



April 3, 2009

Wellington City Council,
P.O. Box 2199
Wellington 6011

Attention: City Planning Team

Submission on Proposed District Plan Changes

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.

There are many points in the proposed changes that Mt Victoria Historical Society applauds. We have a concern, however, that some of this is set out in italics in the *Draft Residential Area Review* document and represents the thinking behind the changes, rather than being enshrined in rules and implemented by Council officers.

Mt Victoria Historical Society urges the Council to continue to acknowledge and protect the fact that Mt Victoria is an important collection of heritage buildings and structures that tell a myriad of stories about the settlement and development of this unique inner-city suburb. The remaining built heritage is not only important to Wellington's sense of place but is also a significant tourist draw card, being close to the city and highly visible.

With this in mind, we urge that Mt Victoria continue to be accorded the status of an Area of Special Character protection. We make more specific comments on the proposals as follows.

1. Chapter 4

4.2.1.6 Residential intensification

We agree that any residential intensification should ensure that new development is compatible with the existing character of the neighbourhood and respects the amenity of surrounding residential properties. We also agree with encouraging the retention and adaptive re-use of existing houses, but suggest there be a caveat on that – provided the use is compatible with character and respects amenity.

Experience has shown, however, that the Council often allows its own District Plan rules to be overridden, so unless there is a commitment to following them we have little faith that they will make a difference. For example, in 2007 a resource consent was granted to construct a two-storeyed dwelling in place of an old sleepout at 13 Porritt Avenue, in spite of the fact that this made the property a multi-unit development and that provisions for multi-unit developments were not being met.

We also urge that protection of open spaces, in an historic area such as Mt Victoria, should include preservation of more-than century-old rear and side yards.

Regarding windfall sites and their conversion from commercial or community purposes to residential purposes, we agree this should not lead to a loss of existing residential character. However some former commercial or community purpose buildings may have historical value worth preserving. We suggest their historical value be considered in any proposals for their retention and conversion to new units, along with the requirement that they have appropriate levels of residential amenity.

We agree that a split into two household units should not require an additional off-street car park. This rule has led to the fronts of many properties being converted into car-pads or garages, totally out of sympathy with the original streetscape.

4.2.2 Heritage and sense of place

We are pleased to see that Mt Victoria's significant contribution to Wellington's unique character and its importance in helping to define Wellington's sense of place are acknowledged. We agree that new development in Mt Victoria should respect and complement the existing streetscape character. However, we believe the visibility Mt Victoria's houses, individually and collectively, from central and other areas of Wellington is another important factor for consideration.

We would also propose that there be restrictions on unsympathetic additions to buildings in inner residential areas such as Mt Victoria (see comments under Residential Design Guide section below for more detail).

Demolition of pre-1930 buildings (discussion)

The rules protecting pre-1930's buildings in Mt Victoria are currently not strong enough. Greater protection is required for such buildings and a more robust and open process for assessment of such buildings, involving formal communication with organisations such as the Mt Victoria Residents Association and the Mt Victoria Historical Society, is required.

We agree that the current rule 5.3.11 be deleted for Mt Victoria. We continue to urge that there be mandatory public notification on every demolition of primary form, or where there are significant additions and alterations so that primary form is no longer discernable, or where the building is removed. The latter considerations suggest that they be included in the definition of what constitutes 'demolition'.

We agree that streetscape and also the design quality and potential contribution of the proposed replacement should be considered. We also agree to requiring a report from a suitably qualified conservation architect where Council records are inadequate to determine date of construction.

While streetscape is very important, it is often about a complex set of relationships in the surrounding area and not confined simply to the alignment of one house with its next door neighbours. We are concerned that effects on streetscape weigh more heavily than heritage values. This appears to involve imposing a planner's subjective judgment of what a 'good' streetscape might be over the 'original' streetscape. We do not believe that this is a valid basis for decisions on approving demolition or infill.

