

**State the specific provisions of proposed District Plan Change 81 that your submission relates to.**

DOCOMOMO NZ makes this submission in regard to the application to delete a listed heritage item [Gordon Wilson Flats, 320 The Terrace, Wellington, Map Ref 16, Symbol Ref 299] from the Wellington City Council's District Plan in order to facilitate its demolition.

**State whether you support or oppose the specific provisions or wish to have them amended. You should also state the reasons for your views.**

DOCOMOMO NZ opposes the application on the grounds that the Gordon Wilson Flats are a significant historic heritage resource and their heritage value and significance is recognised by Wellington City Council in its listing of the building on the District Plan. The intent of both the District Plan [Volume 1, Chapter 20 Heritage] and the Wellington Heritage Policy [September 2010] is to recognize, protect and conserve the city's historic heritage so that the council can meet its obligations under the RMA and provide for the present and future well being of its community.

DOCOMOMO NZ believes that the de-listing of the Gordon Wilson Flats would set a dangerous precedent, whereby other owners feel encouraged to approach council to de-list their heritage listed property in order to expedite the demolition of significant historic heritage resource.

DOCOMOMO NZ is also opposed to the de-listing of the Gordon Wilson Flats given that the applicant's heritage assessment has not used the council's own criteria and methodology for assessing heritage significance and thus cannot be said to have formed an opinion as to the significance of the building in regards to its listing.

DOCOMOMO NZ considers that the Gordon Wilson Flats have high architectural and historic significance and make a notable contribution to the urban streetscape of the inner-city. The building has retained a high level of authenticity and is a local landmark. The flats have a significant contextual relationship to other multi-storey apartment buildings built to

meet social housing needs by both Housing New Zealand Corporation and Wellington City Council in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Gordon Wilson Flats are particularly notable for their maisonette-style planning and commemorative value, as their name memorializes the architect who designed them and died not long before their completion.

**What decision do you want the Council to make? (please give precise details)**

DOCOMOMO NZ urges the Wellington City Council to decline the application, on the grounds that the Gordon Wilson Flats fully merit their inclusion on the District Plan as a listed built heritage item and that any proposals for the redevelopment of the site should proceed on that basis and vigorously explore refurbishment and / or adaptive reuse options.

**Additional comments:**

The applicant's heritage assessment notes that the Gordon Wilson Flats have 'not been attributed Earthquake Prone Status by Wellington City Council' [Archifact Heritage Assessment, p. 5], although other technical reports contradict this assertion [see Appendix 3]. This contradiction raises questions as to the information base available to the council from which a robust and defensible decision can be made.

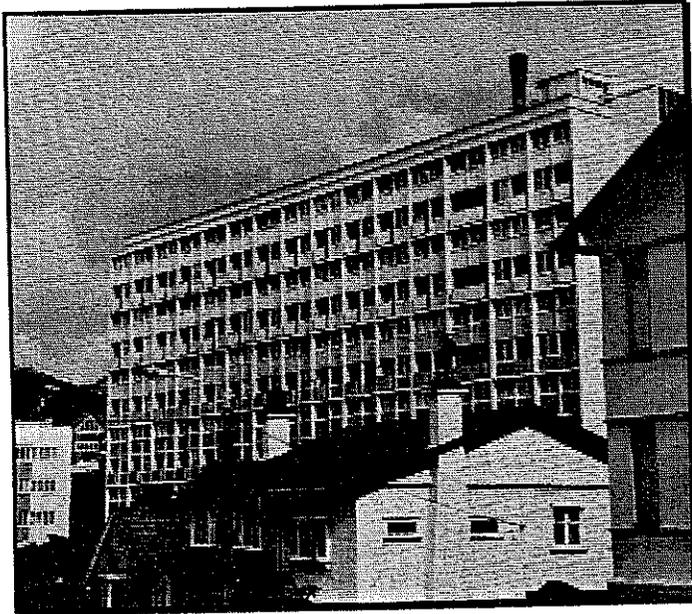
DOCOMOMO NZ commends to Wellington City Council the example of the Civic Administration Building in Auckland [1951-66], which was, until recently, under threat of demolition but is now being described as 'an exceptional renewal and adaptive re-use opportunity'.

