally used for compact vertical development, allowing room for large public spaces to flourish and enhance the grain, centrality and vitality of our city and villages. The future of Whangarei should therefore see more high density yet quality design in the urban environment.

Benefits

1. towns and neighbourhoods will become thriving, vibrant, mixed-use centres
2. walking will become an attractive way to get to places of work, study, shopping, and recreation
3. greater choices of living and business environments will evolve
4. large attractive public spaces will compensate for reduced access to private open space
5. access to services, activities, and transport options will improve
6. private land and public spaces will be used more efficiently
7. open space and healthier living will be preserved
8. more affordable housing will be possible
9. current and future public transport services will be supported
10. inner city retail, employment and recreation activities will be supported
11. traffic congestion, travel time, and vehicle emissions will be reduced
12. infrastructure costs will be reduced
13. household travel costs will be reduced
14. community focal points that promote social cohesion and sense of community will be promoted
15. social interaction from which grows a sense of community will be encouraged
16. mixed-use activities that enable day and night activity and natural surveillance will be promoted

Urban Design Objectives

Table 1. Design Objectives and Elements of a Compact Place

	Objectives		Priority			Design Elements
			High	Med	Low	
1	To develop the inner city and suburban centres for both living and working.	●			Location, plot ratio, density, street layout, road widths, parks, squares, building height, facilities, block dimensions, public transport stops and facilities, berm width, footpath location and width	
2	To promote the increase in density, intensity, and diversity of use of land that is within and in close proximity of urban centres and along major public transport corridors.	●				
3	To use an appropriate and sufficient living density to support local services and passenger transport facilities.	●				
4	To encourage redevelopment of derelict or brown field sites to reduce and delay the demand for greenfield land sites and supporting services.	●				
5	To discourage low-density development on land that is within and in close proximity of urban centres and along major public transport corridors.		●			
6	To ensure that compact developments contribute positively to the creation of high-quality streets and public places that will provide the recreational opportunities needed to compensate for the lack of private space in compact built environments.		●			
7	To adopt green “fence,” greenbelt, or gateway concepts to clearly define and contain compact urban from rural and countryside environments.		●			

6.2. Connected

On the regional scale, ensuring good physical connections between the urban centres and key infrastructure (State highway network, airport, seaport) will make the centres more accessible within Whangarei and with other parts of the country. On the district level, increased connectivity facilitates the integration between the service function of the urban centres and the amenity values of the natural and historical environment and this helps articulate a sense of place for Whangarei. On a neighbourhood level, good connectivity helps the community make easy access to local services and amenities. On a micro scale, increased connectivity helps coordinate the provision of public spaces or street furniture in relation to individual buildings and developments.

Outcomes

Developments with high level of connectivity can help achieve the community’s desire to promote safety, make people healthier, create a vibrant economy, promote equal access to facilities, and of valuing Whangarei’s rich culture and heritage.

Issues

Location | Sprawl | Grain | Focus | Vitality | Style | Equity

Good circulation is the life-blood of towns and cities. Successful meeting and destination places thrive when they are highly connected, accessible, and visible. Increasing the visual and physical connectors can help enhance legibility as it emphasises the transport corridors between the urban centres and State Highway 1, and between the urban centres and the entrance gateways that draw people into them.

Increased connectivity can reduce sprawl as services become more accessible to the community. It can improve urban grain since streets and building blocks will be shaped by new routes to suit public transport provisions. Increased connectivity can help enhance the centrality and vitality of CBD if the transport links from the suburbs were enhanced. Improving public transport, shelters, and benches can also provide a unifying element in an area that has eclectic character. Most importantly, increasing the availability, affordability, and use of public transport, footpaths and cycleways, makes the built and natural environment more accessible to a diverse group of people including tourists. Whangarei's future should see the city and rural villages becoming more walkable, cyclable, and less car-oriented.

Benefits

1. reduces dependence on car and thereby reduces air pollution
2. makes experience of using streets safer and provides passive surveillance
3. makes walking more enjoyable and removes sense of travelling from one end to another
4. provides opportunities for a sequential experience in city journeys such as the use of mid-block public spaces, pedestrian arcades, or a carpark building that services, for example, the CBD on one end and the Town Basin on the other
5. increases pedestrian activity and vitality between adjacent buildings
6. prevents disconnected pockets of space or creation of a no-man's land by opening up more sight lines and pedestrian access
7. helps increase productivity due to savings in travel time and cost and improved health
8. provides opportunities for the development of walkable and connected urban precincts
9. provides opportunities for the development of cycleways both within and between urban centres
10. facilitates movement and exchange of people, goods, and services
11. spreads unproductive traffic load
12. maximises the opportunity to support community and commercial activities



Figure 17. Citylink Public Transport

The Citylink is the only available public transport facility within the District and should be utilised.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 2. Design Objectives and Elements of a Connected Place

