

Absolutely Positively Wellington – A Model for Smart Growth

Carlton C. Eley

Development, Community, and Environment Division
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

Paper presented at
The Sixth Symposium of the International Urban Planning and
Environment Association

Center for Environmental Policy and Management
University of Louisville

September 6, 2004

Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei -
For us and our children after us.

Māori Proverb

Abstract

According to the United Nation's Environmental Programme, the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost in the world's cities where an increasing majority of the world's population lives. In the United States, "smart growth" is growing in acceptance as an approach to planning and development, and it represents one means to achieve a 'sustainable' end. The international planning community is inclined to agree there is a need for a sustainable urban form whether or not it is called "smart growth." Furthermore, there are various international best practice models from which smart growth practitioners in the U.S. can learn. This paper offers perspectives on Wellington, New Zealand, and suggests why the city is a model for smart growth. Perspectives were formed based on observations, interviews with city personnel, reviews of city reports, and consideration of United States efforts to manage growth. Some points note strengths and others identify opportunities for improvement.

According to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost in the world's cities where an increasing majority of the world's population lives. Although the term "sustainable development" no longer resonates with the U.S. public as it did ten years ago, the importance of sustainability has not been lost. Conceptually, sustainable development grew in popularity in the U.S. throughout the 1990s, and its appeal subsided by the end of the decade. Nationally, its interpretation proved to be highly contestable, and there was no clear framework among proponents for making the transition from theory to practice. By the end of the 1990s, sustainable development meant different things to different people, and the overwhelming sense of public ambiguity made sustainable development less of a public priority.

Ironically, the gradual decline of "sustainable development" in the U.S. coincided with the burgeoning popularity of "smart growth." Mindful of the quick rise and descent of sustainable development, smart growth practitioners crafted a clear definition for the term, developed principles that supported the definition and enhanced its meaning, and specified the focus of the approach - - improving and enhancing communities. If sustainable development represents a national goal to aspire towards, smart growth represents a means to a "sustainable" end. Former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Christine Todd Whitman referred to smart growth as the planner's approach to achieve sustainable development (Whitman, *New Partners for Smart Growth Conference*, 2002).

The international planning community is inclined to agree there is a need for a sustainable urban form whether or not it is called “smart growth.” Furthermore, there are a myriad of international best practice models that smart growth practitioners in the U.S. can learn from and reference. The City of Wellington in New Zealand represents one such model. This paper shares the author’s perspectives on Wellington and suggests why the city is a model for smart growth.

The U.S. construct for smart growth is based on ten principles. These principles illustrate the characteristics of healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities that offer residents choices of how and where to live. Although smart growth is not a household term in New Zealand, the principles are transferable, and they speak volumes to why Wellington is highly celebrated as a city. This paper presents eight of the ten smart growth principles; explains how they have been met sufficiently in Wellington; and uses the principles as a means to present best practice examples for planning sustainable urban areas.

The author participated in the Ian Axford (New Zealand) Fellowship in Public Policy, and the objective of his research was investigation of New Zealand approaches to achieve smart growth objectives. Perspectives were formed based on observations, interviews with city personnel, and reviews of city reports. Points offered in this paper note strengths of the city and opportunities for improvement.

About Wellington

On the globe, there is a city positioned 41° 17.00S (latitude) and 174° 47.00E (longitude). The city is called Wellington, and it is the national capital of New Zealand. Wellington has transcended simply being the nation's political center. In recent years, the city has flourished as host to a wide range of recreational, cultural, and entertainment activities of national and local significance. Also, the city has acquired a reputation for cinematic production due to the overwhelming success of the Lord of the Rings film trilogy.

With a population of 163,824, Wellington is New Zealand's third largest city. Physically, the city conforms to the shape of a natural amphitheatre, buffered by rolling hills west of the city and Wellington Harbour to the east. Because of these signature features, the city is often compared to San Francisco.

