

URBAN DESIGN UNIT

Terms of Reference: Auckland Urban Design Panel 2021





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Introduction

High quality, distinctively Tāmaki Makaurau-Auckland urban design thinking and built form outcomes are critical to the success of Auckland’s urban environment.

Local and international experience has demonstrated that using independent design review panels, comprising leading professionals from a mix of disciplines, is a cost effective tool for creating better quality urban environments.

This thinking is in line with the urban design outcomes of the Auckland Plan 2050, which are to:

- “Develop a quality compact urban form to accommodate Auckland’s growth”
- “Embed good design in all development”
- “Reflect mana whenua mātauranga and Māori design principles throughout Auckland”
- “Provide sufficient public places and spaces that are inclusive, accessible and contribute to urban living”
- “Build strong urban centres and neighbourhoods”
- “Use growth and development to protect and enhance Auckland’s natural environment”

The Auckland Urban Design Panel has been established to provide independent design review of significant projects for both private and public developments.

While the benefits of the Panel are many, its primary purpose is to assist in achieving a high standard of design quality by reviewing projects and identifying areas for improvement early on in the design process.

Recognising the value of the Panel’s independence, and its support from leaders within the development industry, the Auckland Urban Design Panel Governance Board was established to appoint Panel members and provide governance advice to Auckland Council on the operation of the Panel.

The Auckland Urban Design Panel is a key tool in improving the quality of the built environment across all of Auckland, as well as contributing to the realisation of the Mayor’s vision for Auckland becoming a world class city.

Benefits of the Panel

The Panel process provides an independent peer review from leaders in a variety of relevant professions including from the development sector, practising organisations, and academic sectors.

Good urban design processes and outcomes add economic value to proposals in terms of both capital and operating expenditure over the lifetime of a project, as well as the positive spin-offs associated with successful and attractive centres and neighbourhoods.

The Panel process has the potential to minimise time delays for lodged resource consent applications by supporting the resolution of complex issues early on in the design process, prior to lodgment.

The Council urban designer's time is focused on the pre-application process, resulting in smaller billing charges at the consenting stage.

The Panel process is also structured to provide consistent advice during the consenting process, and co-ordination (where necessary) of other Council departments.

Benefits of design review panels are considerable and include:

- Bringing an additional source and mix of design expertise to further complement the skills available to the scheme.
- Lifting the profile of design by supporting Council and the development sector in requiring more from applicants and their design teams in terms of design quality.
- Providing decision makers with the confidence that they have the best possible independent advice on design quality.
- Identifying weak and inappropriate schemes at an early stage, when significant design changes can be made with relatively little waste of time and effort.
- Helping developers assess and identify which costly design elements add little value or are essential to the overall quality of a scheme.
- Putting schemes into perspective and seeing the bigger picture.
- Questioning the design brief or assumptions and opening up new opportunities for improved development.
- Offering opportunities to those observing design reviews for continued learning, particularly on how to assess good design.

Terms of Reference

Purpose of the Panel

The purpose of the Auckland Urban Design Panel is to provide independent design review and subsequent design advice that achieves well-designed buildings and places that contribute to safe, healthy and attractive urban environments.

Design review by the Panel could be undertaken in the following situations:

- Pre-application advice to developers and council representatives on large, complex or locally significant development proposals;
- Design advice to the Council on large or controversial council-initiated projects;
- Advice to the Council on the assessment of development proposals that have been lodged for resource consent and that may (or may not) have previously been to the Panel, and have significant issues of concern;
- Advice to the Council on proposed policy and statutory tools that have an urban design impact or will shape the development of significant parts of the region.

Recommendations from the Panel are to assist Council officers in forming their professional opinions with respect to the requirements of the Unitary Plan. The Panel's advice is in addition to the in-depth urban design assessment that takes place as part of the resource consent process.

The review undertaken by the Panel is not limited to the scope of the Unitary Plan, but also encourages best practice approaches to development that support the overarching objectives of the Auckland Plan.

Recommendations from the Panel are to assist an applicant and their design team by providing a critique of the proposal and identifying areas for improvement. Many applicants value the insights provided by the Panel and how it supports the creation of a better product.

