

21st AGM. 12 June 2016

President's Report

After 21 years of campaigning to keep the Wellington Waterfront as public open space, Waterfront Watch deserves to feel a great deal of pride in what has been achieved. The waterfront that we have now didn't happen by accident. Nor was it achieved by the vision of politicians, architects or planners. The waterfront that, according to council surveys, is approved by 92% of city residents is here today only because people raised their voices and stopped many of the things that the Council would have done. Without doubt, if people had not signed petitions, called protest meetings, formed Waterfront Watch, raised funds, filed court appeals and won, much of the waterfront that people so appreciate would not be here today.

Instead Wellington residents and visitors are able to enjoy harbour views, open sky, and green grass. Of course, we always knew that's what people wanted.

Later this year we are planning a celebration to mark what has been achieved by Waterfront Watch over its 21 years. We hope that many of our members will want to come and to take the opportunity to acknowledge the work of our earlier leaders.

But for now I want to acknowledge the support that I have received from my committee, all of whom have indicated that they are willing to stand again:-

- Pauline Swann who has been our Treasurer,
- John Galloway our Secretary.
- Alana Bowman, Victor Davie, Dave Lee and Katie Underwood

And to thank to all of our members who continue to support the work of Waterfront Watch.

As Gaylene Preston, Wellington's favourite film producer said when she named the waterfront as her favourite place in Wellington, "**That waterfront wasn't achieved by accident – we fought for it!**".

Just to remind ourselves what Waterfront Watch has fought for and achieved, I want to talk about the 1987 development plan prepared by Lambton Harbour Development Limited and promoted by the City Council.

From one end of the waterfront to the other, the plan was to develop the space that had been left vacant by the Harbour Board's move to the container terminal with \$1 billion worth of high rise buildings. This was a vision of a modern city conceived during the Roger Douglas fairytale period before the crash. Each building was already lined up with a financial developer and a chosen construction firm.

This was at the stage when the Council and Harbour Board went to Parliament to get special legislation to authorise their joint venture and to create freehold titles over the seabed beneath Queens Wharf, ready for the Hilton Hotel, and the Overseas Passenger Terminal ready for private multi million-dollar apartments.

The Council was nothing if not seriously organised with their eyes on the golden goose, ripe for commercial development.

- Starting from the railway station end, on Site 10 beside the brick Shed 21, Brierley and Downers were going to build an 11 storey office building, “linking the waterfront to Wellington’s business district”.
- North of Queens Wharf, now called the Kumutoto area where the Meridian building is, Fletcher Challenge was to build a “stunning” 31 storey tower, complete with a revolving restaurant. It would have been the “focal point of the entire Lambton Harbour Project”. A glass canopy between the new tower and poor little Sheds 11 and 13 was intended to “create a strong visual and physical link between the tower and the business district”.
- Where the events centre is now, the spacious “Victoria Festival Market Hall” would bring two storeys of market style shopping, open plan restaurants and a “continental atmosphere” to New Zealand. You will recognise that this dream faded into the so-called commercial centre, with its food hall serving McDonalds and Chinese takeaways, that is now the offices of Z Energy, closed to the public.
- The proposed Civic Centre was to extend on a plaza across Jervois Quay to touch the lagoon. The council had taken over the whole block to Harris Street, including the building occupied by the Ilott advertising agency.
- The Ambulance and Odlin buildings was to be replaced by an 8 storey Sheraton hotel with 280 rooms, 3 restaurants and conference facilities.
- The Chaffers area had been freed by the removal of the Council’s bus parking and their works depot and rubbish collection base. “In response to the demand for inner city housing”, some 200 multi-tiered apartments were proposed to be designed and built by overseas investors. Work was expected to be well underway by 1990, 3 years after that plan was published in 1987.

The recession that followed the Roger Douglas campaign days, marked by the 1987 stock market crash, took the wind out of commercial developments. But the Council kept the vision alive, especially after the Harbour Board was converted into the port company and the Lambton Harbour land transferred to the city council.

In 1995 the Events Centre appeared, which Waterfront Watch memorably described as looking like a “Russian ablution block”. Waterfront Watch was formed and called its first public meeting in March 1996, 20 years ago this year, to protest plans for more buildings on the waterfront.

By May the council had called a moratorium on waterfront development and in July were presented with a 10,000 signature petition opposing more buildings on the waterfront but Council planning continued, fronted by Lambton Harbour Management Limited created to keep elected Councillors away from the project. Committees were established with community input but their recommendations fell on deaf ears.

A year later the Civic Trust convened a meeting which called for Chaffers to be retained as a park, and Mary Varnham, then a Councillor, led the *Chaffers Park – Make it Happen* campaign.

Recently, the Council has highlighted the value of Waitangi Park, with the message “Green spaces are important to Wellingtonians” in their urban

development plan for adding 15,000 more inner city residents over the next 30 years. Without any sense of irony, the Council has failed to acknowledge that if it was not for people power, and the "*Chaffers Park – Make it Happen*" campaign, that green space would now be covered by town houses.

