

BEFORE THE INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)
IN THE MATTER of the Far North District Council Proposed District Plan
Hearing 15D: Rezoning Kerikeri-Waipapa

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF GRANT NEILL ON BEHALF OF
TURNSTONE TRUST**

URBAN DESIGN

June 16, 2025

INTRODUCTION

- 1 My full name is Grant Edward Neill.
- 2 I have been engaged by Turnstone Trust (**Turnstone**) to provide independent expert advice on the Proposed Far North District Plan (**PDP**).
- 3 This evidence relates to Turnstone's submission on Hearing 15D: Rezoning Kerikeri-Waipapa. Turnstone own approximately 29 ha of land at 126 Kerikeri Road (and associated landholdings), between an existing residential area and the Kerikeri River (**The Site**), which is proposed to be zoned General Residential Zone (**GRZ**) under the PDP. Turnstone's submission (**The Proposal**) seeks a mix of GRZ and Mixed Use Zone (**MUZ**).
- 4 I have visited the Site and am familiar with the area.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 5 I am an urban designer, architect, and director of Pacific Environments, a multi-disciplinary architecture, urban design, and interior design firm. I hold the relevant qualifications of Master of Urban Design with First Class Honours, University of Auckland (2011) and Bachelor of Architecture, University of Auckland (1989). I am a member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and the Urban Design Forum. I have been a registered architect for over 30 years and a qualified urban designer for 12 years. I have completed advanced Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (**CPTED**) training. I lead urban design consultancy services in our office.
- 6 I specialise in structure planning, master planning and urban design for subdivision, residential, retirement and commercial projects. I have extensive experience in this professional area and have provided urban design technical reports and expert evidence nationally at plan change and resource consent hearings for medium and large-scale housing developments; publicly listed, not for profit, and privately owned retirement village companies; commercial and medical developments; and Government Departments including Kainga Ora, at both Council Hearings and the Environment Court.
- 7 My relevant recent experience includes:

- (a) Contributing to a structure plan, writing a Neighbourhood Design Statement, masterplanning, and giving urban design evidence for an approved rezoning proposal by Turnstone Capital Limited to rezone approximately 99 ha of Future Urban zoned land to business and residential zones in Warkworth. The proposal would provide for approximately 1,000 - 1,200 dwellings, 13 hectares of industrial / commercial land and a new neighbourhood centre of 3,000m².
- (b) Giving urban design evidence for a successful appeal against Queenstown Lakes District Council Proposed District Plan zoning for a 9 hectare site in Wanaka, in the Environment Court in December 2024 (Decision (2025) EnvC 74).

CODE OF CONDUCT

- 8 Although this is not a hearing before the Environment Court, I record that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and agree to comply with it.
- 9 I confirm that the issues addressed in this brief of evidence are within my area of expertise, except where I state that I have relied on the evidence of other persons. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I have expressed.
- 10 I note that I have also been engaged by Kiwi Fresh Orange Company Ltd to provide evidence in respect of Hearing 15D: Rezoning Kerikeri-Waipapa. This engagement does not impede my ability to provide independent opinion to the Hearings Panel in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 11 The focus of my evidence is to:
 - (a) consider The Proposal in the context of Te Pātukurea¹ Draft Spatial Plan for Kerikeri-Waipapa.
 - (b) consider Urban form with reference to the planned roading network connection between Augusta Place and the Heritage Bypass.

¹ Far North District Council March 2025 version.

- (c) comment on the potential benefits of a more sophisticated zoning layout for Kerikeri Town Centre
- (d) comment on the different roles of Kerikeri town centre and Waipapa

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- 12 This evidence evaluates the Turnstone Proposal in relation to urban design principles, zoning strategies, and the broader framework of the Te Pātukurea Draft Spatial Plan for the Kerikeri-Waipapa area.
- 13 Key Findings
 - (a) Alignment with Te Pātukurea Draft Spatial Plan: The Turnstone Proposal closely aligns with the Spatial Plan's vision for the Kerikeri-Waipapa area, particularly in its zoning recommendations and planned connections to the Heritage Bypass.
 - (b) Improved Urban Outcomes: The proposal enhances urban design outcomes by prioritizing Mixed Use Zones (MUZ) along major roads, ensuring consistent land use on both sides of bypass roads, and fostering a legible and efficient mixed-use development.
 - (c) Distinct Town Centre Zoning: The evidence supports the introduction of a specific Town Centre Zone to consolidate Kerikeri's CBD, preventing potential underutilisation of the CBD and proactively creating a pedestrian-friendly, vibrant and community-focused town centre.
 - (d) Roles of Kerikeri and Waipapa: Kerikeri is positioned as a residential and commercial hub, while Waipapa is industrially focused. The proposal maintains these complementary roles by strategically distributing MUZ designations to complement the existing Town Centre, and also work with other PDP proposals that locate MUZ in connection with Waipapa, allowing MUZ development at a different scale.
 - (e) Economic and Urban Capacity: Zoning decisions should be informed by economic evidence and the need for feasible block sizes, ensuring balanced growth and the ability to create well-functioning and robust urban environments.

