

Waikato Society of Arts Submission to Hamilton City Council Long Term Council Community Plan

20 April 2009

Executive Summary

WSA advocates increased civic support for all the arts in Hamilton.

Waikato Society of Arts (WSA) recommends the Council edit the draft LTCCP to include funding and a timeframe for developing a community arts facility on the land behind Arts Post.

Specifically, the following steps should be provided for in the 2009-2010 budget:

- Designate the site behind Arts Post for community purposes in the form of a community arts centre.
- Vest the land in a trust established for the purpose of developing a community arts centre.
- Allocate a sum of \$2million towards the cost of planning the development.

Contact Details

Martha Simms
WSA President
PO Box 1018
Hamilton
Telephone: 07 856 6981
Cellphone: 021 050 1161
Email: normansimms@hotmail.com

Waikato Society of Arts Submission to Hamilton City Council Long Term Council Community Plan

Background

The Waikato Society of Arts (WSA) has for many years advocated for the arts in civic planning. During its 75 years WSA established the city art collection, managed the city gallery and ran the museum. Early on WSA recognised that an amateur and voluntary organization could not provide sufficient expertise, time and money to sustain all the artistic institutions of the growing urban centre Hamilton was becoming. We advocated for the establishment of a civic art gallery and supported its inclusion in a museum of culture and history, which became the Waikato Museum.

WSA's historical role of community building with this (and other) projects gives us confidence that we can partner with other community organizations, including the Hamilton City Council, to develop an achievable plan to build capacity for increased community-based arts activities in Hamilton.

We believe that Hamilton City Council's vision for the arts, as expressed in the draft LTCCP, is too narrow. Traditionally Council's planners believed that more sports and recreation facilities and big events would raise the status of Hamilton among New Zealand's cities, thereby attracting industry and improving the economic well being of the city. In fact, the reality is that some of our most successful entrepreneurs have moved away to cities that offer more arts and cultural facilities and events.

These days there is a growing understanding that economic growth and community health are linked with creative pursuits as much as with physical recreation. It is no longer sufficient to provide large sports arenas such as the planned redevelopment of the Claudelands Events Centre. A city like Hamilton also needs to ensure there are community arts facilities and activities in order to attract and keep an educated and cultured entrepreneurial population.

Creative businesses thrive in a creative milieu. Hamilton is a natural centre for creative businesses with so many research facilities in town or nearby. But creative people, whether their creative expression is scientific, economic, technical or artistic, will always seek out places where there is a buzz of creative activity. They thrive on the synergy and energy of multiple activities. Hamilton must ensure they have places to go and things to do other than drinking, eating and watching sport.

WSA advocates increased civic support for all the arts in Hamilton, both participation and consumption, from beginners and amateurs to professionals and elite artists. Music, dance and theatre all need greater support from the Council. WSA supports the Arts Waikato submission to the LTCCP with its holistic vision and dynamic rebranding using positive, existing aspects of Hamilton. Hamilton as a progressive, creative

powerhouse is a brand that has its roots in reality and points to Hamilton's unlimited potential.

However, in this submission WSA focuses solely on the needs of the visual arts sector in Hamilton. Even though a great deal of visual arts activity goes on, in and around Hamilton, this is in spite of a significant lack of resources. Investment now in visual arts community capacity will have benefits for all of Hamilton, not just the arts sector.

Developing a community arts centre behind Arts Post

The focus of our submission is on the development of a community arts centre. Previous submissions to Council outlined the need for, and benefits of, a community arts centre. They pointed out that neither Ward Park nor Arts Post could be called arts centres though various art activities take place within them. Ward Park is not available for development and ArtsPost is too small, too inflexible and too inaccessible to be conceived of as an useful art centre. The old, the young and the disabled find it difficult to use the facilities.

Hamilton needs a visual arts centre that will cater for all sectors of the community and be attractive for elite and professional artists, dedicated amateurs and hobbyists, and beginning artists. It needs to be accessible to the young, the old, the disabled, as well as the hale and hearty. It needs to be a place to learn and share, to make art, and practice technique, to collaborate, and to display and sell. The fact that other cities and smaller centres have such places means that it is not an idle dream but an achievable reality.

WSA has worked on this project for a long time. We have considered many possible locations, all with advantages and disadvantages. We have considered the issues of accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusiveness. The one location that combines both appropriateness for regular users and maximum benefit to the wider community is the area of land behind Arts Post.

HCC's own visioning document identified a 'cultural precinct' including the Waikato Museum and Arts Post and specified the area behind Arts Post currently used as a car park as the only suitable site in the CBD for a community arts centre.

Although the draft LTCCP mentions the development of this piece of land for an 'appropriate community facility', WSA is concerned that there is no budget or timeframe specified.

WSA submits that the LTCCP should commit Council to developing the site behind Arts Post as a community arts centre. Specifically, the following steps should be provided for in the 2009-2010 budget:

- designate the site for community purposes in the form of a community arts centre

- vest the land in a trust established for the purposes of developing the centre. The trust would then be able to approach other funding bodies in confidence, demonstrating HCC's commitment to the vision through the vesting of the land.
- allocate a sum of \$2million towards the cost of planning the development. With this resource the trust can run a limited design competition to select an architect or group of architects design the development on the site. With the concept plans from the competition and the land vested for this purpose, the trust will be able to seek and secure the major funding required to build the centre.

WSA does not think that the Hamilton City Council should be solely responsible for the creation of a community arts centre. It should be a cooperative endeavour. In this way, organisations with an arts focus, funding bodies, individuals and businesses can share with the Hamilton City Council in the planning and funding of the project. By sharing the process, we can achieve true community ownership. The council's role in vesting the land, creating a trust and providing seed funding will initiate community involvement in a project many have desired but despaired of seeing manifested. Community involvement in planning, fundraising, and management will ensure that the centre is flexible and responsive to community needs, and minimise the ongoing costs to Council.

Benefits of developing a community arts centre behind Arts Post

The benefits to Hamilton of building a community arts centre on the site behind Arts Post include the following:

- Synergy of being on the same site as the Waikato Museum and Arts Post within the cultural precinct
- shared restaurant and café
- shared public space in piazza can be developed
- drawing more people to ArtsPost and Museum
- Synergies with other arts activities in the area ie the Meteor Theatre
- Attracting more people to the south end of the CBD during the daytime
- Evening and night time arts activity mitigates the excesses of drinking culture in the CBD south end.

Economic advantages of a multi-use facility on the site mean that the running of the centre can be partially self-funded. Entrepreneurial businesses can successfully subsidise non-profit community organizations. They, in turn, can take advantage of the voluntary component of their operations in order to reduce their user fees. Lowering the cost to community organizations means that the centre will be more affordable to users and therefore more available to all sectors of the community. Manakau City runs five different community centres, each one with different levels of self-funding through entrepreneurial activities. Other community arts centres throughout New Zealand fund their operations in a similar way.

The facility could include:

- Community gallery
- Casual crèche
- Picture framer
- Parking lot
- Practice rooms
- Meeting rooms
- WSA Art School
- Artist's studios to rent
- Social space for openings and forums
- Design that links river front to Victoria Street

WSA wishes to speak to this submission at the LTCCP hearings, in the same session as Arts Waikato.

Contact Details

Signed

Date

Martha Simms
WSA President
PO Box 1018
Hamilton

Telephone: 07 856 6981
Cellphone: 021 050 1161
Email: normansimms@hotmail.com