

Kia ora koutou. My name is Grace Ridley-Smith and I am speaking to you today as a passionate millennial Wellingtonian. I love this city, its people and communities; its history, art and architecture.

I grew up mostly in Wellington, and have lived and/or spent extended periods of time in cities around the world: Dunedin, Tauranga, New York, London, Salt Lake City in Utah and most recently Bunbury in Western Australia. I have rented apartments, shared flats and lived as a boarder in a single family home. I have lived in old homes and brand new subdivisions; in the suburbs and city centres.

And it is my genuine, wholehearted belief that Wellington is the best place in the world to live. When I moved home from London and found myself swimming after work at Oriental Bay or eating fresh caught paua sammies at Makara Beach, I quite literally wept with joy.

I love Wellington's marriage of culture and nature. That you can see an indie band and an orca whale on the same day; live in an urban centre and enjoy kaka and kereru in your garden. It is an exceptionally beautiful city – naturally and architecturally – and I am constantly amazed by how many wonderful vistas and vantage points the city has.

I am aware of an argument that Wellington is the city that it is because of the people who live in it. Of course people shape culture. That's obvious. But it isn't just the people who live here now that have created Wellington's culture and identity. The culture and identity of a city – much like a person – doesn't arrive suddenly, fully formed. It's cumulative and shaped over time. Generations of Māori, settlers and immigrants have played a role and each has left a mark on the city's natural and built form.

I'm not here today to ask you to freeze Wellington in time; to stop that accumulation. Cities are not static; nor should they be. But that doesn't mean that threads which connect people over time should be severed. Allowing for continuity is not the same as giving in to stagnation. I am here today to advocate for a vision of Wellington that weaves together the past & present; that balances future development against historical and cultural value.

Finnish architect, Juhani Pallasmaa, said "architecture enables us to see and understand the slow process of history and to participate in time cycles that surpass the scope of an individual life." In other words, buildings, as they age, help connect us to something that extends before and behind us. It's through the preservation of buildings, monuments, and natural landmarks that we allow for the layering of history.

I know that some people's response to this is to argue for a case by case approach where specific, individual buildings of importance – like say St James Theatre – are heritage listed and therefore protected. Setting aside the issue that heritage listing too often fails to protect buildings, this approach underestimates the importance of a coherent streetscape. Buildings don't exist in a vacuum. Like an orchestra playing together, buildings add up to a sum greater than its parts. This is why character or heritage precincts are so vital. These are parts of the city

with important, intact groupings of valued character buildings that deserve to be protected not only from demolition but also from being compromised by nearby development. A historic building loses its mana and meaning if it's dwarfed, marooned, shaded out or has its sight lines blocked by new development.

Of course not everything can or should stay. The overriding question is not *should* Wellington grow and add to its building and housing stock, it is *how* to do this well. How should we meet the challenges of tomorrow while retaining the unique, idiosyncratic culture and identity that Wellingtonians love?

One important way is to support the character precincts recommended by Council for the new district plan. These precincts represent a small proportion of Wellington's buildable land and comprises some of the city's oldest houses, built in beautiful native hardwood and using techniques no longer in use. Typically built with impressive street facades, these houses are not only enjoyable to inhabit; they have a generosity of spirit and contribute to a beautiful streetscape. Images of houses and streets within these precincts have been reproduced in paintings, Ans Westra photographs and marketing materials promoting the city. They are iconic and represent something distinct to this place.

To properly preserve a coherent sense of place and character, the precincts need to be joined up and have logical, practical boundaries. I suggested this in my submission on the proposed plan last year and I'm glad to see that the Council officers agree with me and are suggesting some changes in Mt Victoria, Mt Cook and Newtown to do this better. However, I think there is an opportunity to add in a select number of streets that were highlighted in the original Boffa Miskell report as being well intact and contributing a high level of cultural and heritage value.

Another important tool is the "resource consent to demo rule" which requires (as the name suggests) a resource consent to be granted in order for pre-1930s buildings located within the character precincts to be demolished. This is not about saying that no pre-1930s building should be demolished and replaced, but rather weighing up proposed new development against the existing structure. I know the criticism is that this adds to building costs and slows new development and I agree that the process could be simplified and streamlined but a resource consent process is a good way of ensuring thoughtful, considerate development. I think it is important to reiterate that this is only relevant to a small section of the city, it's not blanket coverage and has been incorrectly characterised as a city-wide handbrake.

Old buildings hold stories of the past, clues about the political, economic and cultural trends of the time. I'd like to finish with a quote by Kerry Pollock from Heritage New Zealand: Heritage is the physical manifestation of human history and culture. Landscapes, buildings and structures hold the stories of our past, our ancestors, and their presence enables us to tell these stories in a tangible way. I believe this knowledge provides us with a sense of rooted belonging in the world.

Thank you for your time commissioners. Ngā mihi.