**Attachments:**

EOI document, Civic Administration Building, Auckland Council  
Biography of Gordon Wilson, Te Ara  
WCC heritage assessment 1995  
Gordon Wilson Flats assessment

# GORDON WILSON FLATS

320 The Terrace



*Architect: Gordon Wilson.*

*Architectural Style: Modernist.*

*Compilation Date: January 1994.*

*Condition:*

*Visible Material: Reinforced concrete, rendered cement.*

*Date of Construction: 1950's.*

*Building Type/Use: Residential Housing Block.*

*Photo Negative: 7.12 (1994).*

*District Plan: Map 16, reference 299.*

## □ HISTORY

Built on an historic site of the first residence of Mr George Hunter, the first Mayor of Wellington. The block provides 116 unit's (mostly single bedroom), and it's height varies from seven to ten storeys with a maximum height of 100 ft, which was higher than other buildings of the time. Unlike Berhampore Flats also designed by Gordon Wilson, the Gordon Wilson Flats are a monolithic unit with a group of lifts at the centre. Ernst Plischke's contribution to the design is an unanswered question. His arrival in New Zealand shortly before this block was built, and the fact that he was working in the housing division put him in a position to be influential.<sup>(1)</sup>

## □ HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Gordon Wilson Flats are an important high density housing development, and are of a type of construction rare in New Zealand. They are still one of the largest public housing projects undertaken in the country, and exist as a momento to the social housing policies of the post-war Governments.

## □ ARCHITECT

To his predecessor's sound organisation, Gordon Wilson brought his brilliant design skill to the position of Government architect. He had already made his mark in private practice with many major projects to his credit. He had also had, a highly successful record of achievement as Chief Architect for the Housing Construction Department. He had designed the Dixon Street Flats (1947, in association with Ernst Plishke) that had gained for him a Gold Medal Award. He was tireless in design, leaving nothing unstudied, and he had the capacity to enthuse all his staff with the same degree of intense involvement. Architectural design was his whole life, and to many young architects he was the arbiter of "contemporary design". During his short term as leader of the Architectural Division - from 1952-1959 - he was responsible for the Bledisloe Building, Auckland; the Bowen State Building,

Wellington; State Flats, Grey's Avenue, Auckland; the Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington; the Dental School, Dunedin; the Milford Hotel; the Engineering School, Canterbury University; and many more.<sup>(2)</sup>

## □ ARCHITECTURE

An architectural landmark in many ways. It was a very big building by Wellington standards, and went some way in creating a new urban scale. Previously only smaller luxury apartments had been built. The building signalled a rising 'social concern' of the Government and architects. New institutional clients, had given the modern movement a start. Flat roofs, no cornices, sheer walls. No window architrave or raised lintels, no capitals or pediments and originally no colour.

The individual unit's appear as boxes placed into the structural grid of the building block. The layout of each unit is planned on two levels, the upper level accommodates the two bedrooms and bathroom while the bottom level provides kitchen and living room, and a small recessed balcony that faces the harbour.

## □ SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

### **Cultural:**

### **Emotional:**

**Historical:** *The building is a response to the social policy of the Government of the day, an endeavour to solve the chronic housing shortages. Later responses moved away high-density developments like this one to medium and low density solutions.*

**Design:** *The design is a significant example of the social agenda of the period and an exploration of modern principals of architecture. The apartment block is a significant element in the cityscape.*

**Use:** *Maintains social and functional use values.*

**Contextual:** *The building represents an important expression of the modern movement in architecture.*

*Level of Authenticity: Maintains a high level of authenticity of design, materiality, function, workmanship and setting.*  
**Statement of Significance:**

### **SOURCES:**

<sup>(1)</sup> Wellington's New Buildings. David Kernohan.

<sup>(2)</sup> Booklet prepared by Architectural Division of the Ministry of Works.

<sup>(3)</sup> VUW School of Architecture. Research Report. Stuart Gardyne.

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# Story: Wilson, Francis Gordon

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Wilson, Francis Gordon

1900–1959

Architect

This biography was written by Julia Gately and was first published in the

[Dictionary of New Zealand Biography](#)

Volume 5, 2000

Francis Gordon Wilson was born in Subiaco, a district of Perth, Western Australia, on 27 November 1900. His father, Francis (Frank) John Wilson, was a New Zealander and an architect, and his mother, Mary Catherine O'Hagan, was Irish. They had a second son, Leslie, in 1902. The family moved to New Zealand in 1903, settling in Wellington. The marriage did not last: Frank Wilson returned to Australia and the two boys were raised by their mother, who ran a boarding house in the city.