	Objectives		Priority			Design Elements
			High	Med	Low	
1	To ensure that future intensive developments occur in areas that allow convenient access to urban services and amenities as well as to current and future major public transport provision.	●				Paths, signage, lighting, vegetation, paving, streets, parks, squares, buildings, facilities, street layout, monuments, bridges, block dimensions, bus stops and facilities, footpath location and width, street corner splays, crossing points, entrances, and exit points
2	To encourage the development of buildings, spaces, and infrastructure that promotes walkability and pedestrian safety and discourages the use of car.	●				
3	To link all major places of interest within urban centres and the district through visual connectors, transport provision, and places or sequences of arrival and departure.		●			
4	To advocate for new and improved public transport systems and wide ranging, safe, and convenient walking and cycling routes for all regardless of culture, age, income or disabilities.		●			
5	To increase the accessibility and connectivity of public spaces, employment areas, services, facilities, and amenities.		●			
6	To reduce the sizes of urban blocks in order to make walking easier and shorter.		●			
7	To encourage different land uses and facilities to concentrate in urban centres so that people's time to visit more than one destination and thereby dependence on the car are reduced.		●			
8	To design streets, crossings, cycling and pedestrian routes that exhibit high level of attraction, legibility, convenience, accessibility, and natural surveillance.		●			
9	To facilitate the creation of new connections, mid-block spaces, and green linkages, for walking.			●		
10	To promote an integrated approach to public and private space design.			●		

6.3. Distinctive

To be a successful meeting place and destination, Whangarei should look, feel, and differ distinctively from anywhere else with respect to people, heritage, and setting. This distinctive identity will form the fabric of an urban environment that invites people to engage, respond, relate, and create a bridge to the past, to become part of it.

Outcomes

The distinctive quality of future developments can help address the community's desire to value Whangarei's natural resources, culture, and heritage, and to create, through these assets, a vibrant and growing economy.

Issues

Focus | Vitality | Style | Articulation

It is important to celebrate and reinforce Whangarei's unique points of difference. One way is to develop a vernacular architecture or method of construction that uses local resources and traditions in order to satisfy local needs and conditions. It does not have to be traditional or static but can evolve over time to reflect changes in the environment, culture, and historical context. Making public places distinctive and reflective of our natural and historical uniqueness will help enhance the central importance, vitality, and character of our urban environment. The 20/20 Strategy identified the need to build a cultural centre similar to Puke Ariki in New Plymouth to help create a distinct identity for Whangarei. In the future, Whangarei's city centre and rural villages should be more distinctive, making the District a memorable, stimulating, comfortable, and human-scaled place to live, work, play, and visit.

Benefits

1. local identity is preserved as features and elements are treasured by the community
2. development becomes sensitive to significant buildings, sites, and landscape features
3. natural and built heritage is protected
4. a living tangata whenua presence in an urban setting is promoted
5. opportunity for developing a vernacular architecture that captures both our rich European and Maori history
6. past layers of settlement and natural resources are uncovered, celebrated and given meaning



Figure 18. Stone Mulch and Hardy Tussocks

Use of these materials can help bring Whangarei's coastal character into the urban landscape.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 3. Design Objectives and Elements of a Distinctive Place

	Objectives		Priority			Design Elements
			High	Med	Low	
1	To identify Whangarei's unique character by increasing visual representation of its distinctive natural beauty, rich local iwi history of stories and significant places, and other heritage values in the urban landscape.	●			Signage, vegetation, paving, streets, parks, squares, buildings, facilities, public art, monuments, bridges, bus stops and facilities, street corner splays, entrances, key views, built heritage, water bodies and indigenous plants	
2	To ensure that new developments respect, protect, support, and enhance the overall character of the District and special qualities and uniqueness of the neighbourhood and site.	●				
3	To develop Whangarei's creative sector as a catalyst to increasing the identity of the district.		●			
4	To create and improve existing pedestrian plazas that allow the celebration of Whangarei's natural point of difference.		●			
5	To promote the use of city furniture and detail that enhances Whangarei's identity.			●		

6.4. Diverse

For Whangarei to be successful as a meeting place and destination, the city and rural villages should create a character that encourages activities and facilities to flourish, that people of diverse cultures, races, and needs can relate to, that invites them to settle in the District.

Outcomes

The diverse quality of our built environment will address the community's desire to promote safety and peace, make people healthier and educated, create a vibrant economy, promote equal access to facilities, and value Whangarei's rich culture and heritage.

Issues

Sprawl | Focus | Vitality | Style | Equity

It is important that public spaces reflect the variety of landscapes, peoples, and cultures that define Whangarei. Diverse urban environments can control sprawl by encouraging the concentration of mixed-use activities in public places. They help to develop focal points in the city that become places of convergence for diverse people and activities, and contribute to the vitality of urban space. Diversity can also enhance the uniqueness of the city's eclectic character and the emerging cosmopolitan nature of the community.

