

Press Statement 23 September 2016

Frank Kitts Park Redevelopment

Waterfront Watch Survey Finds Little Support among Candidates

Of the seven Mayoral candidates only one, Jo Coughlan, has told Waterfront Watch that they support the planned redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park in its entirety. Five expressed doubts or opposition to the proposed location of the Chinese Garden.

The organisation's survey asked candidates "Do you support the council's planned \$5.5m redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park that would remove the amphitheatre and introduce a Chinese Garden? Yes/No.

Of the 12 sitting councillors seeking re-election, 7 did not provide a response to the question, while 3 opposed and one supported the council's redevelopment plan.

Across all 37 candidates for mayor and council:

- 22 do not support the council's plan
- 4 said they supported the plan
- 3 responded "Don't know"
- 4 sitting councillors chose not to answer the question, instead providing comments: Andy Foster, Justin Lester, Malcolm Sparrow, Simon Woolf
- 3 councillors did not respond to the survey, despite reminders: Simon Marsh, Paul Eagle, David Lee

The sitting councillors to oppose the plan were Iona Pannett, Helene Ritchie and Nicola Young.

Mayoral Candidates

- Mayoral candidate Keith Johnson joined Coughlan in supporting the plans, including the Chinese Garden, but he was "skeptical about the wider upgrade".
- Andy Foster chose not to respond to the Yes/No option. Instead, in a long comment, he said that he supported the upgrade of the playground at Frank Kitts Park but would like to see adult exercise equipment added. He said that the Chinese Garden would occupy one seventh of the Park's area, that the Council had consulted on it twice over 20 years at different locations, and that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been signed with Wellington's sister city.
- Nick Leggett said "I support the idea of a Chinese Garden – I have yet to be convinced that Frank Kitts is the site".
- Justin Lester favoured locating the Garden on the carpark roof rather than replacing the pathway aligned with Willeston St, but thought "it would be deeply embarrassing for Wellington to fully renege on this undertaking [given to the Chinese government]".
- Helene Ritchie and Nicola Young preferred that the Chinese Garden be placed in the Botanic Garden, while Johnny Overton simply opposed the planned redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park.

A press statement issued by the Chinese Garden Society (dated 6 September 2016) reported that when Mayoral candidates addressed a forum organised by the Society, Coughlan, Foster, Leggett and Lester all "supported the proposed waterfront location, subject to resource consent being granted and sufficient funding in place". Nicola Young had told the forum that she favoured an alternative site being found away from the waterfront.

Ward Candidates

Lambton

Of the 8 Lambton Ward candidates, only Dave Gee supported the redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park as proposed. The other seven answered "No", describing it variously as a "waste of money" and "a terrible idea", or suggesting alternative locations.

Northern

Peter Gilbert endorsed the proposed removal of the amphitheatre and the placement of the Chinese Garden. Jill Day wasn't sure but "agreed in principle" to keeping Frank Kitts Park as it is,

saying “it’s a lovely open space and is well utilised as it is”. John Apanowicz and Judith Gray did not support the proposal, while Malcolm Sparrow did not comment on the question.

Eastern

No candidates for the Eastern Ward indicated they supported the planned redevelopment, with sitting Councilor Sarah Free saying “I’d love the Chinese Garden, but would prefer another site for it.” Councilor Simon Marsh did not respond to the survey.

Onslow - Western

No Onslow-Western candidates totally endorsed the proposed redevelopment.

Diane Calvert supported “saving” Frank Kitts Park and thought there were more appropriate places for the Chinese Garden, Thomas Morgan answered “Don’t know”, while Mathew Plummer said “It’s a disgraceful project. Councilors are totally out of touch – Wellington doesn’t want this.”

Councilor Andy Foster, as noted above, generally supported the Chinese Garden in Frank Kitts Park while proposing changes to the plans for the playground and saying nothing about the future of the amphitheatre. Councilor Simon Woolf was “not at all happy with the council’s plans” to redevelop the Park; however, he felt the council was committed to a Chinese Garden and, like Justin Lester, would prefer that it be placed above the carpark, overlooking the lagoon.

Southern

Brendon Bonner was the only Southern candidate to respond to the survey. He opposed the redevelopment, saying “Why can’t they leave this wonderful big public open space alone? In a city of limited space, this inner city waterfront park is a treasure.”

Despite reminders the other Southern candidates, including sitting councilors Paul Eagle and David Lee, did not respond to the survey.

Comment

Patrick McCombs, President of Waterfront Watch, said that group was pleased that all except one of the eight Lambton Ward candidates, including the only Mayoral candidate who lives in the inner city, have declared their opposition to the plan for a Chinese Garden and the removal of the amphitheatre. “As more people come to live in the CBD, the more important it is to keep all the open, usable and sheltered spaces that we have. While people living in outlying areas may have more access to green spaces, for inner city residents the Waterfront is our front yard”

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