Wellington has received many accolades in recent years. In 2000, Wellington was named New Zealand's Top Town by *North & South Magazine* and rated the best place to live of all New Zealand cities. In 2001 and 2003, encouraging results were reported for Wellington in quality of life studies for New Zealand's largest cities.¹ These indicators demonstrate Wellington is a great city as well as a vibrant and exciting urban centre.

Take advantage of compact building design

When describing their city, it is common for Wellingtonians to mention the city's compact urban form. The land area of Wellington is approximately 26,625

hectares (103 square miles), yet the area of land classified as urban is approximately 9,324 hectares (36 square miles).² Wellingtonians have a tendency to attribute the city's urban form to nature rather than design. The steep and hilly topography of the region forced most of the city's development to limited low-lying areas near Wellington Harbour, particularly reclaimed land.³ In fact, a key distinction for the city is that its essentially linear commercial core wraps around the harbour rather than draws back from it. This has contributed to a clear sense of public ownership for Wellington's waterfront.

Wellington exhibits a snug urban fabric because much of the central city is composed of small, intensively developed city blocks that are truncated or irregular in shape. The central business district is characterized by intensive high rise office (10 to 15 storeys) and commercial development (Wellington City, *District Plan [District]*, 2001). The area also hosts a wide range of political, recreational, cultural and entertainment activities of national and local significance. The built form of the central area has been shaped by this diversity of activities, proximity of the city's port, and the topography of the harbour and hills (Wellington City, *Understanding the District Plan [Understanding]*, 2003). The latter has required city planners and designers to creatively use developable space. In some instances, the city has maximized space between detached structures by creating pedestrian plazas that feature a concentrated mix of retail shops.

The city's district plan identifies two broad residential areas. The Inner Residential Area adjoins the central city and is mostly within the inner Town Belt. The Outer Residential Area comprises the remaining suburbs from the inner Town Belt to the boundary of the city's rural area. According to Wellington's district plan, the Town Belt and other rural areas effectively establish clear edges to the city. To foster a city that remains compact, district planning rules encourage more intensive development within existing residential areas (Wellington City, *Understanding*, 2003).⁴

Create walkable communities

The second popular axiom for describing Wellington is it's a walkable city. Central Wellington's physical dimensions are 2 kilometers (1.24 miles east to west) by four and one-half kilometers (2.79 miles north to south). As a result, common attractions are within the comfort of a twenty minute walk.

The "Golden Mile" refers to the main retail strip which begins near Parliament and extends to the eastern end of the city's entertainment district (Wellington City, *Courtenay Precinct Zone Design Guide*, 1988). The pathway reflects the curvilinear form of the Central Area and helps to structure the way the city is perceived and the way people move within it. Planning policies for maximizing pedestrian comfort that are common to the Golden Mile include but are not limited to wide footpaths, pavers on footpaths, verandas, street level retail, active ground floors, consistent setbacks, and in some sections office blocks are terraced to

maintain sufficient sunlight as well as minimise the effect of wind downdraught at the street level.

Wellington City Council has even conducted an economic analysis to assess the value-added of pedestrian enhancements to footpaths for business owners along specific streets.⁵ This is not the first time the City has detected a connection between street augmentation for pedestrians and shopping behaviour. Following the removal of trams and tracks along Wellington's Cuba Street in 1965, the street was closed off to vehicle traffic. When it was noticed that this was an attraction to pedestrian shoppers, the City Council was petitioned to make part of Cuba Street a permanent pedestrian mall. The idea was accepted and Cuba Mall was opened in October 1969. It was the first street in New Zealand to be developed in this way (Wellington City Council, *Cuba Mall*, 2001).

Some smart growth advocates suggest pedestrians are the "indicator species" of a smart growth community. According to the 2001 New Zealand census, 13.5% of Wellington's working population opted to walk as their means of travel to work. This is higher than any other New Zealand city. In addition to being sensitive to the need for creating good environments for walking throughout the city, Wellington's policies encourage physically active lifestyles for citizens with walking as a central component of the daily routine. Installation of measures such as shared cycle/pedestrian paths advance the perception that walking is the "first mode of transport" rather than an alternative.

