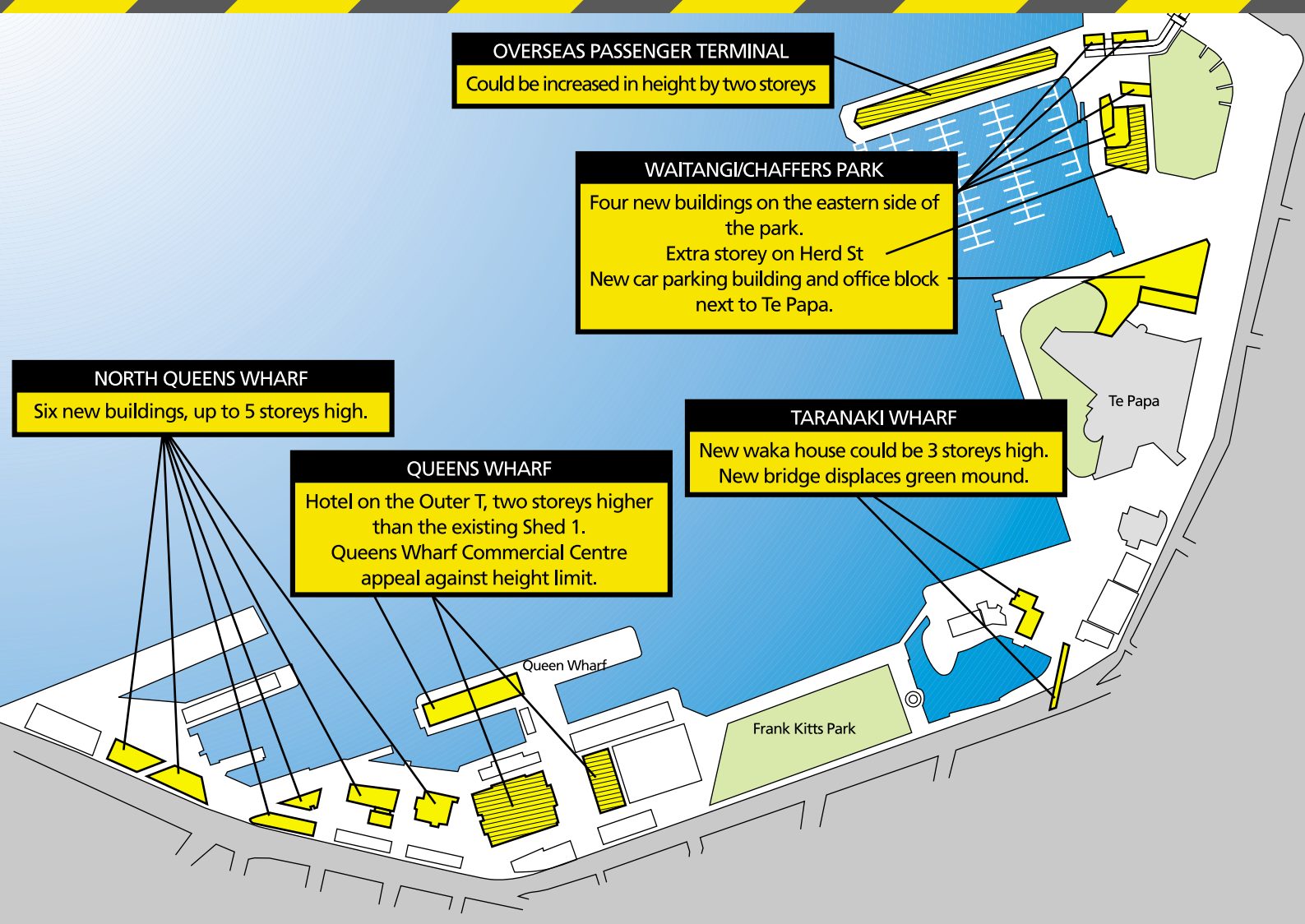




Too Many Buildings



If you are concerned about new buildings on the waterfront, and you want to continue the fight for public open space and views, then you are invited to the

