

# Memorandum

## Christchurch

Level 1  
141 Cambridge Terrace  
Christchurch 8013  
PO Box 110  
Christchurch 8140

+643 366 8891

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Attention:	Sarah Trinder
Company:	Far North District Council
Date:	8 September 2025
From:	Jane Rennie, Urban Designer / Partner
Message Ref:	Hearing 14 – Urban Design Response to Vision Kerikeri Evidence
Project No:	BM250224

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## Introduction and Scope

1. My name is Jane Maree Rennie. I am an Urban Designer and Partner with Boffa Miskell Limited, based in the firm's Christchurch office. I have set out my relevant qualifications and experience in previous evidence<sup>1</sup> and agree to comply with the Environment Court's Code of Conduct.
2. This urban design technical memorandum has been prepared on behalf of Far North District Council ('Council'). I have been asked to respond to the following evidence provided before the Hearing Panel in relation to Hearing 14 ('urban zones'):
  - a) Statement of Evidence of Katerina Dvorakova on behalf of Vision Kerikeri (Our Kerikeri Trust, Kapiro Conservation Trust, Carbon Neutral Trust - collectively referred to as 'The Community Groups').
  - b) Written Statement by 'The Community Groups' on behalf of Vision Kerikeri (Our Kerikeri Community Trust, Carbon Neutral Trust and Kapiro Conservation Trust)<sup>2</sup>.
3. Specifically, I have been asked to respond to the following:
  - a) If the Proposed District Plan ('PDP') needs to be more prescriptive and adopt a design-led planning framework?
  - b) The role of design guidelines to enforce urban design responses.
  - c) Central Kerikeri building setbacks (street wall effects) and recessed pedestrian spaces.
  - d) Topography when considering height restrictions and future rezoning.

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence in response to Kainga Ora, Turnstone Trust and Kiwi Fresh Orange on behalf of FNDC

<sup>2</sup> Written statement of The Community Groups, dated 14 dated July 2025

## Design-led Planning Framework

- Ms Dvorakova outlines that a shift from a permissive, effects-based approach to a more prescriptive, design-led framework is required to achieve sustainable urban outcomes in the context of the trajectory of urban growth for Kerikeri and Waipapa. She outlines that:

*“The future development of Kerikeri and Waipapa, particularly within the urban zones, must be guided by robust planning and design principles that transcend a purely permissive approach. The community's experience highlights the adverse impacts of such a framework, leading to “incompatible land uses and significant adverse effects on rural character, amenity and indigenous biodiversity”. A **shift towards a more prescriptive and design-led planning framework** is essential to ensure sustainable and liveable outcomes. .... “The **continued reliance on “discretionary activity” status** with “vague policies open to wide interpretation” remains a significant concern, preventing robust assessment and leading to “ad hoc development” that erodes “character, amenity values” and imposes “untenable cost burden on ratepayers.” (her emphasis)*

- Ms Dvorakova outlines that the PDP must define ‘more than minor effects’ resulting from non-compliance with critical design standards (i.e. built form standards such as height, height in relation to boundary (‘HIRB’), façade massing, building articulation, street activation), a trigger for notification if these standards are breached, and the use of mandatory master plans and design guidelines.
- I will leave the reporting Planner to cover notification matters and the broader concept of a more prescriptive approach to plan preparation and focus on specific urban design issues, albeit it is my opinion that a breach of built form standards does not necessarily result in ‘more than minor effects’.
- I discuss the role of master planning and design guidelines in the following sections of this memorandum, including for larger-scale sites. Generally, it is my opinion that there is a role for future master planning and design guidelines in ensuring good practice outcomes within different urban environments, particularly town centre and medium density areas where larger scale change is anticipated.
- I have provided evidence in response to the Kainga Ora submission requesting a Town Centre Zone (‘TCZ’) for Kerikeri and support the adoption of this framework (with the exception of the height limit sought). This acknowledges Kerikeri is the primary commercial centre in the District and has a distinctive character and identity. It is my opinion that the proposed TCZ provisions include more targeted policies than those of the Mixed Use Zone (‘MUZ’) in supporting a high quality urban form and design outcomes within Kerikeri, including greater recognition of local character and activation of the street environment. In response to Ms Dvorakova’s concerns around inconsistent implementation of discretionary activities, strengthening the proposed ‘built form assessment matters’ within the TC and MU zones to be clearer, more directive and design-focused would provide greater clarity and ensure stronger and consistent assessment of proposals, particularly in the absence of any design guidelines at this time.