Walking in Wellington is enhanced by the provision of tools and infrastructure that make the city navigable and legible for pedestrians. Living Streets Aotearoa, a walking advocacy group, and the City partnered to install pedestrian maps throughout the city. In addition to serving as directional aids, the maps identify pedestrian shortcuts (steep steps and pathways) that help walkers traverse the city and make walking more feasible as a mode of travel. In a like manner, Wellington City has erected ornate pedestrian signs throughout the central area which aim to bring art, fun, vibrancy, and a sense of history to the central city. The signage incorporates sculpture, compact information centres, and direction finders.

Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental area

The first objective of the Wellington District Plan is “to protect and enhance the natural or ‘green’ areas of the city. This is chiefly all the land beyond the outer town belt, including rural and open space zones, and conservation sites.”

Historically, the towering green hills encompassing the city have been a natural buffer that physically limited the expanse of development. In recent years, the hills of Wellington have been embraced as an asset and a signature feature worthy of protection. In fact, the character of the hills has been incorporated as an indicator for measuring the city’s progress towards meeting its built environment outcomes.

Wellington policies for protecting open space and recreational areas can be traced to the city’s early years. In 1840, the founders of Wellington designated the Town Belt as lying on the first line of hills wrapping around the central city. The

Town Belt is approximately 425 hectares in area and a management plan has been developed to enhance and preserve this feature. To the west of the Town Belt and the city is a complementary bush and grass covered line of ridges known as the Outer Green Belt. The City Council's vision for the Outer Green Belt is indigenous vegetation will be restored within its boundary and for it to function as a recreational network for citizens and visitors. In terms of natural areas, Wellington is well endowed. A recent quality of life report indicates Wellington has the greatest proportion of green space land per capita, among New Zealand cities, at 19.8 hectares per 1,000 head of population.

Wellington's rural area represents approximately 65% of the city's total land area. Extending from the outer boundaries of the city's urban areas to the coast, most of the land is used for pastoral farming, and settlements are small and scattered. Currently, the rural area is home to a small proportion of Wellington's population but increasing demand for rural 'lifestyle' blocks is creating pressure for subdivisions and other development. In response, the Wellington District Plan has provisions to control subdivision to limit housing (Wellington City, *Understanding*, 2003). Furthermore, determinations to subdivide rural land require a change in the District Plan (Wellington City, *District*, 2001).

Also, Wellington has committed to returning 252 hectares (623 acres) of land to a state reflective of New Zealand prior to human occupation. The Karori Wildlife Sanctuary is the world's first inner city predator free environment and a safe haven

for New Zealand's treasured endangered wildlife. The sanctuary has been referred to as the most ambitious conservation project in the country. The long term vision of the sanctuary is restoration of the flora and fauna once endemic to the area. A two metre high predator-proof fence surrounds the facility. Situated around two old reservoirs that once supplied Wellington with water and now support a newly created wetland environment, the Sanctuary demonstrates the potential of adaptive reuse of under utilized facilities for ecological restoration.

Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place

Up to this point, the paper has periodically referenced how nature has contributed to Wellington's distinctive character. However, quality design is a key factor that reinforces a look and feel within the city that is praised by citizens and visitors. Wellington City's District Plan 2000 and the Annual Plan 2003/2004 clearly identify quality design as a priority for the city.

The look and feel of Wellington is accented by the impressive display of late 19th and early 20th century architecture throughout the city. The extent of the heritage fabric varies within the city. For example, the Thorndon neighborhood is tightly packed with wooden houses and cottages that were built by early settlers and serve as reminders of the City's colonial past. Also, specialty shops and restaurants occupy the heritage buildings and contribute to the village atmosphere of this district.

