



Urban Renewal, Masterplanning and Design Information Management: The Case of the Auckland Waterfront Masterplan

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This paper reports on a master planning exercise recently completed for the urban waterfront in Auckland, New Zealand. The principal focus of the paper is on urban planning and urban design strategies that permit planners and urban designers from different professional backgrounds to effectively work together in considering large scale developments. Two areas of secondary interest are the management of decision making complexity, and the relationship between the master planning process itself and broad guiding principles generated on the basis of wide public consultation.

The paper analyses the outcomes from ten collaborative design workshops, in which participants from a variety of design professional backgrounds were asked to work to prepare a master plan to guide future development of the 5 kilometer long central city waterfront. The paper describes the use of a “strategic framework” as a link between public consultation outcomes and these collaborative design workshops. On the basis of negotiation between participants at these design workshops a two-pronged approach to the design task evolved. The first involved group agreement on the key themes that would ensure integrative planning and design decision making over the whole of the waterfront. The second involved agreeing on those areas within the waterfront that could be considered as “sub-problems”, able to be independently considered in greater detail, and in terms of the previously agreed themes. The paper argues that this decision making strategy allowed the design group to effectively move between the scale of the whole waterfront and the smaller scale of particular parts of the waterfront in a way that ensured integrative decision making across these different scales, and which avoided the reductive characteristics of the analysis-synthesis work structure advocated by some design methodologists as an effective strategy for managing design decision-making complexity.

In order to establish continuity throughout the workshops, a matrix of decisions was maintained and updated at the end of each workshop. This matrix combined decisions taken in respect of each of the broad themes with decisions taken in respect of each of the sub areas of the waterfront. Within each decision set, planning and urban design priorities were distinguished from design proposals/elements, and within the listing of these proposals/elements a distinction was drawn between “transforming proposals” and “supporting proposals”.

A further section of the paper examines the relationship between the vision and guiding principles established the basis of public and stakeholder consultation, and the master plan proposal itself. Despite apparent departures from the originating principles, the master plan has received both public and political support, and the paper identifies possible reasons for this support.

The concluding section of the paper proposes a number of guidelines for the management of multi-disciplinary master planning processes, and argues that the identification of “levels” within project decision making, and the need to differentiate between and to inter-relate these levels, is critical to integrative decision-making in complex master planning projects. Relevant literature in the fields of planning and urban design will be referred to in developing these conclusions.

KEY WORDS: Urban planning strategies, master planning, multi-disciplinary design, consultation.