Dixon Street State Flats, Wellington

Gordon was educated at the Terrace School and at Wellington Technical College. He was articled to architect William M. Page in Wellington from 1916 and commenced study at the Auckland University College School of Architecture in 1920. About the same time, he began working for the architectural partnership of Hoggard, Prouse and Gummer. This partnership had been dissolved by 1921, and William Gummer formed a new partnership with Reginald Ford in 1923, employing Wilson first as a draughtsman and later as chief draughtsman. Wilson completed his professional examinations in 1928, was admitted to the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA), took a trip to the United States, and then returned to Auckland to take up an associate partnership with Gummer and Ford later that year.

In the 1920s and 1930s Gummer and Ford was one of New Zealand's most respected architectural practices. During his time there Wilson is known to have worked on the Remuera Public Library, Auckland railway station, Wellington Public Library, the National War Memorial and carillon, and the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum building in Wellington. Responsibility for the design of both the Wellington Public Library (now the City Gallery) and the Dominion Museum building has been attributed to him.

Wilson remained with Gummer and Ford until 1936, when he was appointed chief architect of the Department of Housing Construction. The department was set up in Wellington that year by the first Labour government to facilitate the construction of state rental houses. Wilson was ultimately responsible for all the department's buildings, the major ones including the Berhampore Flats (built in 1939-40), the Dixon Street State Flats (1941-44), the McLean State Flats (1943-44), the Hanson Street Flats (1943-44), and Auckland's Grey's Avenue Flats (1945-47) and Symonds Street Flats (1945-47). The Dixon Street flats were awarded a gold medal by the NZIA in 1947. These blocks of flats were important in the development of modernist architecture in New Zealand. They were also indicative of an urban interest within the department. Wilson, like many architects of his day, believed that town planning was a facet of architecture, and he became a member of both the Town Planning Institute (London) and the New Zealand Institute of Professional Town and Country Planners.

Wilson attracted gifted people to work with him in the department, including a number of refugee architects who had fled Europe in the late 1930s. Many of those who worked under him became leading architects themselves: Ernst Plischke, Fred Newman, Helmut Einhorn, Ian Reynolds and George Porter. He nevertheless kept a close eye on all design work himself. He was 'a dominant person who had a strong influence on all the work of the architectural office ... Gordon would do the rounds each morning, leaving behind him black pencil marks over drawings and many irate architects'.

The Department of Housing Construction became the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works in 1943. Wilson was its chief architect until 1948, when he was appointed assistant government architect. He then succeeded Robert Patterson as government architect on the latter's retirement in 1952.

Economic recovery in the 1950s meant a boom in the building industry. As government architect, Wilson was responsible for many state housing schemes, educational buildings and government buildings. His major projects from this period include the Bledisloe State Building and another block of flats in Grey's Avenue, Auckland; the Bowen State Building and The Terrace Flats in Wellington; the School of Engineering building at the University of Canterbury; the University of Otago Dental School building; and a portion of the Milford Hotel, Fiordland. The Terrace Flats, nearing completion on his death, were renamed the Gordon Wilson Flats in his honour.

Wilson was actively involved with the NZIA, particularly in his later years. He was elected a fellow in 1951, was chairman of its Wellington branch in 1955-56 and was a member of its council and executive committee from 1955 until his death. He represented the institute on the National Historic Places Trust and the Association of New Zealand Art Societies and became an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1954. As a member of the Architectural Centre council in Wellington, Wilson helped to bring new ideas to architectural education and to introduce modern design principles to the public.

Wilson married an American, Virginia (Ginny) Abigail Smith, at St Paul's Cathedral Church in Wellington on 4 March 1937. They had three sons and two daughters, and from 1940 lived in a house designed by Wilson in the Wellington suburb of Karori. After his death on 23 February 1959, Ginny returned to the United States.

In addition to his practical work, Wilson gave talks and wrote articles that were published in architectural magazines and other outlets. It is his buildings, however, that continue to have an impact. Wilson was a gifted and informed architect who took advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves to him, and in this way was able to make an outstanding contribution not only to New Zealand's building stock but also to the development of modern architecture in this country.

*Next: External links and sources*

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