9. Further, in relation to Ms Dvorakova's concerns around ad-hoc development outcomes, the Council could consider the role of a urban design peer review process for specific TCZ proposals (and potentially larger scale mixed-use and residential developments) in ensuring that the assessment matters are adhered to and in supporting a consistent application of the policy framework.
10. I discuss the role of a HIRB rule in relation to the street frontage in the TCZ later in this memorandum, but based on the evidence of Ms Dvorakova, I consider that a rule would assist to support a quality public realm environment within the Kerikeri town centre (and potentially other centres across the District).
11. In summary, and on balance, I consider that refinement of the 'built form assessment matters' within the TC and MU zones (along with a HIRB rule) would assist to support more context-sensitive urban outcomes.

### Role of Design Guidelines

12. Ms Dvorakova outlines that: *"The S42A Report for Hearing 14 acknowledges the Spatial Plan's implementation tasks but states 'no Design Guidelines will be included in the PDP at this point in time'".* Ms Dvorakova outlines that Urban Design Guidelines for urban zones should be mandated (as part of legally binding Master Plans) with objective criteria for design quality and including between the town centre and Kerikeri River / Puketotara Stream<sup>3</sup>. Specifically, Ms Dvorakova seeks guidelines to translate Master Plan's and enforce urban design responses as follows:
  - a) *Residential Design Guides: Ensuring sensitive integration of residential typologies (such as townhouses and walk-up apartments) with active frontages and coherent street activation, avoiding developments that present inactive facades to the street.*
  - b) *Town Centre or Mixed Use Guidelines: Providing specific controls on façade length, material quality, massing (encouraging split and reduced bulk), façade treatment, glass percentage, and appropriate landscaping at the front.*
  - c) *Streetscape and Open Space Guidelines: Detailing requirements for public spaces, pedestrian amenity, connectivity and green infrastructure - including native tree planting, urban greenways and blue-green networks.*
13. I acknowledge that through recent spatial planning work and the growth anticipated for Kerikeri (both commercial and residential) the urban environment will experience considerable change over the short to medium term. I also acknowledge that the character and identity of Kerikeri is valued by the community and is an important factor in its attractiveness as a place to live and work and as a visitor destination. As such, focusing on achieving a high quality environment and good practice urban design outcomes are important considerations and design guidelines can assist.
14. The Implementation Plan included in the Spatial Plan states:

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence of Ms Dvorakova, Page 5

*“The Planning and Urban Design Principles will be further refined in an **Urban Design Framework**. This Framework will detail how these principles will be actioned on the ground and will include **guidelines** for the design and development of new urban areas as well as existing ones. The Framework focuses on creating high-quality, sustainable, and liveable environments by addressing aspects like building design, public spaces, streetscapes, and overall urban form... The Implementation Plan references **structure plans** for Kerikeri and Waipapa. These will be developed in accordance with the Urban Design Framework and will inform future plan changes.” (my emphasis).*

15. In my experience design guidelines are helpful in achieving good practice urban design outcomes, whether or not they are integrated into the District Plan. If these factor in the character of a place, they can ensure that key attributes or value are integrated into built form and landscape outcomes. In addition, it is also relevant to consider the role of ‘Urban Design Panels’ and more targeted assessment matters as part of consent pathways for larger-scale projects.
16. Given there is additional work signalled for both Kerikeri and Waipapa through the Spatial Plan actions, along with a future town centre bypass, I consider that this work should be undertaken prior to determining how the District Plan provisions should be amended (in due course) to address broader master planning, character and urban design matters. I consider that this will enable a more careful and targeted evaluation of the appropriate mechanisms to manage urban change from a urban design perspective. An assessment of character (both built and landscape) will be important as part of these investigations.
17. In relation to the Turnstone Trust and Kiwi Fresh Orange sites that I assume Ms Dvorakova is indirectly referring to, proposed rezoning requests with associated structure plans are being considered separately through the PDP review, and which I have prepared separate urban design evidence. From a process perspective, I acknowledge the importance of a sound structure plan framework and targeted plan provisions (including potentially guidelines) in these instances in achieving good practice urban design outcomes.
18. In summary, given the Spatial Plan has signalled that further urban design work is required for Kerikeri and Waipapa, I consider that this process is better suited to determining the nature and potential scope of future master plans and design guidelines and how these can be integrated into the District Plan in due course.