Variation 17

The Council persisted with its plans, and in 1999 proposed Variation 17 which would have allowed 20 new buildings, including two 12-storey towers. 2000 people packed the Town Hall meeting called by Waterfront Watch and, after receiving 2500 submissions, 94% opposed, the Council withdrew Variation 17 and appointed a committee to draft the Waterfront Framework.

The Framework provides some comfort, but its ambiguous wording allows the Council, who remain in charge, to decide how it should be interpreted – they quote it when it suits their plans, and ignore it when they choose:

- Whenever has the "Pedestrians first" principle been implemented? Even now, the Council will encourage cars to drive across the new plaza being built at Kumutoto because they will "animate" the area !
- Wherever have views been "enhanced", or even protected?
- Who thought that a written, agreed policy saying that "all ground floors of buildings will be accessible to the public" would mean that they would open to paying customers within business hours?
- Who would have thought that the Framework policy stating that buildings at Kumutoto "will ... relate to the scale and size of the heritage buildings" would allow first the Meridian building, and now the 5-storey horse-float being built on site 10?

Despite the prospect that the Framework would lead the Council to plan the waterfront in partnership with the public, that never occurred. Worldwide, public partnership is the hallmark of successful waterfront developments.

A small, but classic, example is the panel that was recently added as an afterthought to the display on the promenade wall of Shed 6 describing the history of the waterfront project. The last panel acknowledges public input into the project with paragraphs mentioning the Civic Trust and Waterfront Watch (including a picture of our crowded Town Hall meeting), but highlighting all those open days where the public was invited to view models of what the Council intended to build. We might have expected to be given an opportunity to review the draft text beforehand, or even to be told after the panel had been erected, but no.

Similarly, work is now underway on the back of the Events Centre facing Frank Kitts park, starting with the removal of a small amphitheatre of steep steps that never really worked. The work is part of the re-cladding of the whole building. Apparently it includes building new toilets, a small coffee shop and, on the roof, a terrace with views of the harbour and park. Wouldn't it have been nice if the Council had let people know what it was doing? But I don't think that building relationships around the waterfront is something that the Council has ever been interested in doing.

Instead, over the years the Council has given Waterfront Watch, and other community interests no alternative but to oppose the Council's plans in the Environment Court. The wins in the Court that Waterfront Watch has achieved, often in partnership with the Civic Trust and other committed individuals, include:

- Saving the Ambulance Building on its original site (2000)
- Stopping the Hilton hotel on Queens Wharf (2008)
- Defeating Variation 11 that would have put an end to any rights of the public to oppose large buildings North of Queens Wharf, and removing the building proposed for Site 8 (2011)

Despite the obstacles that have been put in our way, and the effort and the costs involved reaching half a million dollars, the result has been that PEOPLE POWER has been responsible for virtually all of the features of the Wellington Waterfront that people appreciate so very much.

And when I say people, I mean everyone from the strollers and the cyclists, family groups and visitors, international tourists, dinners and drinkers, businessmen, real estate agents and building owners, and the increasing numbers of inner city apartment residents. In fact, the Council's own surveys show that over 92% of Wellington residents like what has been achieved on our waterfront,

The features that are here on the Wellington Waterfront because of People Power, and DESPITE the Council - not because of it, include:

- Waitangi Park – as public space rather than townhouses, and with 5 fewer buildings than were included in the winning park design
- Open views across the Royal Port Nicholson boat harbour
- The promenade past Te Papa
- The Circa Theatre building not replaced by an office tower block
- The brewery and Odlin's buildings retained
- The Free Ambulance building
- The lagoon
- Rowing club buildings saved and relocated [- Mayor Michael Fowler wanted to demolish them (along with the Town Hall) and described them as being made of boxwood]
- No buildings along Frank Kitts Park street frontage
- No Hilton hotel on Queens Wharf
- Restricted traffic access to Queens Wharf via promenade past Shed 6
- Queens Wharf plaza retained at its original size [ie still open beneath the shop verandahs]
- Kumutoto Plaza will be expanded to include the previous building site 8, and
- The building now underway on Site 10 will be two storeys lower than one that the Council approved 2 years ago, and with a cut-away in the ground floor giving views of the old Eastbourne Ferry terminal

And before all that, we cannot forget the previous generation who, in the 1960s, had the vision and energy, to oppose the 6-lane motorway that would have taken all of the historic buildings along Jervois Quay – and instead has given us Frank Kitts Park:- Although, at the same time, we must tip our hats to the sacrifices made by Tinakori Road and the Bolton Street cemetery to accommodate the motorway moved off the waterfront.

It would be very hard to identify even the smallest thing on the waterfront in which the Council has been influenced by anyone outside those with commercial interests, or the regular group of consultant designers on the council payroll. But perhaps I should acknowledge that the Council did listen to the star gazers who wanted shades on the lights in Waitangi Park - and they do talk regularly with the Council's Accessibility Advisory Group, even if there are still grumbles about slippery wood and uneven steps.