Benefits

1. respects and embraces different cultures and races necessary to attract migrants
2. encourages social interaction since diverse quality public places ranging from grand to intimate spaces enable multi-cultural celebrations and informal encounters
3. promotes multicultural identity through events, festivals and celebrations relating to local setting, farm produce, and lifestyle
4. increases accessibility to varied lifestyle choices and amenities
5. addresses the housing needs of all people
6. encourages inner city living and medium to high density housing
7. encourages the use of different public transport modes
8. provides opportunities for precinct planning
9. encourages economic success for people of all backgrounds and status



Figure 17. Citylink Public Transport

The Citylink is the only available public transport facility within the District and should be utilised.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 4. Design Objectives and Elements of a Diverse Place

	Objectives		Priority			Design Elements
			High	Med	Low	
1	To encourage the development of facilities that reflect, celebrate, and enhance the rich cultural diversity of locals, visitors, and new residents.	●			Signage, paving, street and building design, open space provision, architectural details, artworks, building types, house size and types, facilities, monuments, bridge design, bus stops and facilities, gateways, built heritage, lighting	
2	To promote choice and diversity in urban transport provision where public transport is the principal mode in the city centre.	●				
3	To promote choice and diversity in housing provision that caters to different household sizes, income, and ages, and where intensive affordable housing is the principal type in the city centre.	●				
4	To encourage mixed-use developments where living, working, shopping, and recreation thrive and work at all hours of the day and night for users and passers-by.	●				
5	To develop places that reflect Whangarei's diverse culture and lifestyles and that which attract a vibrant mix of people of all ages and status.		●			
6	To consider the annual cycle of special cultural events and festivals in the design of public spaces.		●			
7	To design streets, public spaces, and furniture adaptable enough to appeal to a variety of uses, experiences and special occasions, integrating areas of business, retail and housing that work well and minimise disruptions.			●		
8	To design public spaces that provide opportunity for special events outside of their core activities of living, working or shopping, in order to sustain a vibrant city life on weekends to maximise good weather conditions, with or without special celebrations.			●		

6.5. Attractive

Urban design is the art of making places both beautiful and useful. It should offer not only a solution but a beautiful solution to the problem. Since beauty is subjective and dynamic, it should encourage creativity in the design and use of public spaces to make them attractive enough for people of all ages to use. In the context of Whangarei, they should not only be useful but successful at attracting people to meet with friends and business partners here and to settle and invest here. The frequency of visits and increase in the critical mass of people, jobs, and activities that our attractive urban environment should bring are most crucial to the successful growth of Whangarei.

Outcomes

Attractive urban spaces will contribute to the achievement of all six desired outcomes of the community and harness the all-encompassing virtue of a high quality urban design.

Issues

Location | Sprawl | Focus | Vitality | Style | Articulation | Equity

Attractive public places can help address the majority of our urban design problems - poor location, sprawl, loss of central focus, lack of vitality, uncontrollable eclectic style, and equity issues. They can help articulate the sense of place and physical image that Whangarei seeks to embody to locals and visitors and they can convey the perception of safety and vitality that is needed to encourage public access and use. They can also help enhance and connect existing attractions and as a result create further new opportunities to celebrate the city.

Attractive public places allow events to flourish in the city. Both attractive places and events are instrumental to continuously celebrating the city. They can create memorable experiences to different people from their arrival until their departure from the District, enticing them to return and stay. For investors, attractive urban places should provide the confidence they need in terms of the viability and vibrancy of the place for doing business. For the creative, they should display a high-quality working environment that is suitable for developing new ideas. For migrants, they should express certain elements of cosmopolitanism. To be successful as a meeting place and destination, our buildings and public spaces should look beautiful, functional, and stimulating to attract more people to live, work as well as frequently visit the District.

Benefits

1. fosters a culture of creativity and innovation for all ages in the design of public and private open spaces, art works, buildings, landscape, and use of materials
2. promotes an image of a city that never sleeps, a vibrant street life, and thus looks and feels successful
3. adds value by increasing the economic viability of urban development
4. helps create a strong sense of place
5. provides opportunities for incorporating natural and historical values of the community
6. promotes agglomeration of activities which contribute to the development of key industry sectors
7. helps attract and retain highly skilled workers and businesses especially in the creative industry



Figure 20. Claphams National Clock Museum

Although the museum is in contrast with the prevailing character of the Town Basin, it complements in use and creates a certain level of curiosity and excitement that is needed to attract visitors.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 5. Design Objectives and Elements of an Attractive Place

	Objectives		Priority			Design Elements
			High	Med	Low	
1	To make visual sense as the defining feature of new developments on both public and private lands.	●			Building edge, colour, texture, walls, signage, paving, roof and parapets, open space provision, architectural detailing, ornaments, public art, facilities, monuments, bridges, bus stops and facilities, street furniture, built heritage, lighting, gateway and entranceways, vistas	
2	To encourage the development of high quality, lively, and attractive mixed-use urban environments.	●				
3	To raise public expectations and standards on the design and construction quality of streets, public spaces, and future developments.	●				
4	To increase accessibility of public places and spaces to all people of all ages and abilities.	●				
5	To design buildings, places, and ordinary everyday spaces that create a stunning distinct character for Whangarei.	●				
6	To consider various viewpoints in the design of buildings and spaces as an element of attraction.	●				
7	To improve the design, quality, and appearance of new buildings in the city and suburban centres.	●				
8	To foster gateway or entranceway development as key to attracting visitors, expressing community pride, and creating a sense of place.		●			
9	To design new buildings that revel in the mixture of old, new, and largely eclectic character of the district.		●			
10	To enhance the amenity value of the built environment at both day and night.		●			
11	To develop central public places that appeal to all types of people and accommodate a variety of occasions to further attract these people.		●			
12	To encourage the use of bright colours on street furniture and details to convey vibrancy in city streets.			●		