Alternatively, modern office buildings have been seamlessly interwoven with heritage structures in the downtown Central Business District (CBD), and these

buildings generally relate well to their neighbors. Although it is too expensive to replicate the craftsmanship, styles, and features of Victorian-era architecture in modern buildings, contemporary downtown buildings honor the late 19th and early 20th century building tradition through a continuity and form that honors the human scale at the street level. This is demonstrated through provision of continuous verandas (on certain routes) that mask the dominance of high-rise structures, setting back office towers from the street, featuring attractive retail frontages and window dressings for shops, as well as limited construction of skyscrapers with a footprint that requires occupation of an entire city block. The result is a modern city skyline that exhibits the essence of a village at the street level.

Downtown Wellington consists of four quarters, each with its own personality. Lambton is a regal precinct that abuts the focal point of New Zealand government, Parliament. Willis is the civic heart of Wellington, hosting the town hall and other municipal facilities. Cuba is a bohemian precinct that has been partially reclaimed for pedestrians. Finally, Courtenay Place is a vibrant entertainment precinct and has given Wellington a 24-hr quality. While there is an overall Central Area Design Guide for Wellington, separate Design Guides provide for the special character of certain areas of the central city to be retained, namely Courtenay, Cuba, and sections of Willis. The design guides list criteria against which new building proposals are assessed, and are intended to ensure appropriate

design principles are incorporated without dictating the appearance of new developments (Wellington City, Understanding, 2003).

Wellington has a Built Heritage Policy to conserve the city's heritage footprint. The policy covers a full range from identifying heritage items to working with owners and developers to facilitate the protection and restoration of heritage assets in proper ways. For example, the City Council identifies vintage structures that are earthquake prone and works with owners to ensure they are strengthened. The city even offers financial and project management assistance as an incentive for building owners to restore their property (Eley, *Smart Growth Down Under*, 2003).

Because bi-culturalism is central to the New Zealand way of life, the collective identity of Wellington City is derived from Māori and European influences. Wellington has taken progressive steps to honor the rich heritage of New Zealand's indigenous population within the urban fabric. The heritage footprint of Māori is demonstrated in the paving patterns of the Civic Square complex. It is evident in the names of parks and neighbourhoods, such as Te Aro or Pipitea, that honor fortifications or villages that once occupied the same land. In a like manner, district plan consultation with Māori targets resource management as well as recognition of places of traditional importance, thus demonstrating how the area has been historically shaped by Māori settlement. It is widely accepted much that is unique to New Zealand is derived from Māori culture. By honoring both cultures, Wellington's sense of place becomes more apparent.

Provide a variety of transportation choices

Wellington enjoys the benefits of a transport system that offers citizens the choice of walking, biking, bus, passenger rail, driving, ferry, and in some instances cable car. The goal of the City Council is to ensure that travel is safe, convenient and enjoyable regardless of mode.

As noted earlier, Wellington rates well for having a good walking environment as well as a strong network of walking routes. City policies are also sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities. Pedestrian crossings are equipped with tactile and audible features that let persons with disabilities know when it is safe to cross.

A small percentage, 2.1 percent, of Wellington's population uses cycling as a mode of travel. The potential for this to increase is limited by the topography of the city, perceptions of safety of cycling, and the provision of appropriate infrastructure and cycling routes. A key issue for the City Council is to improve cycling safety in the city as a means of encouraging increased cycling as an active and sustainable mode of transport. In some areas, the introduction of traffic calming measures to improve the safety of cyclists on city streets and integrate them into traffic may be more appropriate and cost-effective than building segregated routes (Wellington City, *Draft Transport Strategy, [Transport], 2004*).

The Greater Wellington Regional Council is responsible for purchasing public transport services (bus and rail) from public transport operators. The City

Council has a strong interest in the successful operation of public transport because it is integral to the successful functioning of the city. Public transport in Wellington is currently functioning well with steady improvement in bus services and patronage and modest growth in rail patronage.⁶ Uncertainty over future ownership of rail has slowed further development of this service. Apart from the general impact of road congestion, the biggest issue facing bus services is congestion and delays along the Golden Mile (Wellington City, *Transport*, 2004). One approach taken by Wellington to improve efficiency of bus transport has been the provision of bus priority lanes. Currently, the approach appears to be working well.

