

Mayor's Report



KERRY PRENDERGAST Mayor



Wellington has enjoyed another strong year despite global economic turbulence

There are many forces – local and global – that influence quality of life for Wellington and its residents.

The global economic downturn slowed growth during the year and made affordability a pressing issue for households and businesses. The city continued to face competition for investment, skills and tourism dollars. Environmental issues, from climate change to water use, demanded attention.

But the city continued to grow, and to welcome a wide range of people, representing many cultures and interests.

Our approach in responding to all these trends is to preserve what makes Wellington special, to invest in areas where we have a competitive advantage – for example our compact form, tolerant attitudes, and reputation for being able to deliver major events – and to look after crucial infrastructure such as transport and water networks, while ensuring our services and activities remain affordable.

Although our work programme for the 2009/10 year focused largely on 'business as usual', we did continue to invest in the city's future. That investment is reflected in the completion of exciting visitor attractions such as the new Carter Observatory, Zealandia and the expanded City Gallery; in progress on areas such as the new Indoor Community Sports Centre and the Golden Mile; and in the huge range of events that kept the city humming during the year.

Our decisions throughout the year reflected the significant economic, social and environmental trends. Environmental issues were to the fore, as were preparations for next year's Rugby World Cup.

We also set a direction for the city's community facilities – the pools, libraries and other networks that provide places for people to get together, enjoy themselves, learn and to live healthy lifestyles.

Despite the tough economic environment, Wellington has enjoyed another good year – and we can look forward to an absolutely positive future.

HIGHLIGHTS

QUALITY OF LIFE

Wellington continued to offer residents a very high quality of life during the year. In our 2010 Residents' Satisfaction Survey, 92 percent rated their quality of life as good or very good.

In the 2010 Mercer Quality of Living Survey, Wellington was ranked 12th best city in the world for quality of life and 5th best eco-city.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

In June 2010, the Council approved a new Community Facilities Policy and Implementation Plan. The policy aims to guide future Council investment in community facilities such as pools, recreation centres, libraries, and community centres and halls (see 5.6 Community Participation and Support for details).

As part of implementation, the Council approved improvements to several pools, including a new hydrotherapy pool at the Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre and new indoor teaching pools at Keith Spry Pool in Johnsonville. We also established a new School Pools Partnership Fund aimed at increasing access to community pool space and learn-to-swim programmes.

WELLINGTON'S WATER SUPPLY

Every year, Wellingtonians use about 30 million cubic metres of water. This includes household uses such as washing and bathing, as well as commercial and building uses.

Water use has declined over the last three years per person; however, continued population growth may eventually lead to shortages, especially during dry periods. Without further action to reduce our usage, we will have to build a potentially costly dam or introduce conservation measures such as metering. The Council does not favour either option in the near future.

Instead, during June 2010, we agreed a draft Water Conservation and Efficiency Plan aimed at stabilising the city's water use. This means reducing water use per person as the city grows. In the coming months we will be seeking residents' views on this plan.

RUGBY WORLD CUP

The city is continuing to count down to the Rugby World Cup 2011. This will be a massive event, with tens of thousands of international visitors. Wellington is hosting several teams including South Africa, France, Australia and the All Blacks. The Council is working with rugby authorities, businesses and other local authorities to ensure the region's sports, transport and visitor facilities are ready. As part of our preparations, a 'rugby village' will be developed around the new wharewaka (canoe house) on the waterfront.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT

During the year, we consulted on District Plan changes covering residential areas and suburban centres – that is, most of the city outside the CBD. These changes support our 'growth spine' strategy, which aims to focus growth and development in key transport and employment 'hubs' such as Johnsonville, Adelaide Rd, Kilbirnie and the city centre. The plan changes provide for more intensive residential development in those areas, introduce new design guides to improve building quality especially in character areas, and introduce controls on 'big box' retail developments outside of existing town centres while ensuring we retain quality outdoor green spaces.

The Council made a decision in December 2009 to open Manners Mall to buses in order to provide a quicker, more direct bus route through the central city. As part of the plan, lower Cuba Street will become a shared space and pedestrian links to Civic Square and the waterfront will be improved. Following an Environment Court challenge, work got under way in May 2010. Also during the year, the New Zealand Transport Agency committed to several significant projects in the city, including improvements to the Basin Reserve and the Ngauranga-Aotea Quay stretch of State Highway 1.

The Council and the Government in September 2009 launched The Capital City Initiative – a project to showcase Wellington's status as New Zealand's capital, with a range of building and urban design initiatives, many focused on attracting visitors to the 'Capital Centre' – the area around Parliament.

EVENTS AND ATTRACTIONS

The city maintained its reputation as New Zealand's events capital during the year, with key events such as the FIFA World Cup qualifying match between the All Whites and Bahrain, the NZ International Arts Festival, and numerous community and local festivals.

The Council worked on options to strengthen the city's arts and events infrastructure. This included work on bringing together the management of the St James Theatre, Opera House, and Wellington Convention Centre; working towards establishing a new Trust to run the Cuba Street Carnival, the Wellington Fringe Festival and other community events; and establishing an arts 'hub' at Toi Pōneke Arts Centre to provide information for arts practitioners.

CLIMATE CHANGE

After extensive consultation, in June 2010 the Council approved a new Climate Change Action Plan, which focuses on mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change on the city. As part of this plan, we recommitted to ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gases, and to a range of programmes including a pilot of electric vehicles and support for business and household energy efficiency measures.

I attended the Climate Summit for Mayors in Copenhagen in December 2009, held alongside the United Nations climate negotiations. The key message from the summit was that cities cannot wait for world leaders and governments to act on climate change, but should take action now.

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The Council's civic relationships can open doors for businesses, artists and other Wellington residents. In June 2010 I led a 65-person civic, business and cultural delegation to the Shanghai World Expo, the largest international Expo ever held. This trip allowed many leaders from Wellington's creative industries to make contacts and, in some cases, forge deals.

Wellington was recognised as a 'Fair Trade City' by the Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand. Along with Dunedin, Wellington was the first city in New Zealand to achieve 'fair trade' status, which requires fair trade products to be widely available in the city and to be used by the Council.

WORKING WITH THE REGION

We are working with other councils on a review of governance arrangements in the Wellington region. The context for the work reflects the move to create a 'supercity' in Auckland but recognises that Wellington has distinctive characteristics, including a history of collaborative relationships such as those that created the Wellington Regional Strategy.

The aim of the review is to identify any governance issues in the region and the ability to respond to drivers of change for the long-term benefit of our communities – it does not leap to any conclusions about structural solutions. The independent firm PricewaterhouseCoopers was appointed to undertake research, analysis and facilitate the process. They are expected to present a discussion paper to the Mayoral Forum in September 2010.

PLANNING FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

During the year, we began a project to learn more about the forces that are likely to shape the city over the next 30 years, and identify how we can respond.

The Wellington 2040 project identifies six 'megatrends' that may be crucial to our future quality of life: the increasing importance of information technology; the ageing population; environmental sustainability; access to basic resources such as water and energy; the increasing importance for cities to offer a sense of place; and the need for smaller cities like Wellington to define their role in the world and tap into larger markets.

This work will set the background and priorities for the long-term plan that we will develop in 2012. We will engage with the public on this work in the coming year.