6.6. Appropriate

Public buildings and spaces should be fit for purpose, affordable for the community and the District, and durable. It is important that the design of urban space fits with standard and international best practice and is appropriate for the context, site, community, city, and District. The design of urban developments will need to match with the physical form of the site, the intended capacity, its intended role in the community and the city, and the pattern by which people will use the space. It is also imperative that it is durable and cost-efficient relative to the size and scale of Whangarei.

Outcomes

Issues

Location | Sprawl | Grain | Focus | Vitality | Style | Articulation | Equity

High quality urban design must be appropriate for Whangarei and help to address all of the community's desired outcomes as well as the District's urban design issues.

Public buildings, spaces, services, and amenities should be provided where and when they are needed, and should be provided to meet their particular needs and intentions. For example, to encourage walking, no long term parking should be provided within the centre of the CBD. Permanent parking should however be provided for the use of disabled persons and for dropping off goods and visitors.

In terms of the physical appearance, it is proper that buildings abide by the adage 'form follows function.' The principle is that the shape or style of a building should be based primarily upon its intended purpose, thus making public places more recognizable in its expression. However, since urban design recognises the need for buildings to be adaptable to changing times, some level of flexibility may be appropriate. For example, although institutions take a solid formal building form, light informal designs such as that of the Whangarei Courthouse can be appropriate for future commercial use, the building being located at a strategic future pedestrian-oriented edge of the CBD.

To be successful as a meeting place and destination, our buildings and public spaces should fit with the context, purpose, and scale of Whangarei, both now and into the future.

Benefits

1. new developments and their intended purpose can contribute positively to the local context
2. new developments can influence the physical elements of succeeding developments to promote a harmonious whole
3. vernacular design can be developed
4. opportunities for integrated planning can be provided
5. legibility can be created in the expression of buildings and spaces
6. a sense of sense of order can be promoted
7. legibility can be increased



Figure 21. Whangarei Courthouse

Although institutional buildings take a solid formal design, a light informal style can be appropriate if they are strategically located to allow for appropriate alternative uses in the future.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 6. Design Objectives and Elements of an Appropriate Place

	Objectives		Priority			Design Elements
			High	Med	Low	
1	To discourage the use of strategic prime urban land for inefficient low-density development.	●			Signage, paving, building design, massing, setback, colour, subdivision, location and orientation, landscape elements, street layout, architectural detailing, open space provision, heritage articulation, materials, artworks, building types, house types, facilities, bus stops and facilities, street furniture, gateways, lighting, viewpoints, lights and shadow, corners, ground floor detailing, bay windows	
2	To enhance the use, enjoyment, and advantages of existing public facilities and community activities to attract intensive development.	●				
3	To ensure that new developments fit with the physical, heritage, and local character of the site and contribute to creating a coherent sense of place and identity.	●				
4	To ensure that the design of buildings and spaces are appropriate for their purpose, setting, and grain of the existing neighbourhood.	●				
5	To ensure that new buildings and spaces contribute to enhancing rather than undermining the overall quality of public amenity.	●				
6	To provide for urban amenities and services only where and when they are needed.	●				
7	To consider in the design of public environments the elements that affect the transition toward intensification.		●			
8	To promote the design of buildings and spaces that express timeless qualities of symmetry, proportion, balance, harmony, scale, and rhythm appropriate to the context.		●			

6.7. Sustainable

Although the intended use can be flexible, the design of public places should be timeless. To remain a memorable, lasting, and effective meeting place and destination, Whangarei's urban environment should be sustainable across all the four well-beings: environmental, economic, social, and cultural. High quality urban design should allow growth to occur where the natural environment is recognised and protected. It should continue to play a key role in the sustainability of the built form. When possible, developments should make efficient use of indigenous materials, energy, and other resources, to support the local industries. High quality urban design should be enduring but not compromise significant heritage values. It should also promote healthy living by encouraging walking and cycling.

Outcomes

Issues

Location | Sprawl | Grain | Focus | Vitality | Style | Equity

Since sustainable built environments contribute to all the four well-beings, they can address all of the community's desired outcomes and the urban design issues.

It is important that Whangarei thrives in a manner where appropriate urban land use, enhanced natural beauty, and quality built form lead the way to our sustainable future. Growth will affect existing amenities as well as the lifestyle and travel patterns of communities, so it is imperative to find smarter ways to promote sustainable behaviour such as using resources wisely, reducing our impact on the environment, encouraging mixed-use developments, and increasing the adaptability of buildings and spaces to different climate and business conditions. Though style, taste, and fashion are expected to change over time, the built environment should remain sustainable to secure the future of Whangarei.

