

INNER-CITY
WELLINGTON Te Reo Pokapū o Pōneke

VOICE OF TE ARO AND WELLINGTON CENTRAL

*enhancing community well-being
through civic engagement*



Te Ngākau-Civic Square

Submission to pre-design process

2021

The starting point in developing a concept for any public space agenda should be to identify the talents and resources within the community -- people who can provide historical perspective, insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of what is truly meaningful to the local people. Tapping this information at the beginning of the process will help to create a sense of ownership in the project that can ensure its success for years to come.

<https://www.pps.org/article/ten-strategies-for-transforming-cities-through-placemaking-public-spaces>



A great urban park is a safety valve for the city, in which people living in dense urban areas can find breathing room.

<https://www.pps.org>



The sooner the community becomes involved in the planning for a public space, the better; it is ideal that they join before any work has been done. They also should be encouraged to stay involved throughout the improvement effort so that they become owners or stewards of the place as it evolves.

<https://www.pps.org/article/11principles>



**THE COMMUNITY IS THE EXPERT
YOU ARE CREATING A PLACE, NOT JUST A DESIGN
YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE**

<https://www.pps.org/>



The most successful places grow out of understanding what a space needs to offer so that people will use it. However, in most cases, it is not until after a space is built that much thought is given to how people will use it; this is a major reason why much retrofitting goes on in failed public spaces: because the space's function was never seriously considered at the outset.

<https://www.pps.org/article/11principles>



INTRODUCTION

In December 2020 Wellington City Councillors asked Council officers :

“to develop a plan for Te Ngākau-Civic Square as a whole, and asked for a framework to be developed to return the council’s main buildings to the square, while developing it as the musical, creative and democratic heart of the city”.

At the same time, the Mayor noted that

“It needs to be adaptable, beautiful, a place for events, music, entertainment, protests, celebrations, a place to enjoy and be proud of”

ICW maintains it is vital that any redesign of Te Ngākau-Civic Square (the square) recognises that Inner-city residents now make up the largest suburb in Wellington in terms of population (in the smallest area of land in Wellington) and, as this population is expected to grow considerably, it is essential that, as well as being developed as the Civic heart and cultural hub of the city, the Square can also be seen as the heart of the Inner City Community. Key to this is retention of outdoor space, especially green space, and inclusion of surrounding internal community amenities at ground floor of ‘new’ buildings.

Currently the inner city is woefully devoid of community open space for its residents and we cannot afford to lose any that we currently have. Jack Ilott Green in the Square is the only reasonable sized easily accessible area in the CBD that provides essential green park-like space for children and adults alike to play and relax. A further requirement is for the space to

continue to be open and retain the glorious vista to the harbour from the square. Ease of access to the waterfront is also vital. The need for a large space that can be used as an evacuation centre is also a requirement.

As we see it, the future of the Central Library is known – and building requirements for the Old City Library, the Michael Fowler Centre and the Town Hall have been identified. In addition, new or remediated facilities are needed to house the City Council civic and staff functions and a National centre for Music. We expect that these buildings will be as ‘green’ as possible, base isolated and built with sea level rise/encroachment in mind. That means the ‘greenness’ must be made a requirement for the design.

However, the greater and PRIOR issue is that of the whole site design – consideration of the view shaft from Mercer Street, framing of the Square with consideration of sun and shade, and the way in which openness to the harbour needs to be maintained, the designation of large open spaces which are indeed adaptable so they can be used for physical activity, events, protests, celebrations, evacuation places; then the bulk location of the buildings to encourage connection.

ICW’s concern is that in providing a framework for any design brief or competition, without a focus first on the spatial elements of the Square and the need for consideration of how it will contribute to improved social cohesion, conversation and debate will inevitably focus more on the buildings.