Not all developments qualify for review by the Panel, and only those recommended to the Panel from Council's Urban Design Unit are able to be presented for review. The triggers for a Panel review are included in this document.

Whilst it is recommended that a Panel review take place at the pre-application stage of a project when design changes can be easily made, the Council's urban designer can request the advice of the Panel at any point in the consenting process. The attendance of the applicant at a Panel session is voluntary, but highly recommended.

Whilst the Panel's recommendations are non-statutory, they are an important benchmark for the assessment of resource consent applications.



Appointment of Panel members

Panel members are highly-regarded professionals with specialist skills in the areas of urban design, architecture, planning, landscape architecture, heritage, Māori design and property. In order to retain the panel's independence, no current Auckland Council or CCO employee can serve as panel members.

Panel members are nominated by their respective partnering organisations.

These are:

- New Zealand Institute of Architects
- New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects
- New Zealand Planning Institute
- Property Council of New Zealand
- Ngā Aho Network of Māori Design Professionals
- Auckland Council's Urban Design Unit

Panel members are selected for their individual experience and qualifications rather than as representatives of their professional firms. There is a maximum of 3 panel members from any one professional firm per partnering institute at any one time.

They are expected to be leaders in their respective professions with experience in relation to delivering high quality design outcomes in the built form and public realm.

Selection of Panel members

The selection of Panel members for a Panel review is discussed between the Council urban designer and Design Review Panels Lead to ensure the appropriate mix of skills and expertise. Only 1 panel member from a single profession firm, regardless of their discipline, will sit on a panel review at the same time.

Final Panel member selection will depend on the nature, type and scale of the development, whether there are any infringements against the Unitary Plan, whether there have been previous Panel reviews on the site, and where in the design process the project is at.

A Māori cultural design Panel member, nominated by Ngā Aho, will be invited to attend a Panel meeting where Mana Whenua engagement is being carried out and the feedback received has design implications for the development.

This Panel member will help to ensure that the feedback received by Mana Whenua has been responded to in a meaningful fashion throughout the design process

A Heritage Architect Panel member, nominated by the New Zealand Institute of Architects, will be invited to attend a Panel meeting if there are heritage items on or in close proximity to the site.

Quorum

A quorum of three Panel members is required, with at least one urban designer selected for every Panel review.

Additional experts

Provision is made for independent experts from other professions to attend Panel meetings to provide expert advice where there are complex or significant issues relating to areas outside of the Panel's expertise.

Examples include traffic engineering, universal access, and sustainability.

Role of Council officers

The Council's urban designer, planner and often planning Team Leader are present for the duration of the Panel meeting to seek or provide clarification to/from the Panel during the meeting. Both Council's planners and urban designers have responsibilities in terms of assisting the Panel.

Planners are responsible for:

- Providing supporting information for the Coversheet – a brief written report that accompanies the Panel presentation material and summarises the key urban design issues that Council officers are seeking advice from the Panel on.
- When invited, providing guidance to the Panel on relevant Unitary Plan matters including general policy and regulatory matters.

Urban design officers are responsible for:

- Working with the Design Review Panel's Lead to confirm whether a proposal should be taken to the Panel;

- Working with the Design Review Panels Lead to confirm the appropriate mix of Panel members;
- Ensuring the applicant's material is fit for presentation to the Panel in terms of adequacy, quality and accuracy (Refer to the Information Requirements checklist for Panel presentations - www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-process/AUDP);
- Identifying urban design issues and outlining the specific advice they are seeking from the Panel on the Coversheet
- Informing the Panel about related Council policies, strategies, plans, or works that may impact the proposal;
- Advising the Design Review Panels Lead on any additional experts that might be required to attend the Panel meeting;

Administrative support for the operation of the Panel is provided by the Urban Design Unit

Email the address below for any queries:

urbandesignpanel@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

Nature of meetings and conflicts of interest

Meetings with the Panel are closed to all but the applicant's nominated representatives, Council officers and Panel members, unless the applicant indicates a willingness for it to be a public meeting.

All Panel members, and any additional experts in attendance, are required to declare if they have a conflict of interest.