Benefits

A sustainable urban environment results in a high quality of life and a raft of associated benefits across all four well beings, environmental, economy, social, cultural. A few of those benefits include:

1. low-cost low-impact development
2. preservation of intrinsic value of landscape and ecological systems
3. increase in native biodiversity
4. opportunities for water-sensitive outcomes
5. opportunities for use of sustainable energy resources
6. reduced need for artificial lighting and air conditioning
7. relief from hard urban spaces
8. savings on maintenance cost
9. waste minimisation



Figure 22. Use of Palms in CBD Streets

Palms are very tolerant to a wide range of conditions and offer an instant effect and flexibility in placement.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 7. Design Objectives and Elements of a Sustainable Place

	Objectives	Priority			Design Elements
		High	Med	Low	
1	To design public buildings and places with anticipation of the need for additional services in the future.	●			Paved areas, parks and gardens, street furniture, lighting and solar orientation, ventilation, gullies, vegetation, esplanade reserves, street trees, water features, soil type and conditions, swales, building materials, parking, buildings layout and form, site design
2	To encourage the development of lifetime neighbourhoods in the city and suburban centres.	●			
3	To promote walking, cycling, and public transport as the preferred means of access and lifestyle in the urban centres for both locals and tourists.	●			
4	To ensure that the intrinsic value of ecological, cultural, amenity, and intrinsic values of the environment are utilised and enhanced in public and private developments.	●			
5	To design places that encourage local employment and decision-making.	●			
6	To provide when possible for an increase in native biodiversity in the design of urban landscapes.		●		
7	To ensure that public buildings and spaces are able to change and adapt over time concerning future use.		●		
8	To ensure that public buildings and spaces are designed for Whangarei's climatic conditions and reduce energy costs.		●		
9	To promote the efficient use of local energy and resources to extend the life of buildings, structures and spaces.		●		
10	To encourage the use of materials which reduce waste production such as those recycled, reused, or sourced from renewable resources.		●		
11	To promote the use of water sensitive urban design (WSUD) principles.		●		
12	To promote the use of the principles of low impact urban design and development (LIUDD) in the design of buildings, public spaces and carparks.		●		
13	To promote the use of materials and detailing that are durable and easy to clean, fix, or replace if needed.			●	
14	To encourage when appropriate the conversion rather than removal of existing buildings and spaces in inner urban areas due to intensification, to reduce demolition waste and energy required for producing new building materials.			●	

6.8. Safe

Public safety is a baseline provision at all times in all places. Public places should be human-scaled to attract people of all ages and backgrounds and ensure they feel safe in Whangarei. For a sustainable future, it is important that the built environment has safe, clean, lively, tidy, active, attractive, and comfortable streets and public spaces that offer rich experience to entice people of all ages and diversities to gather to meet and eventually settle in our District.

Outcomes

Safe public buildings and spaces help increase the mental and physical wellbeing of the people. Not only do they ensure public health and safety but they also create the feeling and perception that it is safe and comfortable to go to public places. The assurance and perception of public safety not only help to increase pedestrian activity and accessibility; they also promote healthy community lifestyle and increase the vibrancy and vitality that contribute to a growing local economy.

Issues

Sprawl | Grain | Focus | Vitality | Equity

Making public places safe and crime-free can also address a number of other urban design issues. It can reduce sprawl, as people will find urban places convenient, safer, and healthier for public walking, cycling, meeting, shopping, and inner city living. It is important that our built environment is human-scaled. It should be much more respectful of the people's wellbeing, how they experience the city, and should give people priority over cars. This will facilitate urban intensification that will help further enhance the grain and form of urban centres. Increased safety will also make public spaces accessible to diverse cultures and sectors of the community. All these facilitate the increase in vitality and centrality of urban areas.

Benefits

1. increased sense of community stewardship, identity, and spirit
2. reduction in cases of graffiti
3. decrease in inappropriate social behaviour
4. enhanced mental and physical well-being of people
5. provision of natural surveillance which helps increase sense of vitality and safety on streets
6. support for development of local tourism and retail industries



Figure 23. Railway Bridge Mural at Rust Ave.

Murals promote a sense of ownership in the community and can be effective as defence against graffiti.