#### Central Kerikeri Building Frontage Setbacks and Recessed Pedestrian Spaces

19. Ms Dvorakova outlines that she: *“...supports the mixed-use developments as long as they exhibit high quality street facing frontages and sensitively activate the public realm, avoiding inward facing developments that present inactive facades to the street.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Evidence of Ms Dvorakova, Page 11

20. To achieve this, Ms Dvorakova recommends amongst other things improved HIRB rules to reduce building bulk and retain a 'village character'. Specifically for facades facing a public street (frontage) within the MUZ Ms Dvorakova recommends:

*"a 60-degree recession plane at 8m above ground level – This would allow for taller buildings (noting a height limit of 12m) but requires upper levels to be set back, reducing perceived bulk at street level."*

21. She seeks a similar approach for the TC Zone, albeit she has not set out if this would be the same provision.

22. In my evidence in response to Kainga Ora's request for a TC Zone, I considered the height limit for the TCZ, recommending a 15-16 metre height limit (I do not support the 22 metres requested). In relation a HIRB rule, I considered that in relation to a 15-16m height that a recession plane provision to manage a road wall height was not necessary<sup>5</sup>.

23. Albeit an upper level setback can be influenced by building orientation and other layout factors, on further consideration of Ms Dvorakova's evidence, I consider that a upper level building setback within the TC zone (buildings in central Kerikeri) would be beneficial in providing greater certainty of outcome in achieving a human scale environment, adequate access to sunlight within the public realm and in responding to the character of the township. This could take the form of a recession plane approach as suggested by Ms Dvorakova, or a specific building setback at third floor level. If the Panel are minded to support this approach, I recommend that 3D modelling of these options would assist to determine which approach is most suited to the Kerikeri context. This will in part be impacted by the final height limit that is confirmed for the zone. In relation to the MU Zone, I consider that a similar approach could be adopted, albeit noting that the height limit is lower at 12m.

24. In relation to the pedestrian environment and concerns in relation to the width of footpaths and the ability to accommodate outdoor dining, Ms Dvorakova outlines that: *"The Proposed District Plan aims to maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment by focusing on the relationship between buildings and public spaces, using concepts like "pedestrian frontage," "verandahs," and "setbacks."*<sup>6</sup> Ms Dvorakova acknowledges that building setbacks at street level are not the most effective solution within the central zones. Ms Dvorakova considers that alternative methods for creating more spacious and functional pedestrian areas should consider:

- a) *"Revising the Council's Engineering Standards specifically for central zones to mandate wider footpaths.*
- b) *Transforming town centers into pedestrian-only paved areas (precedents - various examples of Jan Gehl's transformation of cities), with trafficable surfaces only for deliveries*
- c) *Implementing footpath changes through master plans and associated documents, ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated approach."*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Evidence of Jane Rennie, KO TC Zone, para 5.25, page 23

<sup>6</sup> Evidence of Ms Dvorakova, Page 13

<sup>7</sup> Evidence of Ms Dvorakova, Page 13

25. Further consideration is given to this issue in the Written Statement by the Community Groups, with a request for the following change to the MUZ provisions:

*“The PDP requires buildings to be set back at least 3m from a road boundary in GRZ, and we support this. We also seek setbacks from road boundaries in MUZ. As currently drafted, MUZ-S6(1) will require MUZ sites with ‘pedestrian frontage’ (identified on planning maps) to construct all new buildings or alterations right up to the road boundary. The MUZ standard would have adverse effects – it would actually reduce the existing width of pedestrian pavement in some areas, and would gradually eliminate the existing (valued) paved recesses in the CBD.”<sup>8</sup>*

26. I concur with Ms Dvorakova’s observations at page 13 of her evidence that a building setback from the footpath can result in misalignment between buildings, dilution of the active edge and creation of potentially unsafe recesses and corners. As such, I do not support a building setback from the street within the TCZ, or within the MUZ sites located within the pedestrian frontage area.
27. As touched on earlier, the Kerikeri Waipapa Spatial Plan includes an action to prepare a structure plan for Kerikeri as part of a broader Urban Design Framework. The quality of the public realm within Kerikeri town centre is anticipated to be covered by this work given it is acknowledged that the centre will continue to grow and evolve, including as a result of potential road layout changes. I acknowledge that this work may also have an impact on the Council’s Engineering Standards and I would recommend that a coordinated approach is taken to any associated changes to streetscape standards. There is the ability through a discretionary consent pathway to consider the impacts of a commercial development on the streetscape environment, with a setback in some instances potentially appropriate in both managing effects and in achieving a positive public realm outcome.
28. In summary, in light of Ms Dvorakova’s evidence, I acknowledge that a HIRB rule for the TC zone would provide greater certainty of outcome and help achieve a human-scale environment for Kerikeri. Future structure/master planning work associated with Kerikeri town centre will guide potential changes in relation to the quality and design of footpaths.