BACKGROUND

- 14 This evidence, and my opinions, are based on the documentation supplied by the applicant to support the Proposal relevant to urban design.
- 15 I have not contributed to this documentation or been involved in the submission process prior to this evidence.
- 16 Before the submission process was undertaken, I produced several Site masterplan options for Turnstone Trust as part of a due diligence process. These have been not bought into the submission documents.

THE PROPOSAL

- 17 The PDP proposes to rezone a strip of Kerikeri Road (on both sides) adjacent to The Site, from Kerikeri Town Centre to the Heritage Highway, from a residential zoning to a commercial MUZ. Currently the Mixed Use zone enables dwellings above ground level and service stations as a permitted activity, along with healthcare and commercial service activities. The s42A report for Urban zones is due Monday 23 June 2025. I am therefore not aware of any signalled changes to the rules for the Mixed Use zone at the time of writing this evidence.
- 18 The PDP seeks to re-zone the entire Site to GRZ, from its live residential zoning under the FNDC Operative Plan. The Proposal is considered reasonably straightforward in concept, in that it seeks to extend the PDP MUZ area over part of The Site and keep the rest GRZ. It also seeks to rezone outside The Site on both sides of Fairway Drive, to MUZ to achieve a connected and cohesive zoning pattern.

THE PROPOSED SPATIAL PLAN

- 19 The proposed Spatial Plan Te Pātukurea is described by FNDC as:
- ...a non-statutory document that sets out how Council will manage growth by identifying areas appropriate for housing, businesses and industry, and serves as a blueprint for future planning and investment.*
- 20 It is currently not adopted but does contain a recommended Spatial Plan for Kerikeri and Waipapa that is discussed in the Deliberations report issued circa 12 June 2025. The Summary of Recommendations (Section 16) states under the sub-heading Economic Development, that there are

no proposed changes to the spatial allocation of business land in Kerikeri.

- 21 Significantly, the Spatial Plan is in broad alignment with the Proposal over the Site and is not in alignment with the PDP. It recommends that a “Commercial Mixed Use” (**CMU**) be extended over the site in approximately the same area as The Proposal’s MUZ. Its proposed northern edge is of a slightly different form to the Proposal; however the Spatial Plan is “broad brush” and the Proposal has likely had the advantage of detailed engineering study to consider zone boundaries based on actual site features.
- 22 It does not recommend CMU around Fairway Drive as the proposal does, and It does not recommend a separate town centre zoning.
- 23 The Spatial Plan indicates a “potential connection” from Augusta Place to the Heritage Bypass, connecting Clark and King Streets, along with a new connection that appears to be the entrance to the Woodlands Motel. This is referred to in the Spatial Plan as the Kerikeri CBD Bypass.
- 24 Supporting Proposal documents include structure plan maps showing a schematic connection from Kerikeri to the Heritage bypass as well, albeit in a different location to the Spatial Plan. Of significance is agreement on a second access from the CBD to the Heritage Bypass in principle.
- 25 The Proposal’s Structure Plan showed options that include a key connection to The Site from the road stub at the end of Fairway Drive. While the Spatial Plan prefers the residential areas of The Site to be accessed from the continuation of Clark and King Streets, and the motel access, I consider it is important to keep options Fairway Drive connection live for flexibility and options now and into the future.
- 26 If engineering permits, Fairway Drive is still a logical access point to the site, and by zoning the Fairway Drive area MUZ, would potentially create a more robust receiving environment, should the road be carrying more traffic in the future. MUZ still provides for quality residential living options, so it is not necessarily going to be a net loss of dwellings, just in a different (and likely more affordable) typology.
- 27 In my opinion, the Proposal is in close alignment with FNDC’s proposed Spatial Plan and is supported by it, especially specific to The Site.