Car ownership in Wellington is estimated to be 480 vehicles for every 1,000 people in the city, one of the highest car ownership rates in the world (Wellington City, *Transport*, 2004). Alternatively, Wellington has the lowest percentage of employees, approximately 48.5 percent, who travel to work by motor vehicle when compared to New Zealand's eight largest cities. While acknowledging car travel is a major transport mode for many, Wellington realizes it must deconstruct the built in bias towards the ease and priority of vehicle oriented travel and amenity (Wellington City, *Central City Urban Design Strategy Principles [Central]*, 2003)

Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities

In general, New Zealand cities are experiencing similar trends in demography that are apparent in U.S. cities. Internal migration trends reveal population increases for New Zealand's largest cities. Couples are waiting longer to marry and bear

children. New Zealand's household sizes are shrinking, and the nation's ageing population is increasing. The shift is evident in changing lifestyle preferences and needs (Housing New Zealand Corporation, *Building the Future: Towards a New Zealand Housing Strategy [Building]*, 2004).⁷ In acknowledging these shifts, Wellington has responded to increasing demand for convenient, diverse, and vibrant communities.

Strengthening and encouraging development within the existing community requires protecting the obvious and subtle amenities that contribute to Wellington's identity as well as make it a popular destination. For this reason, Wellington has heavily invested in developing and implementing an urban design strategy that continually nurtures the built environment so that the city may continue to celebrate its character as well as build on its competitive edge.

Wellington effectively demonstrates that higher density development and improved quality of life are not mutually exclusive goals. Wellington's success in meeting its intensification objectives is evident in the sentiment of the city's citizens. The proposition of intensifying development in Wellington does not evoke the same type of panic response that is common for citizens in many U.S. cities.⁸ The reason for this is Wellingtonians understand that the quality of life benefits enjoyed by them - - walkable communities; housing choice; transportation choice; community fiscal health; higher sense of safety and comfort; and protection of the environment - - are

inextricably linked to policies for containment and intensification that are reinforced by sound strategies for design.

An advantage of directing growth back to existing communities is maximization of investments (facilities, roads, water/sewer, etc.) as opposed to expending capital to replicate infrastructure and services. Courtenay Place is the eastern terminus of Wellington's Golden Mile. While it is currently known as the city's entertainment precinct, the area primarily consisted of service businesses and warehousing over ten years ago. Also, the city's produce market, housed by many of the buildings occupying Blair and Allen Streets, was a popular attraction within the precinct until it moved in the early 1990s. Some of the buildings became vacant when the markets moved, and this added to a general state of decline that was already present in Courtenay Place. The City Council and the Historic Places Trust recognized the significance of the buildings and encouraged their retention. Today, Blair and Allen Streets have been restored, and their buildings are an important part of Courtenay Place (Wellington City Council, *Blair & Allen Streets*, 2001). In a similar vein, the Courtenay Place precinct has been transformed, and a driver has been the pattern of in-migration back to the city. Currently, Courtenay Place features a mix of retail stores, shops, office/commercial space, restaurants, and apartments. In step with the city's policies to protect its heritage assets, the refurbishment of the Embassy Theatre, for the Return of the King world premier, was probably the most important restoration to take place in the precinct.

Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

Wellington demonstrates that urban living is not limited to apartments. Varying housing styles and types can be found within the city's inner and outer residential areas. The spectrum of housing options includes flats, apartment blocks, duplexes, 19th century cottages, and modern single family residential accommodations.

In Wellington's residential areas, including Thorndon, Mt. Victoria, and Aro Valley, there are several neighborhoods with distinctive character due to the presence of older structures, particularly homes constructed during the Victorian Era. The City Council considers such areas to be important to Wellington's identity and the city has provisions to protect them from inappropriate development. The provisions include design guides, controls on multi-unit housing in some neighborhoods, and rules restricting the demolition of pre-1930 buildings in select first-tier suburbs, namely Thorndon and Mt. Victoria (Wellington City, *Understanding*, 2003).

