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Parks, Sport & Recreation
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Submission on the Draft Mt Victoria/Matairangi Master Plan

This submission is made on behalf of an organisation, **Mt Victoria Historical Society Inc.**

It is an incorporated society with the aims of researching and sharing the history of the suburb of Mt Victoria and promoting interest in, and preservation of, its unique heritage.

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1. There are many aspects of the Master Plan which we support and we appreciate that a comprehensive approach is being taken to the future management of the Mt Victoria section of the Town Belt. There are some proposals, however, which we believe takes it too far from the original intention of a public recreation space and 'over-develops' it.
2. Mt Victoria Historical Society (MVHS) commends the Draft Plan's Cultural Significance section (page 13) for its description of the Maori heritage of the area. We request the plan should also include a section on its European heritage.

Mount Alfred peak is a good example of that shared heritage. As the draft plan states, it is the site of Te Akatarewa Pa. It should also state that the peak was named after Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Prince Alfred was the first member of the British Royal Family to visit New Zealand when he came here as commander of the frigate *HMS Galatea* in 1869. There is a very interesting sign explaining this on the peak itself.

3. Unfortunately, because of past dense plantings of American conifers, Mount Alfred is invisible to most Wellingtonians and its existence is only really known to those who actually walk or bike over it.

The Significant Views (1.01.1) "Opportunities" section of the draft plan proposes that there should be selective pruning of vegetation to afford better views from the Peak to Cook's Strait and Lyall Bay. We submit that such pruning should be extended (including the removal of selected ageing pines) to allow a view from Mount Alfred to the city and inner harbour as well. This would also allow it to be seen again from the city, bringing it back into public consciousness.

4. The draft plan rightly states in Broad Views (1.02.2) that views west to the city from Alexander Road are "obscured by existing vegetation". The monoculture of even-aged exotic conifers along the western edge of the road has a 'flattening' effect on Mt Victoria's ridgeline. Removing them would not only allow for views of the city and inner harbour but would expose the natural topography (see attached historic photo 1.).

MVHS supports the draft plan's concept of Glimpse Views (1.02.4). We consider some minimal pruning of a few trees on well-used tracks would achieve this.

5. MVHS agrees with the proposal to develop a "pedestrian journey" along a loop track from Courtenay place to Oriental Bay via the Mt Victoria Lookout (Tracks-Walkways 1.03). We suggest this walkway should be well identified along its route, including direction signs in Courtenay Place and Oriental Bay.

Going, as it would do, up Marjoribanks St, the walkway could also incorporate a built heritage aspect to it, starting with our historic Mt Victoria display in the window of the Embassy Theatre). MVHS would be pleased to consult further with the Council on this idea.

We are not in favour, however, of tracks becoming over-designed and built largely to meet a tourist demand. We believe that the majority of the tourists who choose to walk up or down Mt Victoria appreciate it for its relatively natural aspect, so close to the city. Page 21 for instance, suggests possible barriers alongside a path down from the lookout "would be required here due to fall/safety issues" – this is clearly ridiculous.

6. Regarding the draft plan's proposal to have a 'main entrance' for the Town belt on Mt Victoria, located at the top of Majoribanks St, we do not agree with there being only one main entrance. We believe it is appropriate to have two principal entrances on the city side, with the other from the Pirie Street reserve. This is a very heavily used entrance and is also right beside a bus stop and car park. We suggest both entrances could include a commemoration of the founders of the Town Belt and a sign explaining something of the history of the Town Belt and its special status. While there is an explanation sign to this effect on the Lookout, not all visitors to the Town Belt by any means go there. We would be pleased to work with the Council on this.
7. With regard to the Open Spaces section (1.07), the names Charles Plimmer Park North and Charles Plimmer Park South currently cause confusion. One them (we would prefer the one

at the top of Majoribanks St.) should be renamed, possibly after a famous Mt Victoria identity or some other unique Mt Victoria association (e.g. Mary Taylor), with this part of the Town Belt.

8. Vegetation Types, Risk Levels & Tracks (1.12).

With great foresight the founders of Wellington set aside land, which has become known as the Town Belt, for "the enjoyment of the public ", to "secure the beautiful appearance of the future city" and to have "a landscape to be delighted in". Those descriptions of course referred a great deal to the magnificent native forest and rich birdlife then adorning much of the Town Belt. That forest was considered its "greatest ornament". The upper slopes of Mt Victoria would seem to have lost their native forest some time before European settlement (most likely cleared for building pa and security of views from them). A close examination of the reproduction of the painting of Mt Victoria in the draft plan, however, shows the lower slopes/gullies still with some native vegetation.

For these reasons the MVHS strongly supports the revegetation of Mt Victoria with native trees as proposed in the plan. As an historical society, our position is informed by the past but we are also looking to the future for a Town Belt, where, in the words of Charles Heaphy, "in summer the crimson of rata blazed there".

9. The draft plan's revegetation map shown in 1.13 Revegetation Areas, should include the Mt Vic Revegers who have been carrying out a native tree planting project on Mt Victoria for many years.

10. MVHS in general strongly supports the recommendation (2.06 Broad Scale Context or Vegetation Strategy) not to replace fallen or removed pine, macrocarpa and eucalypt trees with exotic species and that they be replaced with native trees.

We would like to see long-term retention of the historic pine trees behind Ellice Street in recognition of the history of Hector and of pine planting (particularly during the Depression) on Mt Victoria, however.

As the eucalypt trees are particularly valued by tuis as a winter food source (and attract huge numbers of tui), we believe it is important that proactive planting of species that would ultimately replace eucalypts as an alternative food source begin as soon as possible.

11. We are strongly opposed to the extension of, or development of, more community gardens (or children's gardens) on Mt Victoria Town Belt land, including the quarry. These gardens are not public recreation areas, and are therefore not appropriate and against the intention of the founders of the Town Belt.

12. "Tracing the streams"

We are not in favour of the artifice of planting "different dominant indigenous species in each gully", although we do approve of the plan to provide historical interpretation of streams.

We would also like to see a serious investigation into uncovering ('daylighting') streams wherever possible.

13. 2.04 Signage & Interpretation Strategy

We request that the Old Kilbirnie Road (see attached historic photo 2), now part of the Southern Walkway, be identified with a sign/signs similar to the one identifying *The Lord of the Rings* filming location.

We note that a priority 2 activity is to “name open spaces to reflect history and location in consultation with Mana Whenua”. We would also like to see consultation with pakeha over naming spaces and sites on Mt Victoria and would be happy to work with the Council on this.

14. We are opposed to the proposal that a suspension bridge be built across the quarry.

15. We very much approve of the proposal to manage encroachment of residential properties on the west slopes of Mt Victoria; in fact, we would favour raising this to a priority 1 (from priority 2). This could allow, for instance, encroachments to be dealt with immediately in event of sales of property which have encroached.

16. Rubbish bins

We note that it is proposed to retain the status quo in terms of rubbish bins. We believe that this proposal should be revisited. For example, the car park at the former gun emplacement site is sometimes heavily used, including by campers and workers, and currently has no rubbish bin.