

Enterprising People

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NEWTOWN VILLAGE BUSINESS LOOKING FORWARD

Final Report

This work was undertaken on behalf of the Newtown Business Group (NBG) who has become concerned that Newtown 'Mainstreet' has fallen behind other suburban villages across Wellington City.

Several other suburbs have adopted or investigating the Council's Business Improvement District (BID) model (Miramar, Khandallah, Kilbirnie, Tawa & Thorndon) however it was considered by the NBG that this model (an additional rate struck on commercially rated buildings) wouldn't be acceptable to this community.

My approach when asked to survey businesses to get a wider view was to argue that the 'Village/ Mainstreet' is more than the businesses that operate on it. The Newtown community has a number of factors that make it a unique suburb & my proposal to use an internationally proven approach ABCD was agreed to.

Asset Based Community Development or ABCD looks at the wider community focusing on strengths and why people choose to live & do business in the suburb.

My interviews with 20+ key informants have proven beyond doubt that building on the considerable 'assets' of Newtown is clearly the way forward. (see attached Wordcloud for these strengths)

This approach doesn't suggest everything is rosy and there is not work to be done. The key is working together to mitigate issues, building on the wider community strength to reach the potential all informants have identified.

NEWTOWN has much to offer & provides unique village atmosphere that others cannot provide. From its icon Festival, which puts the suburb on the map across the lower North Island, to the "Best little Zoo in the World", the home of all Wellington's professional sports teams to the home of many of Wellington's key Social Service Agencies. The overriding message that came through however was its people & sense of community spirit – he tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

Recommendations

Following a range of interviews with key informants I propose the following actions;

1. Discussion to commence with Newtown Residents Assn to investigate a single **community association** for Newtown.
2. Consideration of the BID model be set aside currently

3. More detailed discussions are commenced with key agencies re collaboration - Particularly the Wellington Zoo & CCDHB
4. A small leadership group be convened in September and a detailed plan of these actions be developed & time lined over the next 6 months.

Specific Factors behind recommendations

1. Many of the issues that arise equally effect residents & businesses. The relationship with Wgtn City as an example around infrastructure, cleaning, transport etc is common and the current discussions with WCC on a possible 'place-based officer' would enhance the environment for both working and living in Newtown.

Another factor in today's environment is identifying leadership and a combined association I believe would attract high quality people across all parts of the community and also people such as home-based businesses, academics, and startups.

This collaboration could also involve the Community Centre Trust (NCCC) who are fairly unique amongst Wellington Community Centres in their role as umbrella of 3 venues and services such as Smart Newtown (Community Centre) and the TimeBank. The team at NCCC are in my view the most proactive in Wellington around addressing local issues ie. Loan Sharks, and coordinating current 'street issues'

2. The BID model has limitations for Newtown we believe. Factors include lack of large single commercial rate payer, many small local family based landlords, low rentals being attractive to many businesses ("this makes us different from Cuba Street"). Funding a 'business promotion person' often how BIDs spend their levy, remains a challenge however building a positive leadership group seen as first priority. It will be important however to keep WCC Economic Development officers involved in project.
3. The impact at either end of the 'Mainstreet' of these two large institutions is obvious and very important to the Village and its growth. The Hospital community effect on parking through Newtown remains a key challenge with the balanced opportunity of the 000's of people working & visiting the hospital a largely untapped potential. There is major goodwill from the Zoo leadership to connect closer for the benefit of "their neighbours". The other 'new tenant' in the Mainstreet, the Salvation Army, is also wanting to engage.
4. Actions identified all need more work & the proposal to form a small leadership to develop a plan to achieve these. We need to go beyond the 'usual suspects' to build a wider mandate across business, community - the people of Newtown young & older.

Should the community want me to continue with an involvement I would happy to convene such a group on return in mid October.

An idea raised by David Lee to hold a CONNECT event in Newtown could well be a catalyst for gaining this wider buy in. CONNECT events (www.connectaotearoa.nz) take the form similar to the popular TedTalks where 10/12 people present their idea, enterprise or service to a wider audience. These are very popular with young professionals, start-ups, and social enterprises.

Project Update

From the 20 formal interviews and a number of other conversations, I have gained enough views and information to make these recommendations on a way forward. The NBG leaders have talked about this project taking another step “up the ladder” towards some future model designed specifically for Newtown unique community.

I will admit I have ebbed & flowed on the recommendations in particular around proceeding to immediately start a process to formally investigate the BID Model. On balance the unique property ownership & business type has moved me away from this model however the issue of funding any alternative remains a big question.

The key idea is to look at the combined COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION Model was raised by several informants. Several factors were considered; the relative strength of both the Residents Assn & the NCCC with its range of services. As you may be aware the Newtown Festival is to be established as a separate Charitable Trust which means a clearer focus for NRA. The challenge of recruiting key ‘governors’ for 2 separate groups is also a factor. Current discussions with WCC re a ‘place-based’ coordinator also could be assisted by this single focussed entity.