The rewards of transforming a civic space into a great public place go way beyond just the space, although the place in itself enriches the lives of its users and enhances its surrounding buildings and neighborhood. Great public places contribute to community health - whether socially, economically, culturally or environmentally. They add enhancement to the civic realm - not only visually, but also in providing a sense of character and a forum for public activities. They can be anchors for downtowns and communities, acting as focal points for definition and foundations for healthy growth. All of these assets, as well as the opportunity these places offer for people to relax and enjoy themselves, add up to greater community livability.

GREEN SPACE IN TE NGĀKAU-CIVIC SQUARE: The story of Jack Ilott Green



Jack Ilott Green is an important public inner city green space adjacent and complementary to Te Ngākau-Civic Square. The green offers a wide welcoming vista of the waterfront when entering the square from the compact enclosed CBD, and enhances the City to Sea Bridge, which is a very popular meeting and relaxing place for the public.

1994

Circa Theatre, which had been built in the Ilott Advertising building in 1976 on what is now known as Jack Ilott Green, was relocated to Taranaki Street next to Te Papa and the land became part of the Civic Centre Heritage Area.

2003

In December the Council agreed to offer the university an 18-month option to develop a proposal to locate a School of Music on the Circa/Ilott site. Options for ‘pocket parks’ in the central city/Te Aro area were put forward to replace the loss of what was the only reasonable area of green space in the CBD which could be used for physical activities. This proposal met with public resistance.

2004

The Council’s Urban Design Team reported to Council that *“the view shaft through Ilott Square [sic] is a useful link that establishes connections from the city to the waterfront and supports the character of the city to-sea bridge”. This iconic bridge and the Civic Square are enhanced by their openness to the waterfront which will be lost if a high rise development is built adjacent to them*¹.

Wellington Civic Trust in their submission to WCC’s proposal to locate the New Zealand School of Music on the Circa/Ilott site argued that *“Jack Ilott Green [the Green] is a very important piece of inner-city real-estate, formed for the statutory (1879 Reclamation Act) purpose of “public utility”. It is important because it adjoins, and is potentially part of, Civic Square, and because of its proximity to and visibility from a popular gathering point on the waterfront. It is also one of the few open spaces left in the down-town area*¹

In a Green Party press release 19th May 2004 Sue Kedgley predicted that WCC would consider selling or leasing this ‘precious green space’ and that *“The Green Party*

supports the retention of the land as a green space in the city and will be launching a campaign to ensure it stays that way.”

2015

However, WCC made the decision to sell/lease Jack Ilott Green to a developer and advertised their intentions in the DomPost.

Towards the end of 2015 the formation of the “Save Jack Ilott green Group” (SJIG) resulted as a reaction against the sale.

2016

SJIG members actively campaigned throughout February 2016 to prevent a multi-story building on the green which, apart from losing vital green space, would completely block the sunny openness of the square and view shaft to the harbour.

Countering Council claims that the green was not used, daily observations undertaken by the SJIG from Monday 14 December 2015 to Monday 1st February 2016 recorded that both the grassy area and the petanque area, were used daily for a range of activities including volleyball, football, Tai Chi, children playing, petanque, picnicking and relaxing.

During February SJIG collected over 10,000 signatures from people opposed to losing the Green. Their petition was presented to Council on 16th March 2016. SJIG Goup continued campaigning and this resulted in public support from the Mayor Justin Lester and several other councillors who had previously supported building on the Green.

In June at an ordinary meeting of the council it was agreed that the Environment Committee be tasked to investigate the statutory process to protect Jack Ilott Green as a reserve.

2018

The process for gazetting JIG as a park was finally tabled at a City Strategy Meeting in April with a recommendation from council officers suggesting that any protection of the green be left until the Civic Square development is finalised. To ICW knowledge no further action on gazetting the green has been taken.

¹ Submission from the Wellington Civic Trust 27 August 2004

BUILDINGS IN TE NGĀKAU - CIVIC SQUARE.

WELLINGTON TOWN HALL



November 2013: WCC closed the town Hall for earthquake strengthening. 2014 and 2017 put on hold. 2018 started.
2023 opening date?

CAPITAL E



November 2012: Building closed after engineer reported it earthquake prone.