Wellington understands that multi-unit housing developments are an effective way to use land in the city's more developed areas, but they can adversely affect residential amenity, especially if they are significantly different from an area's established style of housing. To ensure quality multi-unit housing, the city's district plan requires any new developments to be assessed against the relevant design guide for the area to ensure certain design principles are followed, without dictating the

development's appearance (Wellington City, *Understanding*, 2003). For example, Wellington's Oriental Bay features varying residential alternatives including traditional homes and mid-rise apartments. This is made possible because the Oriental Bay Design Guide is flexible to allow medium to high rise residential development while insisting that such development should not compromise the character of the area.

Further, Wellington has been accommodative to the demand for quality apartments for almost a decade. City officials expressed growth in the number of apartments has added vibrancy to central Wellington (Johnson, 2004). Fifteen years ago, it was common for Wellington's streets to be active by day with civil servants who retreated to their homes in the evening and left the city inert. In recent years, Wellington has fostered a liveable downtown by being supportive of residential uses like apartments above street level retail. Such approaches have enabled the downtown to remain active beyond traditional business hour of operation, and they have complemented existing systems of informal surveillance.

Mixed land use

Currently, the Resource Management Act (RMA) is New Zealand's main environmental legislation.⁹ The RMA does not regulate land use. Instead, it focuses on managing the effects from land uses. Mixed land uses are permitted unless it is demonstrated that the effects of an alternative land use can not be avoided, remedied, or mitigated.¹⁰ While it is inconclusive whether a connection can be drawn between

increasing mixed use development in Wellington and the passage of the RMA, many New Zealand planning researchers and practitioners would agree that the RMA (when properly applied and implemented) grants local authorities a level of flexibility that could not be obtained under the former Town and Country Planning Act.

The Wellington District Plan acknowledges the city's residential areas owe much to the many non-residential activities and community services that take place within them such as schools, shops, churches, service stations, childcare facilities, medical centers, and the like. Mixed land use is encouraged by the City's planning policies provided they are appropriately located and compatible with residential amenity. The District Plan also contains live/work provisions in the sense that working from home is a permitted activity. Working from home is considered to be an effective strategy to reduce travel and save energy (Wellington City, *Understanding*, 2003).

Mixed use in Wellington, whether in a particular area, along a street or within a building allows people to live, work, and play in the same area. This then supports a range of activities at different times of the day and night and helps to create a balanced and safe community without reliance on the car.

Adaptability is a key aim of Wellington's policies. As a result, a wide range of activities and uses are permitted as of right in the Central area. Since the city is not treated as a static environment, flexibility allows building owners and developers

to respond to readily changing market needs or other influences such as new technologies (Wellington City, *Central*, 2003).

Opportunities for Improvement

There is much to celebrate about Wellington. At the same time, there is room for improvement. Before concluding, it is important to balance the discussion of this paper by noting some issues that can be addressed better.

Reinventing Suburbs

While the inner city effectively demonstrates the benefits of mixed land use, clustering development, or directing growth back to existing communities, it is important to reflect those qualities in the middle and outer-tier suburbs that encompass Wellington. The benefits of reinventing a suburb are best demonstrated through the Runanga (tribal authority) of Waiwhetu in Lower Hutt. Over the past 20 years, the Iwi (tribal) authority has taken progressive steps to improve the mix of neighbourhood services and to make the community self sustaining. The provision of services in the form of the Waiwhetu Medical Centre, kohanga reo (Māori language pre-school), Atiawa Toa FM radio station, Tamaiti Whangai Centre of Learning, and gymnasium benefit Māori and non-Māori. Moreover, these services improve the sense of community within this neighborhood (Practice Profile, 2003).¹¹ This model for development, reinvestment, and empowerment merits support and should be replicated.