Urban Design Objectives

Table 8. Design Objectives and Elements of a Safe Place

	Objectives	Priority			Design Elements
		High	Med	Low	
1	To design streets, buildings, and places that make people safe and feel safe while in the public or own private spaces.	●			Paved areas, open spaces, street furniture, colour, street lighting, window orientation, street trees and height, parking, road landscaping, building layout, site design, artworks, alleyways, street location and width, street cameras, billboards and signage, benches, sightlines, visual access, shade and shadows
2	To encourage a range of living, working, shopping and recreational activities on public environments and streets at different times of the day and night.	●			
3	To promote a 24-hour weeklong culture in the city centre that is full of energy, optimism, and vibrancy and that appeals to all ages and abilities.	●			
4	To embrace best practice principles on crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).	●			
5	To ensure that public buildings and spaces accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.	●			
6	To promote the use of natural and man-made forms of shade in public places to protect users from extreme storm and sunny weather conditions.	●			
7	To promote the use of traffic calmers and shared spaces in present and prospective pedestrian-oriented areas.		●		
8	To encourage the placement of windows facing public spaces and streets as a measure of increasing perception that the spaces are 'owned and watched' by the public.		●		
9	To encourage the development of public art in city parks and streets.			●	
10	To promote the development of safe open-ended mid-block spaces and alleys within urban centres to encourage walking.			●	
11	To promote good maintenance of public spaces and street furniture as a sign of good care and ownership needed to deter anti-social behaviour.			●	

7. The Means

The Urban Design Strategy sets the foundation for building a sense of vision and inclusion among the stakeholders in Whangarei and this will be translated into action through subsequent implementing plans, policies, programmes, and projects. The achievement of the desired qualities and objectives for a high quality urban design in Whangarei would not be possible without all stakeholders collaborating and building on this Strategy to ensure the effective implementation and efficient delivery of tangible outcomes.

7.1. Involvement

To achieve the vision of a leading meeting place and destination, it is imperative that future developments affecting the city and suburban centres in Whangarei involve all project stakeholders to ensure that design solutions satisfy the interests of community and industry sectors. The stakeholders mainly include Council, developers, organisations, and the community.

Council

Although the contribution of all stakeholders involved is needed to guarantee success, a large part of the urban design initiatives will be Council-driven. Council will need to demonstrate commitment through leadership and collaboration to secure the sustainable future of the District and to implement an integrated planning and growth management approach to meet its community governance responsibility. The value of any such initiative lies in the success of promoting a proactive rather than reactive culture towards the content and process of policy planning and project implementation. The table below mainly consists of those activities set forth by Council as part of its commitment under the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol.

Table 9. Council Involvement

Council Objectives	Priority			Mechanisms	
	High	Med	Low		
Leadership					
1	To raise urban design awareness in the wider public and development sector.	●			Media, events, public consultation
2	To develop further non-statutory documents to support the Urban Design Strategy and guide future development.	●			Strategic documents
3	To promote the value and place of Whangarei in regional, national and international context.	●			Media, education
4	To benchmark best practice as a means of attracting skilled workers and investors.		●		Education, media
5	To increase efficiency and capability of Council staff.		●		Education
6	To develop projects that identify and resolve specific areas of design improvement, illustrate the Urban Design Strategy, and test innovative approaches and solutions.		●		Demonstration projects
7	To reward high quality urban design in order to instigate improvement of key buildings, places, and properties.		●		Incentives
8	To create a unit within council tasked to promote quality urban design within and outside council.		●		Urban design unit
9	To incorporate urban design principles in statutory plans, policies, and programmes.			●	Policy review
10	To ensure that poor quality design with significant effects to the wider community is dealt with the use of statutory means.			●	Consents

Council Objectives	Priority			Mechanisms	
	High	Med	Low		
Collaboration					
11	To ensure that stated urban design vision, information, funding, and support are able to inform decision-making process that is undertaken in a transparent manner.	●			Strategic documents
12	To incorporate urban design expectations in policy planning, service provision, capital projects, and decision-making.	●			Strategic documents
13	To share information and develop joint research and consultation with other organisations to improve practice.	●			Education, meetings
14	To develop multidisciplinary team and partner approach within and outside Council in order to take a holistic view on the continued development of the urban environment.	●			Urban design unit, meetings
15	To ensure social inclusion, equity, and industry participation in dealing with urban design issues and strategy documentation.	●			Meetings, public consultation
16	To ensure that new developments stem from strategic urban design motivation rather than regulatory constraints.		●		Meetings
17	To act as catalyst in engaging property owners and developers to participate and benefit from Council initiatives.		●		Meetings
18	To conduct audits and inform the public of Whangarei's natural features as well as cultural and built heritage, in order to ensure their protection and/or enhancement as well provide opportunities for creating district identity.			●	Education, media
19	To encourage and the take the lead in organising events which promote and celebrate the urban environment.			●	Media, events

Developers

Developers, together with landowners and investors, are the major players in the property market. They can make considerable influences over the market for the delivery of high quality urban design and ultimately over changing the urban landscape of Whangarei. It is recognised world over that quality adds value and thereby the chances of success of property developments. This does not however appear to manifest locally, demonstrating prolonged complacency. This occurs despite the fact that creative employment, which could make significant influence on innovation and quality, has risen in recent years. The bigger creative businesses such as property developers can fully utilise this available increase in creative talents and together contribute to developing high quality urban environments.

