

Wellington City District Plan - Public Access Submission

Tyers Stream Group

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I have worked in environmental and conservation management throughout NZ and travelled and worked overseas. I have contributed to many plans and other statutory documents throughout the country regarding, amongst other things, the provision of public access to publicly administered areas such as reserves and water bodies. Public access to water bodies is a matter of national importance in s. 6(d) of the RMA, which the Council through its plan must recognise and provide for.

I am part of a community group which is undertaking reserve enhancement of the Tyers Stream Reserve and its associated stream flowing through Khandallah. We are part of a wider network of catchment-based community groups, Te Hononga, or Wellington Community Catchments Collective, which is endeavouring to enhance and retain our water bodies and their associated catchments.

Wellington has certain natural geographic advantages, such as its coastline, its small streams, bush gullies, Town Belt and reserve network. Given the desire to increase the city's population density, careful planning will be required to ensure that opportunities to retain and improve access to areas of public open space, given there will inevitably be more people and possibly fewer areas of open space.

Some cities are better than others in ensuring their planning provides linkages and connections to enable community use of and access to areas such as the coastline, streams and reserves. This is because ensuring linkages are retained and enhanced requires both ongoing vigilance and taking opportunities which present intermittently over time, such as during subdivision or land use intensification. In my experience, observant planning or reserves staff or councillors are well placed to align planning, regulatory, service provision and community interest to provide and take these opportunities when they infrequently occur. This requires a forward looking and responsive district plan to incentivise the opportunities when they arise.

The alternative is setting up a system which does not adequately consider context, avoids maintaining linkages and reduces future opportunities, not just for public access but for other matters like provision for linear infrastructure such as roads or water pipelines or future subdivision. An example of a recent opportunity in Wellington recommended by locals through submissions, was providing for a better cycling (and walking) linkage from Khandallah to Kaiwharawhara using the existing Bridle Path (which is both a not fully formed legal road and provides for water and gas pipelines) instead of the original proposal to run more cyclists up or down the winding Onslow Rd, posing risks to all traffic. Another example is the connection now available from Wadestown to the Trelissick Reserve by way of a bridge and walking pathway. This would not have been possible without the reserve connection from the end of Oban St providing the necessary linkage. Regrettably there are plenty of examples in Wellington where obvious linkages cannot be joined up as no connection to the land beyond, or along a water body, was provided at the time of subdivision.

Thus, the District Plan must provide suitable policy connected to rules to ensure public access and public access linkages are provided during subdivision and when resource consents are sought as well as ensuring there are funds available to support this, where appropriate, such as through reserves contributions or development impact levies. All parts of the Council need to work together, and with the community, to support this in the collective interest and ensure Wellington is a great place to live.