Transport Upgrades

Wellington understands public transport is integral to the successful functioning of the city. Structural enhancements are in order for the modernization of passenger rail stops. Enhancements should be made to reduce the exposure of patrons to natural elements and to create an environment that is less intimidating as passengers wait for trains at night.

Alternative improvements are in order for buses. Prior to August 2004, New Zealand's sulfur limits for highway diesel exceeded Australia and the United States at 3,000 parts per million (ppm). Fortunately, New Zealand's production of "Third World" quality diesel fuel is at an end because current regulations dictate sulfur levels should not exceed 500 ppm. While New Zealand should be applauded for this advancement, public transport bus fleets that service the city of Wellington should be upgraded to include vehicles that are fuel hybrids or run on natural gas. The New Zealand State of the Environment report notes that in cities air pollution from motor vehicles can be worse if dispersion is inhibited by the 'street canyon' effect (Ministry for the Environment, *The State of the Environment*, 1997). Depending on weather conditions or the time of day, this effect is noticeable on Vivian Street, Lambton Quay, or even Tinakori Road in Wellington. While buses are not the only contributor, further steps should be taken to reduce emission from the diesel buses that are used for public transport.

Opting to Bike

Wellington has noted that an increase in the percentage of citizens who cycle as a mode of travel is limited by the city's topography, perceptions of safety of cycling, and the lack of appropriate infrastructure and cycling routes. One barrier that can be removed to make cycling more feasible is to accommodate cyclists on public transport. For example, bicycle racks should be installed on public buses. Although Wellington may not have the infrastructure to allow safe cycling from origin to destination, a step in the right direction is to equip buses with devices that allow bicyclists to transport bikes to their destination.

Reducing the Housing Divide

Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component of any smart growth strategy. Unfortunately in Wellington, as in much of New Zealand, house prices are currently at record levels in relation to average wages and rents. The rapid rise of house prices not only affects disenfranchised parties. Many young New Zealanders (in their 20s and 30s) have delayed home buying plans because they are currently priced out of the market. Aggravating this trend is the limited supply or decline of state housing since Central government vacated its role as a provider of such housing in 1991. In some instances, local governments assumed a limited role in the provision of affordable, state housing. In brief, Wellington housing policies must work towards the creation of an economically inclusive society.

Conclusions

Wellington's status as New Zealand's 'Top Town' is no accident. While Wellington has the benefit of natural boundaries (hills and the harbour) to contain development, the City owes its recent accolades to the intentional efforts of local leaders (elected and laypersons) as well as practitioners (planners, urban designers, and developers) who continually nurture and develop the competitive advantages offered by the City.

Maintaining the status of 'Top Town' will require looking beyond the physical attributes of Wellington. It will be equally important to understand how the City's policies/practices have delivered a quality of life that is highly sought after in Aotearoa.¹² Wellington is a distinctive destination because of:

- Town and green belt polices that establish clear edges for the city;
- Planning policies that foster sustainability, accessibility, security, cohesiveness, vibrancy, and flexibility;
- Heritage polices that preserve the city's historic footprint; and
- Design policies whose primary focus is not the architectural qualities of a structure, but the way a structure is integrated into its surroundings through the quality of the design.

In Wellington, New Zealand, as in the United States, achieving smart growth requires leaders who will introduce alternatives to conventional development patterns and have the fortitude to stick to their vision because it is the right thing to

do. It requires practitioners who can apply innovative approaches and possess a passion for fostering a new reality for their community. Importantly, it requires citizens that celebrate the character of their city as well as understand that quality of life extends beyond the perimeter of one's personal property and is inextricably linked to the condition of one's community. In short, it requires rising above 'social cascades' that are based on perpetuating the status quo or limiting choice for lifestyle options that best meet the consumer's needs.