Table 10. Developer Involvement

	Developer Objectives	Priority			Mechanisms
		High	Med	Low	
1	To seek investments that help achieve the intentions of the Urban Design Strategy.	●			Strategic documents
2	To attract and utilise new and existing local creative talents in contributing to high quality urban design.	●			Media, incentives
3	To recognise public interest by involving communities at all stages of the development of their projects.	●			Public consultation, design competition
4	To demonstrate high quality urban design, indicating its benefits to every development, regardless of scale.	●			Seminars, media
5	To work collaboratively with Council by continuously making public submissions and utilising existing services, facilities, and amenities in their development projects.		●		Meetings, urban design panel
6	To work collaboratively and comprehensively with other developers to ensure synergy in achieving the intents of the Urban Design Strategy.		●		Meetings

Organisations

Organisations, institutes, and groups of professionals, consultants, or individuals with interest in design of the urban environment, can provide significant advisory, advocacy, education, training, and research support to the work of Council and developers.

Table 11. Organisation Involvement

	Organisation Objectives	Priority			Mechanisms
		High	Med	Low	
1	To take the lead in finding better ways of developing high quality urban design in the district.	●			Education
2	To work in collaboration with council and developers to suggest better mechanisms and approaches to doing things.	●			Meetings
3	To assist in helping to re-align the actions of private interest that potentially lead to poor urban design.	●			Meetings
4	To proactively participate in local design advisory and decision-making processes, particularly in determining appropriate and vernacular design, through public submissions and consultations.	●			Public consultation, meetings
5	To assist in directing private interest towards adding value to properties with significant potential of contributing to the enhancement of the urban environment.		●		Education
4	To provide opportunities for educating and helping to increase urban design awareness in the district.		●		Education
5	To act as catalyst in advocating collaborative working relationship between public and private sectors.			●	Meetings

Community

As end users of the urban environment, the community plays the most important role across all stages of planning, design, and implementation. The community consists of people from all diversities and origins and includes locals, migrants and visitors. Tangata Whenua, in particular, has specific kaitiaki roles and responsibilities to the environment and this should be recognised in the design process.

Table 12. Community Involvement

	Community Objectives	Priority			Mechanisms
		High	Med	Low	
1	To recognise and perform their stewardship roles and responsibilities to enhancing the urban environment.	●			Public consultation
2	To lead in the design of their own neighbourhoods and proactively develop community action projects in partnership with the other stakeholders.	●			Demonstration projects, Meetings
3	To collaboratively work with Council by participating in public submissions, consultations, and network building.	●			Public consultation
4	To consistently demand for information at every level and stage of projects to increase urban design awareness.	●			Public consultation, meetings
5	To promote opportunities for helping people to identify and appreciate outstanding local values, stories, and other features necessary to building sense of place.		●		Education, demonstration projects
6	To practice high quality urban design in their own backyard.			●	Strategic documents, education
7	To advocate for alternative ways of changing our actions and behaviour with regard to improving the urban landscape in the community.			●	Media

7.2. Mechanisms

As shown in the tables above, a number of mechanisms can be adopted by the stakeholders when implementing the Urban Design Strategy. They are set out as follows according to priority:

High priority

1. Strategic documents

A number of urban design guides will be formulated out of this Urban Design Strategy such as urban design frameworks and guidelines. Framework plans identify elements of urban structure and the working image needed to resolve specific areas of design improvement such as the CBD. They provide a stable, easily recognisable frame of connection and places where change can occur for a specific area or development type. The design guidelines will illustrate how the elements of building or space design such as colour, materials and facade can best give effect to the design strategy and framework. These strategic documents will provide the consistent operational basis for designing, planning, and assessing vertical and horizontal developments needed by all stakeholders to reap the benefits of a high quality urban design.

2. Urban design panel

Apart from the urban design guides, the urban design panel can also provide free advice on proposals with significant impact on the urban environment. In the spirit of efficiency and effectiveness, initially, rather than hiring external consultants, the panel can consist of Council staff who will highlight existing urban design roles and untapped strong design skills within divisions of Council. A fully independent panel that consists of external local professionals may be established should demand for this service increase in the future. Considering their talents and commitment to the Protocol, the panel can provide advice on private and Council-initiated developments. The panel can help Council document project tender briefs, write guidelines for running design competitions, and build good working relationships with communities from early consultation and cooperation to project completion. It can also help negotiate deals to be used as leverage for encouraging property developers to grasp opportunities offered in prospective sites.

3. Media

Print, television, online information, billboards, and other forms of media can help increase urban design awareness in the community. The media can help enhance, connect, and make existing strong and attractive elements of the physical environment accessible.

4. Events

Events can facilitate celebration of the city, increase urban design awareness and display vigour in public places. Along with media, events can further create new opportunities to celebrate the city and increase activities needed to create a great sense of place.

5. Meetings

Meetings provide a good source of information in strategic planning. Stakeholder groups should be encouraged to organise regular and occasional meetings to increase collaboration and promote synergy of activities. Meetings also generate community buy-in that is needed during public consultation and eventual consent application.