WELLINGTON CENTRAL LIBRARY



March 2018: WCC closed the library.
October 2020 WCC decided to remediate building.
May 2025: Expected opening date?

MUNICIPAL OFFICE BUILDING



December 2020 WCC councillors accepted a staff recommendation and voted to demolish the Building

CITY TO SEA BRIDGE



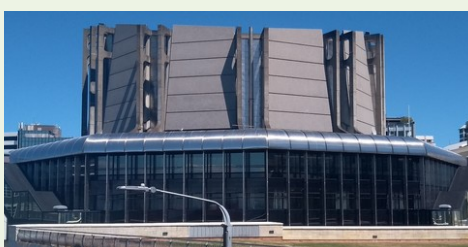
April 2019: Bridge safe but will need remediation work.

CIVIC ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



December 2020: Insurance claim on earthquake damage settled and WCC to determine fate of the building.

MICHAEL FOWLER CENTRE



WELLINGTON CITY ART GALLERY



ICW FOCUS

PLACE IDENTITY & COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT
City Planners must consider and consult on the needs of the inner-city residents = *Co-Design!*

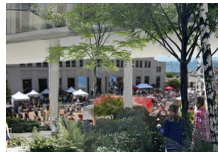
AMENITIES

- ◆ **Library**
- ◆ **Community and public spaces** accessible in ground floor of 'new' buildings

- ◆ **Green space:** Retention of separate reasonable sized area of natural green space for physical activities, children's play & community gatherings such as picnics should be more integrated with the Square. *"Green space should be integrated into all designs"* because of the *"important relationships between accessible green spaces and mental health and wellbeing"*²



- ◆ **Open central area** for gatherings, concerts, markets etc which may consist of hard surfaces and seating areas interconnected to larger green space.



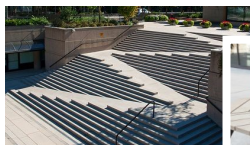
- ◆ **Open to waterfront:** Retain the sunny open view of the waterfront from the square. Nikau ramp should remain as it is an integral part of crossing to the waterfront.



- ◆ **Separated interpersonal places** around the edges of the square where people can feel comfortable and safe without being crowded.



ACCESSIBLE



NEW BUILDING(S) Should not be taller than existing and should contribute appropriately to outer frame of the Square facing the Square.

² <https://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/>

ICW CONCERNS

ICW CONTENDS THAT. . .

- 1) **There must be major stakeholder engagement:** Recognition of the square as the local community space for inner-city residents, as well as a place for all Wellingtonians and visitors to congregate, is vital to its success.
- 2) **If there is to be a design competition** the criteria and guidelines must be agreed with inner-city residents and the Wellington public prior to announcement of the competition.
- 3) **The primary planning focus** should be on SPACE planning rather than buildings
- 4) **Timeframes** need to be given priority.
- 5) **There must be a robust budget limit** as this must not become a vanity project.
- 6) **The technical services** must be separate for each building, so that in future problems can be better isolated
- 7) **Rooftop gardens cannot replace** useable ground level green space for exercise and running and playing.
- 8) **There should not be any 'extra'** buildings in the square.
- 9) **An underground carpark** is still required, and all vehicular traffic should be excluded from the Square.
- 10) **The main entrance** to the Square should be clear and from there the square should tell a story that links the city to the harbour through sculpture/mural/water features etc.





ICW contends that the original vision for the Square should stand as the basis for future re-development.

'There was a strong vision that underpinned the design for the Square, and at the time it was highly innovative for any NZ city to embed the story of the city into the very fabric of the place so comprehensively. The mythological story of the fishing up of Wellington, the eye of the fish, and the role of Maui in the formation of the lands of Aotearoa were all translated in spatial planning. The design understood equally the City's emerging relationship to the harbour and the importance of new and historic urban planning and civic markers.' (Athfield)



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Inner-City Wellington seeks to serve as a progressive and influential voice of and for the residential community in the suburbs of Te Aro and Wellington Central