NINTH ANNUAL MEETING of WATERFRONT WATCH INC

at the Wellington Rowing Club 2pm on Sunday May 9



Too Many Buildings

In February 2000 the Wellington Town Hall was packed by more than 2000 citizens protesting against Variation 17, the City Council's plan for 20 new buildings on the waterfront. The meeting passed unanimous resolutions opposing buildings on the waterfront, and demanding the retention of public open space and views.

Two months later, Variation 17 was dropped, and in August 2001 came Variation 22, a new waterfront plan. The new plan still includes 13 new buildings for the waterfront, though lower than before. Work on this plan is proceeding fast.

- Resource consent has been approved for phase one of Waitangi Park, covering part of the Chaffers area. But it's not the park that Wellingtonians voted for. Five new buildings (six under Variation 17) are proposed in the face of 97 per cent opposition to new buildings expressed in Variation 17 submissions. Only 13 per cent of the park will be grass.

Four of the new buildings are planned around the Herd St Post Office building which has been leased for private apartments.

Phase three of the plan is for a fifth new building in the "transition zone" east of Te Papa. It'll be a combination of a large one-storey parking building and a four-storey office block – again contradicting the wishes of Wellingtonians who voted (in a public opinion survey carried out by the council) 85 per cent against any building in this part of the park. The parking building, which will block harbour views from the street, is to have a Chinese garden on its roof.

- On Queens Wharf, a Hilton Hotel is planned on the Outer T. It would effectively privatise part of the seabed. The hotel would be two storeys higher than Shed 1

which it would replace. Taxis, buses, service vehicles and rubbish removal trucks servicing the hotel would conflict with the pedestrian promenade. Its kitchens, service and rubbish areas and loading dock would face the harbour and open on to the promenade.

- North of Queens Wharf, is to have five new buildings, up to 5 storeys. The Greta Point tavern is the lowest. New buildings will squeeze the view through the Whitmore Street gates.

Wellington Waterfront Ltd (the council-owned company formerly known as Lambton Harbour Management) plans to earn "substantial returns" by selling leaseholds for the buildings. With the most expensive Chaffers design, they want the income to help pay for public space development. The city hopes the ground floors of all the new buildings will attract retailers and food and beverage outlets. But the reality of public access is questionable. After the failure of the Retail Centre, the council allowed the owners to close the shopping area and food hall and convert them into private offices. As a result there's no longer public access to the ground floor.

What victories have been won?

The total number of new buildings has been reduced from 20 to 13 and some of the worst proposals have been cancelled. The five-storey building on the road edge of Frank Kitts Park and two 12 storey towers on either side of the Taranaki Wharf gates are no longer proposed. The historic Ambulance Building is no longer being moved out on to Taranaki wharf.

Re-use of heritage buildings is under way. But "restoration" of the Odlins and Herd Street buildings is not respecting their heritage values.

And what's to come?

- Developers are discussing proposals to build apartments on the Overseas Passenger Terminal. This could involve adding two storeys – destroying the vision of the original architect, blocking views, and effectively privatising the seabed.
- The proposal for a waka house near the Taranaki Wharf lagoon has grown into a three-storey structure to accommodate a cultural tourist project which may include a carving school, shops and restaurant. The building could alienate more open space and views.
- The owners of the Queens Wharf Commercial Centre have appealed against the height limit on the failed Retail Centre.

Waterfront Watch continues to promote public open space and views as the best for the city. We believe there will be too many new buildings on the waterfront. We oppose plans which would allow vehicular traffic to conflict with pedestrians, and we believe the waterfront should be a vehicle-free zone. We continue to believe in the need for public consultation, and we regret the processes such as Waitangi Park where the public was consulted and then ignored in the final decision making.