In conclusion, "Absolutely Positively Wellington" is more than a clever, local brand. It is a statement that reflects Wellington's transformation into a liveable, world-class city.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2003) *Sustainable Development for New Zealand Programme of Action*. Wellington: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Eley, Carlton (2003) *Smart Growth Down Under: Taking Steps Towards Sustainable Settlements in New Zealand*. Wellington, New Zealand: Fulbright New Zealand.

Housing New Zealand Corporation (2004) *Building The Future: Towards A New Zealand Housing Strategy*. Wellington: Housing New Zealand Corporation.

Johnson, Anne-Marie (2004) "Downtown Living is Still on the up and up", *The Dominion Post*. June 5, 2004. <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/dominionpost/>

Ministry for the Environment (1997) *The State of the Environment*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry for the Environment.

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (1998). *The Cities and Their People. New Zealand's Urban Environment*. Wellington: Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (2003) Practice Profile. <http://www.rnzcgp.org.nz/colled/Waiwhetu.php>.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2001) *Our Built and Natural Environments*. Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Wellington City (2003) *Central City Urban Design Strategy Principles*. Wellington, New Zealand: City of Wellington.

Wellington City (2003) *Council Plan 2003/2004*. Wellington, New Zealand: City of Wellington.

Wellington City (1988) *Courtenay Precinct Zone Design Guide*. Wellington: City of Wellington.

Wellington City (2001) *District Plan*. Wellington, New Zealand: City of Wellington.

Wellington City (2004) *Draft Transport Strategy*. Wellington: City of Wellington.

Wellington City (2003) *Understanding the District Plan*. Wellington, New Zealand: City of Wellington.

Wellington City Council (2001) *Blair & Allen Streets*. Wellington: City of Wellington.

Wellington City Council (2001) *Cuba Mall*. Wellington: City of Wellington.

Wellington City Council (2003) *Townbelt*.
<http://www.wcc.govt.nz/recreation/gardens/index.html#townbelt>.

Whitman, Christine (2002) Speech Notes. *New Partners for Smart Growth Conference*. San Diego.

End Notes

¹ Auckland City Council et. al. (2003) *Quality of Life in New Zealand's Eight Largest Cities*. Auckland, New Zealand.

² The land area for the District of Columbia is approximately 15,799 hectares (61 square miles).

³ Once submerged land, some parcels uplifted during the 1855 Wairarapa earthquake but most the result of filling in areas where there was seawater.

⁴ Because Wellington is commonly referred to as a compact city, it would have been ideal to report the average residential density of the city. However, a challenge that became apparent during the fellowship was the lack of robust, reliable, and timely information. According to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, one of the consequences of the series of restructurings of central government in the last sixteen years is the loss of national data sets and agency focus for processing information about people and their environment in urban New Zealand (eg New Zealand Planning Council or the Ministry for Works). There is little publicly available business or corporate sector data that has a specific urban focus. For example, most of the Wellington District Plan was prepared without empirical support. As a consequence, a challenge confronting Wellington and other district councils across New Zealand is knowing how well planning objectives and outcomes have been achieved.

⁵ Economic Impact Assessment - Urban Design Initiatives - Blair/Allen & Woodward Streets. Ernst and Young

⁶ From Wellington, commuter rail transport extends as far as Masterton, 100 kilometers (approximately 62 miles) north of the nation's capital.

⁷ By New Zealand standards, Wellington has a disproportionate population of young adults (25 to 35 years old) who are educated/well traveled/slightly affluent.

⁸ Commonly referred to as Not In My Backyard or NIMBY.

⁹ The Resource Management Act 1991 replaced the Town and Country Planning Act 1977.

¹⁰ A conclusion drawn by the author while in New Zealand is the RMA is not "smart growth" legislation - - in the sense of being consistent with the objectives of smart growth as subscribed in the U.S. This acknowledgement does not detract from the merits of the law. It merely acknowledges that the law was not designed for this intent.

¹¹ <http://www.rnzcgp.org.nz/colled/Waiwhetu.php>

¹² The original, Māori name for New Zealand which means 'land of the long white cloud.'