## Topography and Height Restrictions

29. Ms Dvorakova outlines that Kerikeri is unique in that the town centre is built along a ridgeline and that:

*“The current Spatial Plan indicates the highest density (Commercial / Mixed Use) on the ridgeline, followed by MDRZ and GRZ as the town continues towards the streams/river. The Community Groups express concern that a height of 15 or 16m within the newly proposed Town Centre Zone, recommended in s42 reports, will destroy the existing village character of predominantly low-level buildings.”<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Community Statement, Page 26

<sup>9</sup> Evidence of Ms Dvorakova, Page 14

30. As a result, Ms Dvorakova outlines that the following approaches should be taken into account when considering height restrictions and rezoning in taking a holistic approach that uses topography strategically in order to balance growth and character issues:
- a) ***“Lower the proposed central zones along the street - Preserve a village character at the town's core by maintaining a lower, more human-scaled built form along the ridgeline at the building frontage, defined by HIRB.***
  - b) ***Capitalizing on Topography: Lower Elevations Support Taller Structures - Areas that are currently less developed and topographically lower than the proposed town centre ridgeline present opportunities for development of greater height and density without negatively impacting the established town centre character.***
  - c) ***Shift the boundary of central zones closer to the Kerikeri River - Extend commercial activities between the CBD and Kerikeri River, fostering a more continuous urban fabric and activating the riverfront. This approach also allows for greater height and density between the CBD and river, providing additional activities and amenities and activating the riverfront as a ‘destination’ for both residents and tourists, similar to the successful Whangarei Town Basin.”***<sup>10</sup>
31. I have discussed the role of a HIRB rule for the TCZ (and potentially the MUZ) and recommended its inclusion to provide greater certainty of outcomes from a human scale and public realm impact perspective.
32. In relation capitalising on lower lying topography (away from ridgelines) for greater height and density and shifting the boundary of the TCZ closer to the Kerikeri River (I am assuming this is referring to the Turnstone Trust land), it is necessary to consider the overall urban form of the township and broader NPS-UD considerations. This includes how growth and intensification can support a well-functioning urban environment.
33. The town has historically developed on the ridgeline and there are pros and cons in terms of urban form and legibility. I note that there are many historic ‘hill-top towns’ globally. The visibility of the town centre as rightly noted is greater, however this can assist with its legibility within the wider context. Relocating the height and density away from the core town centre area (i.e. the high street) to the wider commercial area although enabling retention of a smaller scale built form along the high street and potentially reducing its visibility, may impact the nature and extent of future redevelopment opportunities and a disconnect with larger-scale commercial developments occurring beyond the core area.
34. It would be possible to limit building heights specifically along the high street as an option (i.e. 8m height limit), but further work would be required to understand what the benefits of this would be, given the current extent and scale of built development. At this time, and on balance, I consider that my recommended 15-16m height limit in the TCZ, enhanced assessment matters and the

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<sup>10</sup> Evidence of Ms Dvorakova, Page 14

introduction of a HIRB rule is appropriate in terms of the overall urban form of the town, in managing public realm impacts and in supporting revitalisation of the centre.

35. I note that the Turnstone Trust submission seeks an extension of the MU zone and this goes some way to providing for an expansion of commercial activity in closer proximity to the Kerikeri River. In addition, the Kerikeri Waipapa Spatial Plan includes a 'destination node' at the River, enabling future activation of this area. The Spatial Plan also identifies areas of intensification to the south. Future structure planning and potential design guidelines can focus in on other matters that could assist to enhance the character of the township, both from a built form and landscape perspective.
36. In summary, I have recommended the introduction of a HIRB rule for the TC Zone, but I do not support a change to the broad urban form strategy proposed. I note that the Turnstone Trust submission seeks additional commercial land use closer to the Kerikeri River.

## Conclusion

37. This urban design technical memorandum, prepared on behalf of the Far North District Council responds to evidence presented by Vision Kerikeri and Ms Dvorakova. Ms Dvorakova seeks a shift from permissive planning to a more prescriptive, design-led framework, including mandatory urban design guidelines, master plans, and improved built form controls such as Height in Relation to Boundary (HIRB) rules to preserve village character and ensure high-quality, sustainable outcomes.
38. My conclusions are as follows:
  - i. I support refinement of the built form assessment matters for the TC and MU zones to support good practice urban design outcomes.
  - ii. I support a HIRB control for the TC zone to reduce building bulk, human scale streetscape environment and maintain the Kerikeri village character.
  - iii. Given the Spatial Plan has signalled that further urban design work is required for Kerikeri and Waipapa, I consider that this process is better suited to determining the nature and potential scope of future master plans, design guidelines and urban design peer review processes and how these could be integrated into the District Plan in the future. This work will also enable consideration of any potential changes in relation to the quality and design of the public realm.
  - iv. I do not support a change to the broad urban form strategy for the commercial area. I note that the Turnstone Trust submission seeks additional commercial land use closer to the Kerikeri River, with a destination node identified in the Spatial Plan.