We urge that heritage factors, other than age of the building, such as historical owners/tenants, renowned architects, social history, given equal weighting with streetscape. Mt Victoria's old buildings are unique and irreplaceable. They are a tangible link to Wellington's rich social history, as demonstrated by the Historical Society's successful exhibition in 2008 of some of our important people and places.

We are concerned to see that the matters to consider when assessing applications to demolish a pre-1930 building, or undertake work on a site containing a pre-1930 building include the degree of economic effects, and the condition of the existing building, particularly its structural integrity. Economic considerations appear to have led to some demolitions and alterations resulting in very unsympathetic replacements. We are also concerned that some owners are deliberately letting buildings deteriorate so that demolition is more likely to be permitted.

Removal or demolition of architectural features from primary elevations (discussion)

We welcome the addition of this consideration and its impact on streetscape and neighbourhood character. Consistent with comments above, we would suggest adding heritage value to what is considered.

An example of what we consider unsympathetic changes to architectural features is the replacement of windows by aluminium windows, or windows of different shape from the characteristic form for the historic period of the house.

We agree that where the main elevation of the buildings are oriented away from the street, where visible, they can contribute to the character of the neighbourhood. We note the proposal lists five areas, but would like to see some areas of Mt Victoria added to this list, such as Hawker Street and Shannon Street.

Mt Victoria North Residential Character Area (discussion)

We concur with the general direction in the Plan about ensuring any additions and alterations are well-designed, respect the predominant patterns of the surrounding neighbourhood, and the setting St Gerard's Monastery. (See comment on Page 7, however

4.2.3 Character and scale of new development

We agree that any new developments in Mt Victoria acknowledge and respect the character of the area. However, in the case of Mt Victoria, we do not agree with the statement (in 4.2.3.2) that additions and alterations to an existing dwelling on a site will usually not have a significant effect on neighbourhood character, and therefore should be a permitted activity.

We note that respect for character relates to both consistency with immediate context, and contrast in built form. We agree that the latter is going to be difficult to manage effectively, and would not like to see it become an avenue for 'film-set' replicas of Mt Victoria's heritage houses.

4.2.2.3 Identify buildings and areas with significant heritage values

We urge that a comprehensive heritage assessment, such as those carried out for Mt Cook, Berhampore and Newtown, be undertaken for Mt Victoria. Such a study should include an archaeological assessment identifying pre-1900 structures and features in the neighbourhood.

4.2.4 Controls on residential development

We are concerned at reference to less restrictive building recession provisions, as this will potentially severely affect the amenity value of neighbours. (Our comment on G2.5 on Page 6 also addresses this issue.)

We do not agree with the provision, under 4.2.4.1. - matters to consider when assessing a proposal to vary the standards for buildings in residential area - that the extent to which a proposal breaches permitted activity conditions is merely a "matter to consider". If it breaches any District Plan condition, it should not be allowed.

Similarly, we do not agree with the provision that where standards for yards, site coverage etc. are not met, consideration be given to whether the loss of sunlight, daylight or privacy to adjoining sites is significant. If the standards are not met, the development should not be allowed.

Chapter 5. Residential Area Rules

Map of Mt Victoria pre-1930's **demolition rule area** (Appendix 1, page 3)

We believe this area should extend to a line on the east side of Hania and Home Street along to Clyde Quay. We also have concern that, even then, key buildings of heritage significance remain outside this area, namely:

- Kent Terrace – Central Fire Station
- 1 Kent Terrace – BATS building
- Cnr Majoribanks and Kent Terrace – former City Hotel
- 9-11 Kent Terrace – Embassy Theatre
- 25 Kent Terrace
- 43 Kent Terrace – Elliot House

Residential Design Guide

G1.14 Adding to an existing building (page 10)

[Note: reads “adding a new dwelling to an existing structure” – is this what is intended, or should it read “adding a new structure to an existing dwelling?]

We agree with this provision if it means adding to an existing building. We would ask WCC officers, however, to follow this guideline more consistently.