During the past year, your committee ...

During the past year, the main thing before your committee was the resource consent hearing for the large horse-float building on Site 10, at the Northern end of the waterfront and opposite the Post Office headquarters. The case was heard by the Environment Court in August last year. It was very much an uphill battle because the Resource Management Act sets a high hurdle before a landowner can be stopped from doing a development on their land.

Two years earlier, Waterfront Watch had defeated Variation 11 that would have allowed a much larger building on the site with no further opportunity for a public hearing. And for that we need to thank an earlier committee lead by Pauline Swann.

But against the slightly smaller building we made no progress with our objections before the court. We can be sure, however, that when the public sees the size of the building that will grow from its foundations over the next few months, there will be cries of surprise and anguish. We just need to continue our work to ensure that it is the last new building on the waterfront.

Wellington Waterfront Ltd transferred back into the City Council

Over the past few years, many people have campaigned for the management of the waterfront to be brought back unto the city council control, rather than being directed by a council-owned organisation at arms length from democratically elected councillors.

In line with calls from many quarters of the public, 2 years ago responsibly for managing the waterfront was taken away from the separate Wellington Waterfront Limited, with its own directors, and transferred into the normal council structure.

However, rather than clipping the wings of Ian Pike and his waterfront team, they were given a wider role to shape public spaces across the city under the name of City Shaper – and the Council has now decided to create for it a new

company structure at arms length from elected councillors that will be able to trade in and develop property across the city.

On the waterfront, the role of the City Shaper group will continue to be responsible for development – including leasing building sites for private developments, landscaping (like Frank Kitts Park) and building facilities like toilets. So we may not have seen the last of them.

However, the other part of the Waterfront company's role – its day to day management of visitors and cyclists, the vege market and the stalls, and events large and small, along with general maintenance, lawn mowing and cleaning – has been transferred to the Councils Parks Sports and Reserves department. This is a breath of fresh air, and a very welcome change.

We have met with the new waterfront manager, Alan Brown. Alan has a small team of people who manage the markets and events and the commercial leases of Council owned buildings on the waterfront. He is the person who needs to think about how to manage the conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians;-

As an example of his approach when we talked about the possibility of convening a round table discussion of cyclists and other users he said that he'd be more than happy for Waterfront Watch to take part if we wished. That would be a first !!

But when it comes to planning changes and physical developments, Ian Pike and his team are still in charge. The possible new buildings on the horizon are on Site 9 [on the other side of the Whitmore St gates from the Site 10 building that's just started], and the Transition site in the carpark between Te Papa and Waitangi park. It sounds as though nothing is going to happen on Queen Wharf in the foreseeable future. We have asked Ian Pike to be more definitive about future plans, but he just tells us to watch the annual plan updates which is quite unsatisfactory.

So that leaves us with the immediate issue of Frank Kitts Park.

Future Role of Waterfront Watch

At this stage I want to raise the future role of Waterfront Watch, now that development is coming to its end. Waterfront Watch was formed to oppose buildings on the waterfront and privatisation, and to advocate for a vision of the waterfront as predominantly public open space, like the Town Belt.

The objects set out in our constitution are:

To keep watch on the development of the Wellington waterfront, in particular:

- To seek an impendent review of Wellington's waterfront development
- To seek public consultation on all future waterfront developments
- To seek the retention of at least 60% of the Wellington waterfront as publically usable open space
- To preserve the present use by families as a safe and open place, and
- To oppose excessive heights [of buildings] on the Wellington waterfront.

With only two possible buildings potentially on the horizon, it is likely that your committee can expect to maintain a "watching brief" until one of the possibilities

crystallises into a firm proposal. Council activity on the waterfront can be expected to largely be limited to “managing” activities such as events, stall and markets. These are things that the public appreciates, and which I am confident are now in safe hands within the Parks and Reserves department.

To a very large extent, Waterfront Watch has achieved its objectives of ensuring that some large open spaces have been preserved, and that the Council’s earlier plans have been defeated. It would be nice if the current Councillors and staff recognised that the waterfront (which is now so appreciated by everyone) was not created by them, but was achieved DESPITE the Council. As I quoted Gaylene Preston saying earlier, “The waterfront wasn’t achieved by accident – we fought for it!”

Waterfront Watch members and supporters have earned the appreciation of Wellington residents who know that you have been responsible for saving our waterfront for future generations with so much open space, and only two* new buildings have been built since the Events Centre - the Meridian building and the horse-float on Site 10. Well done.

Patrick McCombs
President
Waterfront Watch Inc
12 June 2016

* That’s two buildings if we overlook the total rebuild of the Overseas Passenger Terminal on Clyde Quay Wharf, the 4-storey apartment block in front of the P&T Building/Chaffers Dock, and the relocation of the Unions Steamship laundry from Greta Point to Kumutoto