Leadership/Involvement

As expected I have not had people jumping out to commit time to the Business Assn. Most business owners are working on the shop floor and time away is lost income. It is essential however to build a small team to take the **next steps**.

Keeping with the community/business collaboration I would also recommend 2 or 3 project teams be established to work on some of the identified projects. (low- hanging fruit that can show progress is happening.) The Zoo collaboration would be very exciting for the young prof resident or home-worker I believe. Similarly a branding/tidy up project looking at the mainstreet furniture/planters/flags etc.

The ‘street people’ issue is already being taken up by NCCC workers leading a discussion with all agencies to ensure their efforts are aligned and maximised. They will want Bus Rep on this project once they have meet to clearly understand the full extent of the problem.

Assets

The attached word map sums up the many strengths of NEWTOWN and gives starting points to build upon.

Challenges

The approach taken whilst **asset focused** did allow the **areas of improvement** to be canvased. From businesses these were quite specific to their location

- ‘NewWorld’ area – begging, threatening behaviour, general discouragement to shop
- Northern mainstreet – parking; wardens, signage, hospital, need to ‘spruce up’
- Outliers – roading, rubbish, general tidiness
- All – WCC communication & general lack of interest in Newtown

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Trends & Issues in MainStreets

The revival of MainStreets is an issue across many suburban areas across the world. I have been fortunate to attend MainStreet & Town Centre Conferences in Australia & NZ as well as observation visits in Europe & UK.

The key message across all areas is to ACTIVATE our main streets. Key developers in Australia say the 'stand-alone stadium type mall' is dead and people want to visit busy alive streets. This often involves 'pop up' art galleries, paying the (good) buskers, plenty of people watching spaces and outdoor activity. In NZ particularly in Auckland, many business associations are providing local leadership & promotion to bring people back to their village centres. This almost always involves a better collaboration with local government who have generally focused their efforts on CBD development.

In some towns, Whanganui being an example, this collaboration has moved to the Main Street Assn contracting to Council to delivery all street cleaning, maintenance and gardening services. People taking responsibility for their 'own hood' works well.

There are examples of combined Community-Business Associations I am aware of and attached one is an example I have found that seems applicable.

The Mendon Community Business Association is a collaborative effort among businesses and service establishments, located in the Hamlet of Mendon, NY and its neighboring areas. We focus on growing our members' businesses and community groups to provide high quality goods and services to our neighbors, clients, and our overall community. We work together to promote and support our enterprises through joint marketing efforts, networking and sharing effective business practices.

In a suburban village the boundaries between business and community enterprises and the local residents are more fluid and common interests are easier to identify.

Some examples of projects that could be applicable in Newtown are attached.

What others say about us

Village at the Park Retirement Village –“Village is close by vibrant Newtown”

City Council “Our Wellington” Booklet – “Much loved suburb of Newtown”

One word used to describe Newtown “ Funky, cool, colourful, quaint, old-world, hipster culture, multi-ethnic

From Wikipedia

Originally a [working-class](#) suburb, Newtown has followed [gentrification](#) trends in recent years, attracting large numbers of immigrants, students and young [professionals](#) and resulting in an ethnically diverse population

The Wellington City Council District Plan identifies Newtown as a suburb with an "identifiable or distinct character".

Newtown Festival



The Newtown Festival in 2010 (looking up Riddiford Street)

The annual Newtown Festival takes place over ten days, culminating in the Newtown Festival Street Fair which is usually held on [International Children's Day](#) (usually the first Sunday in March). Organised by The Newtown Residents' Association for the past 18 years, the festival has continued to grow. The 2014 Newtown Festival was attended by an estimated 80,000 people.^[4] In 2014 the Wellington Gold Awards nominated the organisers of the Newtown Festival for one of their annual awards, citing that the festival is "New Zealand's largest free annual outdoor street festival"

What others are doing



Whanganui Main Street featuring hanging baskets and historical wayfinding

Walk of Champions - Jackson Street Petone Bronze plaques in the pavement celebrate 140 national sports champions



Wollongong – NSW



Promoting 'positive street activity' – Public Pingpong, Perth



Very popular across Australia

DAREBIN – Melbourne Suburbs with very similar characteristics to Newtown

ACTIVE SPACES IN DAREBIN City of Darebin Active Spaces in Darebin is a program that works directly with private property owners and real estate agents to utilise buildings while they might otherwise be vacant, and make them available to artists and creative businesses, on a temporary basis. These temporary businesses are often referred to as 'pop-up shops'. The program has two arms; active galleries and active businesses. The program has supported the development of residency of local artists and creatives, and has become a catalyst for new economic activity across Darebin.

