

Kia ora Proposed District Plan Hearings Panel Chair and Commissioners,

I'm Chris Ford, Acting Kaituitui (Community Connector) for Wellington, Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) New Zealand.

DPA is providing this submission for the Wellington City Council in consideration of the Proposed District Plan for the city.

We have focused our submission on accessibility to housing and the urban environment.

The brief background to this is that, as commissioners/panellists and everyone in today's hearing knows, Wellington is bearing the brunt of the country's housing crisis.

Specifically, disabled people are disproportionately bearing the burden of this crisis due to the inaccessibility of much of our private housing stock, not only in Wellington, but throughout the country.

Lifemark Universal Design, a company owned by CCS Disability Action, and which specialises in universal design for both housing and public buildings, estimates that only between 2% and 5% of Aotearoa's public housing stock is fully accessible to disabled people.

This is a shocking indictment on decades of building housing, which is largely inaccessible to disabled people, aiding in the creation of a disabling society.

At the practical level, this means that for disabled people, like me and others who have a need for accessible housing, there is practically nowhere to live, even despite the small, infinitesimal increase in accessible housing numbers through, for example, Kainga Ora and other social housing providers over the last four years.

This lack of accessible housing and supporting community infrastructure means that many disabled people are not able to live in the communities we would like to live in

or even visit whānau/family, friends, or anyone for that matter as visit ability is not a primary consideration in any current housing planning processes either.

That serves as the background to this submission from DPA.

Now, I will deal briefly with some of the technical highlights from our submission.

DPA has some concerns about the proposed intensification process around zoning for housing which has been instituted via amendments made to the Resource Management Act. These stem from the fact that many of the houses which may well be built will be no more than three storeys in height on average.

Nevertheless, these concerns have been mitigated by the proposal to adopt accessibility guidelines, as part of this Proposed District Plan, in the form of the Centres and Mixed Use and Residential Design Guides.

DPA welcomes and supports the introduction of these guidelines.

However, DPA has made various proposals around strengthening the wording of several key clauses to encourage greater uptake of universal design and accessibility by planners, developers, builders and homeowners as the best way of ensuring that both present and future generations of disabled Wellingtonians can access housing of various types, thereby affording disabled people greater housing choices.

Also, if done well, this Proposed District Plan will facilitate the construction of more accessible public buildings, urban infrastructure and housing which will enable disabled people to be included in all of Wellington's communities.

Specifically, we refer panel members to the amendments we have proposed around strengthening various provisions of the Centres and Mixed-Use Guide.

For example, we call for the insertion of the word 'must' in Section G37 of the Centres and Mixed-Use Guide where it discusses that 'entrances should be of

adequate dimensions to provide universal access for all and allow for movement from a wide range of users, including moving furniture and wheelchairs.’

This is as we believe that entrances ‘must be of adequate dimensions’ to enable, for example, wheelchair and mobility aid users the ability to easily manoeuvre in and out of houses and buildings built to these specifications.

The same applies with Section G91 when it talks of ‘for developments that are likely to be occupied by people with limited mobility, where possible, provide ground level access that is accessible by people using wheelchairs, and design units with reference to New Zealand standards for access and mobility. Consider things such as ...’

We believe that ‘Consider things such as’ should be amended to state ‘ensure things such as’ to encourage greater compliance and uptake from stakeholders including builders, designers and future homeowners.

Similarly, in the Residential Design Guide we make several recommendations around strengthening provisions such as that, for example, around Section G37 where we suggest the deletion of the words ‘where possible,’ and their replacement with the sentence ‘ensure that dwellings on the ground floor have a step free entry.’

We make similar recommendations around the need to amend Residential Design Guide Sections G53, G76, G78, and G81.

One area I would like to draw panellists’ attention to is the use of language in the Proposed District Plan document as well. In Section G53, for example, the term ‘limited mobility users’ is not that clear or disability friendly and, in its place, we have suggested using the term ‘...people with mobility impairments’ to better capture and specify whose needs are being catered for within this section.

Overall, we support the proposals made around building accessibility and design in the Commercial and Mixed-Use Centre Zone and in the High-Density Residential

Zone, particularly when it comes to ensuring the widest choice of housing possible in the Wellington region.

This can best be done through using the City Outcomes Contribution via the Environmental and Accessibility Performance Fund to incentivise the building of housing and public buildings as we outline on Section HRZ – P13.

I would now welcome any questions/comments that the hearings panel has on our submission and specific aspects of it.

Panel Chair.