EAST–WEST STITCH
Connecting the Western Edge of the City to the Centre
VISON

THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE CITY CENTRE AROUND VICTORIA PARK IS A NATURAL BASIN FACING THE HARBOUR AND WYNYARD QUARTER TO THE NORTH.

OUR 2032 VISION IS:

- The big streets running through the quarter (Nelson, Hobson, Cook, Victoria and Wellesley) no longer break the area into unconnected pieces; instead, they are pleasant places to linger and to walk along. They are easy and safe for pedestrians to cross.
- Hobson and Nelson Streets become attractive boulevards, or green links, welcoming people into the city.
- Federal Street becomes part of a city centre laneway circuit.
- Safe cycling and walking connections to Freemans Bay are enhanced.
- A new, eclectic mix of buildings has a range of uses that contribute to the area’s character as an attractive urban neighbourhood.
- The big blocks have better pedestrian access through them, with more walking routes running north to south.
- Victoria Quarter becomes a vibrant urban community, with housing catering for families seeking an inner-city lifestyle, as well as singles, couples and students. Some development will be mixed-use, providing work and living spaces under one roof.
The western edge of the city centre around Victoria Park is a natural basin facing the harbour and the Wynyard Quarter to the north. On its boundary is the Nelson and Hobson Street ridge, the densest residential area in the city centre, while the western extent is defined by State Highway 1 and the inner suburbs of Freemans Bay, St Mary’s Bay and beyond. The area was the industrial hub of early Auckland, with timber mills, brick kilns and boat builders’ yards dotted along the Freemans Bay foreshore. As a result, the area has a rich built and cultural heritage including the Rob Roy and Drake taverns, the Logan Campbell Free Kindergarten, and Victoria Park Market – all have had recent conservation work. The scheduled Kauri Timber Company building and basalt seawall are reminders of the way the harbour’s edge looked before reclamation.

In the past five to ten years there has been considerable developer interest in the area, with many of its sites coming to the end of their manufacturing and warehousing lives. New development has brought over 5000 residents to apartment buildings on the Nelson and Hobson Street ridge, seen new commercial buildings spread down Victoria Street West to Victoria Park, and creative businesses clustered in the Sale Street and Drake Street area.

This has coincided with the Council delineating a future residential and mixed-use neighbourhood for the part of the area known as the Victoria Quarter, which spreads from Nelson Street down to Victoria Park.

Despite this interest, the area faces significant challenges, as it is edged and bisected by major traffic corridors. To the north, Fanshawe Street limits walkability between Victoria Park and the Wynyard Quarter. To the east, Nelson and Hobson Streets are one-way streams of traffic to and from the motorway. To the west, Cook Street has become a high-speed street off the motorway. Recent development along much of these routes has failed to connect with the street, with inactive ground-level frontages (e.g. car parking, blank walls).

This harsh street environment has had a significant bearing on the relative underperformance of this part of the city in terms of property values, residential appeal and general desirability. There is an opportunity to revitalise the area through investment in amenity, road design, and a positive planning framework.

BACKGROUND

OUTCOME SCORECARD

- SO1 International Destination
- SO2 Globally Significant Centre for Business
- SO3 Meeting the Needs of its Residential Population
- SO4 Culturally Rich and Creative
- SO5 An Exemplar of Urban Living
- SO6 Integrated Regional Transport
- SO7 Walkable and Accessible
- SO8 Exceptional Natural Environment and Leading Environmental Performer
- SO9 World-Leading Centre for Education, Research and Innovation
HOBSON AND NELSON STREET BOULEVARDS

Hobson and Nelson Streets are important arterial routes linking with the motorway network and carrying large volumes of traffic at peak times. Their development needs to have the look and feel of dignified urban streets that encourage pedestrian movement across and along their lengths. Existing and new buildings along their routes, including the possible New Zealand International Convention Centre, will need to respond to this shift in the streets’ function.

It is likely the changes will involve:

- An initial reduction in the number of vehicle lanes and improved intersections, possibly followed by two-way travel in some sections of both streets
- Wider footpaths as part of a linear park, and the introduction of mid-block crossings
- Continued space for on-street parking at certain times of the day
- Direct access for pedestrians into new and improved developments with active frontages

- Trees that can reach a significant stature being planted in the road reserve
- A confirmed clear view line northwards down to the harbour.

The redesign will have a transformational effect not only on Hobson and Nelson Streets, but also on the entire western quarter of the city centre. It will improve pedestrian and cycling access to and from the city centre for Freemans Bay, Ponsonby and areas further west, as well as create a more favourable first or last impression of the city for those entering and leaving via the motorway network.

Implementing this transformation will involve a combination of small, incremental steps and work on the major actions. For example, changes to traffic light phasing and pedestrian crossing response times will reduce walking times in the area and could be implemented relatively quickly. Work need not be expensive; the carriageway could be narrowed with little change to the current streetscape. Given the length of both streets, the redesigns are likely to be rolled out progressively from north to south, from the sea to the motorway.

By prioritising the longer-term directions for these streets, we can provide development certainty around the qualities of the street frontages and the outcomes sought. This is particularly important in the context of proposals for the former council depot site recently purchased by Tournament Parking Ltd, and the proposed new New Zealand International Convention Centre (scheduled to open in 2016).
A precinct with a distinctive mix of retail, cafés, restaurants and entertainment venues will develop around Federal Street.

It is proposed that over time Federal Street will be developed as an intimate, high-quality pedestrian-focused route from Mayoral Drive to Fanshawe Street and the waterfront beyond, as part of the city centre laneway circuit.

A precinct will develop around it with a distinctive mix of retail, cafés, restaurants and entertainment venues. This will build on the strong character and identity of this area, including the significant heritage landmark of St Patrick’s Cathedral and Square, and the SkyCity entertainment precinct. The street will become a High Street of the west, with the added convenience of ready access to the main public transport routes through the city.

A tried and tested way to achieve this, and to provide for the street’s other access needs, is through a continuous shared space along the street’s length, supported by fine grain uses and a built form that better fits the scale and speed of the pedestrian. SkyCity and the Council have entered into a joint venture agreement to deliver a shared space along Federal Street between Wellesley and Victoria Streets.
106 COOK STREET, COUNCIL-OWNED
(REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY)
The Victoria Quarter has considerable latent development potential. The development industry has recognised this opportunity. However, the full potential of the area will only be realised when Nelson and Hobson Streets become inviting public spaces for pedestrians, and other strategic development opportunities, such as in the Wynyard Quarter and growth around the City Rail Link stations, are further advanced. Significant investment in amenity of the area and its streets and spaces will be important, as will greater connections across the motorways to Freemans Bay and Freemans Bay School, which is set to double in size.

In time the area will emerge as a vibrant, residential-led, mixed-use urban neighbourhood, referencing its industrial heritage and with a strong leaning towards compact family housing. The built form is anticipated to be reasonably fine grain medium-rise development that responds to the needs of families, i.e. unit titles, with reasonable indoor/outdoor spaces and opportunities for safe play.

Auckland Council owns significant areas of land in the quarter. This is mainly road reserve, but it also includes a 5853m² parcel of land at 106 Cook Street on the corner of Union Street. A dramatic change is proposed for this area with a draft masterplan in place that will centre on a new public park.

Redevelopment plans, along with longer-term New Zealand Transport Agency plans to upgrade the Cook Street interchange as part of the additional harbour crossing, will require a new road layout appropriate for a new pedestrian-focused area.

---

Potential built form