URBAN FORM WITH REFERENCE TO PLANNED CONNECTIONS

- 28 The planned connections shown in the both the Proposal and the Spatial Plan through the site to the Heritage Bypass is, in my opinion, logical and necessary in terms of good urban design outcomes and providing multi modal movement options.
- 29 In both the Spatial Plan and the Proposal, the connection goes through CMU or MUZ respectively, and this enables the same commercial use on both sides of the road. In the PDP, the connection as shown in the Spatial Plan would have commercial use one side of the road, and residential use on the other.
- 30 In my opinion, having significantly different uses on either side of a road does not provide for good urban outcomes. I consider it better practice to change land uses mid-block, with appropriate buffer mechanisms, than across a road. This avoids a road having an ambiguous character and fundamentally provides for a safer residential environment by not having larger scale commercial development, and the traffic effects this inevitably brings.
- 31 Having the potential for commercial uses each side of the road is also more efficient for accessibility and movement to these activities, otherwise it requires greater road distance to access the same amount of activity.
- 32 Additional to this, the road will likely be heavily used as a bypass, and a Mixed Use environment would make a better receiving environment for it than residential being on one side.
- 33 The residential typologies envisaged by MUZ (apartments over commercial use) are better suited to being alongside such a road as they can have acoustic and associated ventilation controls cost effectively built in, as opposed to detached dwellings.
- 34 Both the Spatial Plan and the Proposal extend the Commercial use into the site by a depth that will allow for fully functional blocks to be built. In turn providing good depth to develop future commercial lots on.
- 35 As such I consider the Proposal (and the Spatial Plan) provides for better urban design outcomes in relation to a future CBD by-pass, than the PDP.

TOWN CENTRE ZONING

- 36 Both the PDP and the Spatial Plan provide for the same zoning in the town centre as it proposes along Kerikeri Road adjacent to the site.
- 37 The Form 5 Submission to FNDC for the Proposal states that the relatively small number of commercial zoning options potentially limits the potential for good urban outcomes for Kerikeri and the wider area, and that the MUZ becomes a “blunt tool” for attempting to achieve them.
- 38 It states consideration should be given to a “Town Centre” type zone that will differentiate the CBD area from the wider planning context.
- 39 I support this as it will give the existing Kerikeri CBD a clear purpose to function as this, and ensures its consolidation, while MUZ such as proposed for the Site, and other areas submitting to the PDP, can function as the supporting commercial and residential areas to it. In my opinion, mixed use zones also provide a good transition between CBD and residential zones.
- 40 By not having a specific Town Centre zone, I consider the use could be too broadly spread, resulting in an undifferentiated sprawl that may not sustain the vitality and focus a town centre requires.
- 41 This can produce what in urban design terms is referred to as “doughnut” effect, where activity and vibrancy is consolidated in a ring outside an existing CBD because it is easier to develop modern commercial and retail typologies on larger sites, and access them, than on typically smaller inner sites that are not commonly owned. Consequentially the old CBD struggles. A Town Centre Zone that builds on a MUZ can proactively overcome this by incorporating community focussed placemaking and the ability to upscale MUZ provisions over a smaller area to ensure pedestrian scaled vitality, and fine grain specialist retail and destination activities such as restaurants and bars. To be clear, a Town Centre Zone would not mean less MUZ, it differentiates the purpose of the Town Centre from the purpose of general commercial and business zoning.

THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF KERIKERI AND WAIPAPA

- 42 Kerikeri and Waipapa are two towns within very close proximity but of different and complimentary characteristics. While Kerikeri is zoned and functions as residential and commercial uses, Waipapa is industrial and

heavy industrial zoned. The PDP proposes relatively small areas of MUZ and residential zoning in Waipapa.

- 43 In my opinion, The Site should be developed in accordance with the proposal to allow for an increased MUZ that can service the commercial and business needs of the projected population increase in the short, medium and long term, and the MUZ placed in a directly connected and supportive area to the Town Centre, that is transitional to residential zoning. It is not appropriate to put commercial MUZ type demand on Waipapa as this town is heavily invested in its industrial purpose.
- 44 Other submissions (Kiwi Fresh Orange) provide for a MUZ away from Kerikeri that relates directly to Waipapa, and will likely be developed at a different scale, ie “large box” commensurate with the scale of development in Waipapa.
- 45 In my opinion this Waipapa connected proposal for MUZ is complimentary to the Proposal’s MUZ, as provided for activities can develop in ways commensurate with the areas they identify with.

CONCLUSION

- 46 In my opinion, the zoning pattern for the proposal should not be defined simply by lot boundaries, as the PDP seems to. I consider the area from Kerikeri Road to the Kerikeri River should be viewed holistically, and zoning be dispersed in this area based on capacity required in real terms derived from economic evidence, and also what will produce the best urban outcomes.
- 47 In terms of the best urban outcomes, I consider the MUZ should be pushed further into the site as shown in the Proposal, to the extent it can envelop a CBD bypass road with a clear MUZ block on the other side of it from where the PDP MUZ is currently shown This will allow MUZ development (including residential) to take place on lots of feasible size.
- 48 For these reasons, I support the adoption of the Turnstone Proposal as the best urban design outcome for this site and the wider area.

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Grant Neill

16/06/2025