In the past, additional stories have been added, for instance, to high-quality art deco apartment buildings. There are a number of buildings in Mt Victoria designed by well-known art deco architects, including Edward Anscombe, and it is important that these be protected. The scale and proportions of these buildings are essential to their style and heritage and no more examples of these significant buildings should be destroyed. We would mention in particular:

- 9 Hawker Street (Anscombe)
- 82 Marjoribanks Street, Belvedere
- 17 Brougham Street, Owd Trafford
- 53 Austin Street
- 123 Brougham Street
- 11 Dufferin Street
- 2 Hawker Street
- Central Fire Station
- Hania Street, Rehabilitation League building (Anscombe)

Unfortunately the following buildings have already had their heritage and architectural value diminished by unsightly additions:

- New City Hotel, Kent Terrace/Marjoribanks Street
- 24-26 Elizabeth Street
- 11 Hawker street

If consents are sought to change the additions, we would like to see that the additions be removed.

Another common practice in Mt Victoria has been to insert garages into the front of original houses. This practice destroys both streetscape and heritage values and should not be permitted.

This guideline also states “this does not mean that period details or “reproduction heritage” should be applied as these can, and often do, detract from the character and value of place. Such additions have been approved in the recent past and we would request that WCC officers follow this guideline in future.

G2.5 Sunlight and daylight to living areas (page 11)

This guideline states that all dwellings should be positioned “to receive midwinter sun in at least one main living room for at least 4 hours at mid-winter” and requiring that this be considered for neighbours as well as within a development.

WCC officers must take into account, when applying this guide to Mt Victoria, that the pattern of historical development means that a) many existing houses have only one living area b) there is often already no sun from the north and that c) any new buildings must not compromise sunlight access any further.

Residential Design Guide Appendices

We believe that the purpose of the Residential Design Guide Appendices should be amended so that it is clear that they do not apply only to “the design of new multi-unit and infill housing”. They should apply also to replacement dwellings and additions to existing buildings.

Appendix 2: Mt Victoria

2.1 Significance of Mt Victoria to the City

In this section, the following statements are made:

“Mt Victoria has a distinctive character that makes a considerable contribution to Wellington’s collective identity”. It also acknowledges its “Historical Continuity”, “Heritage significance” and “Distinctive character”. (page 39-40).

We support the fact that there is no change to this, but would ask WCC to pay greater heed to its own guidelines in approving demolition, new buildings and major alterations to existing buildings.

- e.g. “private rear yards are important” (page 42) - therefore these should be protected
- “common frontage widths” (page 41) – therefore these should be followed
- “consistent alignment between the building and the street grid” (page 41)

In terms of maps of “sub-areas within Mt Victoria [which] possess special character significance”, we request that:

- Armour Avenue (page 47) should include the west side of Albany Avenue, which has original two-storey dwellings
- Queen Street (page 53) be extended on both sides to Brougham Street.

Sub-area - Mt Victoria North/St Gerard’s

A considerable amount of space is devoted to describing this area and its importance, including MacFarlane Street. It also rates special mention in the District Plan Rules. It is very noticeable, however, that many dwellings on MacFarlane Street have been permitted inappropriate developments, contrary to the guidelines. Again, we urge Wellington City Council to honour its own District Plan.

Appendix 1 - Map of Mt Victoria Pre-1930’s Demolition area

We believe the western boundary of this should be extended to a line on the east side of Hania and Home St and then in a straight line along past Edgehill, Levy Street and Majoribanks St.

Conclusion

While we approve of many of the changes and disagree with others, which we have outlined above, we would like to emphasise that we continue to have concern about Council a) approving works which breach conditions in the District Plan and b) insufficient monitoring and control over building. There have been a number of cases over the years in Mt Victoria where developers or property owners have knowingly breached resource consents and successfully sought retrospective approval for illegal work. (The most recent was at 78 Ellice Street in 2007). These have resulted in works which have had a major impact on the character of the neighbourhood.

We seek greater monitoring by WCC of resource consent approvals and works, and action against property owners carrying out unapproved work, rather than granting retrospective approvals. We ask that WCC enforce District Plan rules and building consent conditions, to the extent that owners should be required to remove structures which breach conditions.

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