6. Public consultation

Urban environments are built for communities themselves, so the public should always be consulted on policies and strategies that influence urban design. In the spirit of efficiency, this strategy and the ensuing design guides shall be open for public consultation once they become available and adopted by Council. Developers will be encouraged to undertake public consultation as an effective means of gaining public acceptance and therefore viability of their project proposals.

Medium priority

1. Demonstration projects

Urban design demonstration projects manifest commitment to quality design and materials, illustrate the kind of city we want, and inform best practice principles. Apart from justifying the use of public funds on Council land, they can be used as a promotional mechanism to raise the level of interest and public expectation of urban design, particularly for public buildings and spaces. They help promote distinctiveness, sense of order in the streetscape as well as refurbishment of heritage buildings. Such an undertaking should be an ongoing activity of Council, continuously displaying innovation and creativity as well pride in the city. Demonstration projects also convey to private developers the expectation that the same level of design and quality is expected of their developments. Among the potential projects for Council is the use of signature city furniture, paving, and detail.

2. Education

Research, seminars, and training support and promote internal and external educational programmes that will advance knowledge and understanding of the value of high quality urban design and of Whangarei's unique natural environment and cultural heritage, to best determine the District's unique sense of place. Conference attendance by Council staff increases capability and helps promote Whangarei at various levels of interest.

3. Design competitions

The development of urban design demonstration and other Council and private projects may benefit from the use of design competition by generating local creativity and public buy-in. The use of design competitions should not however depend on the level of cost of the project but on the degree of public interest and involvement that the proposed building or space will attract.

4. Incentives

To encourage individuals and developers to adopt high quality urban design principles, Council must formulate a policy on providing incentives to developments that promote high quality urban design. This may include provisions in the LTCCP for awarding best practice urban design, for giving subsidies to heritage building owners or developers in the form of reduced or delayed payment of development contributions, consents discounts, and rates holiday, and for giving bonuses in terms of relief from planning rules such as minimum floor area and height.

5. Urban design unit

The creation of an urban design unit tasked to promote high quality urban design within and outside Council demonstrates, in essence, the strong commitment of Council to the continued role of urban design in the development and growth of Whangarei. In addition, due to its strategic and facilitative role, the unit can help strengthen collaboration among the key stakeholders in the development sector.

Low priority

1. Policy review

A number of plans, policies, and strategies were adopted by Council during the last decade in an effort to revitalise the city centre. Largely due to economic uncertainties, these were haphazard and the intents of these efforts did not materialise. The Urban Design Strategy combines all these efforts into one overarching vision and will be used as reference when reviewing previous related policy documents and, when appropriate, making revisions to reflect this vision.

2. Consents

Although the strategic documents and urban design panel provide free advice to resource and building consent applicants, certain consent procedures based on existing District Plan and other statutory provisions will still need to be imposed to discourage poor design and quality.

8. Conclusion

The Urban Design Strategy adopts an ongoing incremental approach to building a high quality urban environment that will help develop Whangarei into a leading meeting place and destination and secure its sustainable future. To achieve this vision, urban development should be compact, connected, distinctive, diverse, attractive, appropriate, sustainable and safe. A number of design objectives, stakeholder responsibilities, and mechanisms have been identified and set according to their priorities for implementation.

By adopting an incremental approach, the Strategy can take advantage of opportunities as they occur and utilise these as appropriate to the state and scale of Whangarei at that point in time. While physical developments are important, it is expected that the strategic initiatives recommended here will provide opportunities and lessons to all stakeholders involved for continuous learning and implementation geared towards achieving a sustainable future for Whangarei.

The success of this Strategy will nevertheless be measured on the ability of current and future initiatives to make Whangarei a successful meeting place and destination now and through the future.

Quality	LTCCP Outcomes						Urban Design Issues							
							Location	Sprawl	Grain	Focus	Vitality	Style	Articulation	Equity
Compact	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Connected		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Distinctive	●			●		●				●	●	●	●	
Diverse		●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●		●
Attractive	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Appropriate	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sustainable	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Safe		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●			●

Figure 24. Summary of the Urban Design Strategy

The Urban Design Strategy sets out the design qualities needed to achieve a high quality urban environment that not only addresses Whangarei’s desired outcomes under the LTCCP but also helps resolve the District’s urban design issues.

Other documents to consult

The Urban Design Strategy for Whangarei is not a statutory document but provides useful guidance for Council, developers, organisations, and the community. It should be read in conjunction with other relevant statutory and strategic documents, and useful references from other councils and organisations.

Statutory Plans

Operative District Plan. <http://www.wdc.govt.nz/customerservice/?lc=links&id=583<L=11>

Long Term Council Community Plan. <http://www.wdc.govt.nz/resources/13029/2009-2019-LTCCP-adopted-webpage-version.pdf>

Strategic Plans

Ageing In Our Place - Positive Ageing Strategy 2005 - 2015. <http://www.wdc.govt.nz/xml/ps.aspx?fn=/resources/9655/Ageing.htm>

Arts, Culture, and Heritage Policy 2009. <http://www.wdc.govt.nz/resources/13106/Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-Policy.pdf>

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