Wellington City Council and Wellington Employers’ Chamber of Commerce
Business Forum – Tuesday 18 March 2014
Summary Document

Overview

The Business Forum on March 18, held in partnership between the Wellington City Council and the Wellington Employers’ Chamber of Commerce, was a success as a meaningful engagement session between the Council and business leaders to explore ideas for taking the city and the region’s economy forward.

Limitations of time and information on the day notwithstanding, it was clear that there are more than enough ideas, enthusiasm and commitment to drive Wellington forward, to continue the engagement process between business and Council supported by the Chamber.

It was very good to see business people turn up and engage with elected representatives and Council officers in a way that didn’t require going through a formal submission process and that enabled dialogue.

What we asked of business in such a short time frame was a challenge, and although we barely scratched the surface, some of the ideas from the four subject areas of film and technology, education and cultural, infrastructure projects, and events and venues were enough make it clear there is real potential for growth in the Capital.

The reaction we received from the forum was a willingness to engage and participate, when it’s convenient, business-like and worthwhile.

The Wellington City Council and the Wellington Employers’ Chamber of Commerce have listened to the feedback and we have created this summary document which outlines the four core group’s feedback from the forum.

1. Major Projects breakout

General comments

- The concept of a business forum was applauded; but the process was flawed as it was not real engagement. The business forum is the first step towards engagement.

- The time frame for the business forum was too short. Why present a list without the information on which to make a decision? The right process would involve more time and more of the right information.
Suggestions

- Business people do not like deciding things on a gut feeling and would prefer further consultation with financial information such as costings and return on investments.

- Hold an "Economic Forum" or "Hothouse" to gain momentum. We should hold regular meetings with a clear purpose.

- Suggested the Wellington City Council should look at complementary items on the list and use these ideas together for multiple benefits and effects; e.g. need for an events centre which creates the need for connectivity driving development of airport extension.

- Balance protection of existing assets, values versus growth of new.

- Sweat lazy assets – why focus on building new items? For example, we already have museums and we could use these assets for the proposed film museum rather than building what we already have.

- Focus on regional projects beyond the CBD boundaries.

- Develop something symbolic – connect with pride and progress in our city.

- Decide on priorities, make a decision and get on with it – show success.

- A proper framework would involve the right people with the right data making the right decision(s).

- The Council should look seriously at a business case and how to fund the possibility of a runway extension.

2. Education breakout

General comments

- We need to take a joined-up approach, involving institutions, businesses and the community.

Students

- We need to ensure that there are jobs for students in Wellington at the end of their study by linking the business community with the universities.

- Wellington does not get its share of students because the city does not deliver a superior student experience. For example, 18% identified Victoria University as having a good education and/or where there parents went. However, the University does not get all of that 18% coming.

- Students bring a lot of our creative talent into the city. We should enhance what we call creative capital, new knowledge, and social capital by making sure our students stay and/or contribute to the city.

- We need to create an entrepreneurial culture in both students and staff.
• Do we have capacity to attract more students to Wellington?

• Wellington is under-done. The proposed runway extension will attract more international students. International students are the main area within the University that we can grow, due to the capped funding of domestic students. (Nb. The cap can be moved i.e. engineering).

• The Government has an aim to double international students by 2025. Wellington should aim to match the Governments goal by also doubling their international student intake.

• Better connectivity between the business and education sector will prepare students for their first, second and third jobs rather than solely a graduate position.

• We need to look at filling the gap of those who leave high school and do not pursue further education.

Team approach – working with local government and the business community

• We need a whole of community approach; we have to do that as a team.

• We don’t have a linked up approach and we don’t feel backed by local government. Our international education revenue is not helping the GDP of this region.

• We need a way to link through to local government.

• Making that attraction linked up with the business community will also addressing improvement

• The city needs to foster and enhance ideas and hand them to the business community to ensure that talent will not go elsewhere. For example, we have great ICT opportunities in Wellington.

3. Events breakout

General comments

• More events spread throughout the year (to fill up hotels, restaurants and bars).

• A runway extension would benefit everyone.

• Take a joined-up/regional approach to holding events, and event facilities.

• More research is required before we can make decisions. We need to ensure we have the budget to secure business events in Wellington.

Event facilities

• Facilities must be suitable for the events we hold.
• Hold a regional stocktake of facilities to see how all needs are met. Identify gaps/opportunities that can make a difference and provide a boost to the city?
• Build a Vector Arena equivalent - Auckland takes money from Wellington.

**Downtown levy / funding**
• Need transparency on downtown levy – Who it benefits and where does the money go?
• Is the downtown levy high enough to get what is possible / desirable? Are we maximising our return? Are events at the right time?
• Business events should be occurring in Wellington and we should be provided with an appropriate budget to chase these events.

**Amalgamation / working together**
• A bigger population base would result in increased scale.
• CCO amalgamation needs to work and take in commercial reality.
• PWT already markets the region by default. But the region doesn't pay its share.
• Can we align with Central Govt to increase Wellington’s reach?
• Can we do more to join PWT, hotels and conference centres?

**Miscellaneous**
• Need to increase the visibility of business events. Can we grow this area? Investment? Facilities?
• We can build on local events and get more successful ones. E.g. Wellington has Phantom event and a great musical theatre.

*(Possible) Wins for the city/region*
• Conference centre.
• Amalgamation, longer term.
• Single ATEED equivalent.
• Attract domestic tourism from now to WOW.
• Better collaboration / Team Wellington.
• Events scheduled for longer periods.
• Focus on consumers.
4. IT and Film breakout

General comments

• More information is required before decisions can be made.
• We need to be able to bring in talent, access the market and provide a shared ability to access IT.
• We need to secure the key players into Wellington who will bring in money and further promote Wellington.

Connectivity and hiring local talent

• Conversations between government and local government need to occur in order to sell local products to the world.
• The Government doesn’t have the political interest to make Wellington technology focused. They would rather outsource due to less risk. For example, Novo Pay – Wellington companies could have done this project.
• If Wellington doesn’t hire local IT firms, why would the rest of the world?
• The Wellington economy relies on government spending.

Film School

• There are too many students coming out of film schools. If the Council wants to create another film school it would be flooding the market unless aimed at further advancing the skills in the middle of the career.
• A remote campus may seem like a good model but the question is whether the film industry would want to employ from Wellington.
• There is no interest for Weta film school as the film industry is not interested in paying for knowledge that is already out there.

Tech hub or precinct

• We need people in business not creating more buildings.
• A tech hub / incubator is an oxymoron. There is no need for a tech incubator.
• The focus needs to be on growth of companies and attracting and retaining talent. The focus should be on those people inside of buildings not on the buildings themselves.
• Talent is needed – not a physical building.
• A tech precinct in unnecessary in Wellington because everyone knows one another. There is 1 degree of separation.
• We need to grow our own people and not always focus on start ups.