Cost to the applicant

Auckland Council funds the operation of most Panel sessions, including Panel members' time and administrative support.

Council's urban designer and planner charge their time to applicants through the consenting process for the preparation of cover sheets, Panel meeting attendance and post-Panel follow up discussions with the applicant.

Dedicated Panel sessions are also run by Auckland Council, which are funded by the applicant. This type of Panel is used on large scale projects where multiple Panel reviews with a dedicated Panel team are required. This Panel format will be discussed and agreed with the applicant.

Where additional independent experts are required to attend a panel meeting to provide advice on issues outside of the expertise of the Panel, the applicant may be requested to fund their attendance.

Assessment process

The criteria used to assess development proposals are consistent across all applications and are based on the following:

1. The urban design outcomes of the Auckland Plan 2050.
2. The urban design provisions of the Unitary Plan identified by Council's urban design and planning specialists.
3. Te Aranga Māori Design Principles (<http://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-thinking/Māori-design>).
4. Urban design frameworks and guidelines prepared for a specific area and endorsed by the Council
5. Urban design best practice principles based on placemaking, context responsive design, universal access, sustainability and crime prevention.

In reviewing proposals the Panel will focus on the appropriateness of the building or development in relation to its physical, social and cultural context, including any impact on identified Māori cultural values, and on heritage values.

In striving for excellence in design the Panel will consider the overall quality of the development and its architecture, as well as its appearance from the street and public spaces.

- The appropriateness of the proposed activities including type, density and relevance to the site's context;
- Building bulk and location, design, scale, layout, and articulation of façades, including how these respond to the functional and environmental conditions of the site and the character of the surrounding neighbourhood;
- Landscaping and interface with the public realm including the design of new or alterations to existing streets and open spaces;
- The relationship between the ground floor and the street/public realm;
- How the development works for both users and the public, e.g. safety for users and passers-by;
- How the development impacts upon any Council projects or strategies;
- The inclusion of and contribution to the wider network of green infrastructure, including low impact/water sensitive design features;
- For residential developments, the standard of living amenity created for existing and future residents on and adjoining the site;
- Materials and any important construction details integral to the success of the project.



Triggers for a Panel review

Council officers are responsible for determining whether an application should be reviewed by the Panel, with the final decision resting with the Design Review Panels Lead in consultation with the Council's urban design officer. The key decision to be made is whether a Panel review would add value to the design process of the project.

Triggers include:

- Any project deemed "transformational" by urban design or planning officers, or listed within the top priority centres within the Auckland Plan;
- Any large development within or near a centre;
- Any development within the City Centre;
- High rise apartment buildings, office buildings or large mixed use developments;
- Large scale residential developments over 20 units;
- Major infrastructure projects such as motorways or schools;
- Masterplans for any new greenfield or brownfield development;
- Any locally significant development that council officers believe would benefit from a Panel review;
- Developments that infringe the standards in the Unitary Plan;
- Major scale Council and CCO projects including streetscape upgrades and community facilities.

There may be applications made from other types of buildings and activities not included above which would benefit from a review, which would be determined by the Council's urban design officer and the Design Review Panels Lead.

For Dedicated Panels, or where more than one Panel review is required for a project, the decision on when to return to the Panel will be determined by how far the design has progressed since the last Panel review and whether the recommendations prepared by the Panel have been addressed. The final decision on when a project should return to the Panel will rest with the Design Review Panels Lead in consultation with the Council's urban design officer.



Panel Process

Step 1: Book pre-application meeting

The applicant liaises with the Council planner regarding a new proposal. A time for a pre-application meeting is set up. Invitations to the pre-application meeting are sent by the Council planner to any relevant Council specialists such as an urban designer, traffic engineer etc.

Step 2: Pre-application meeting

The pre-application meeting is held and the Council urban designer will check the proposal against the triggers for a Panel review.

Step 3: After pre-application meeting

The Council urban designer will confirm with the Design Review Panels Lead if the scheme is to go to the Panel.

Step 4: Date and Panel members

The Council urban designer will check with the Panel Assistant to select possible dates for the Panel session. The Panel date will be confirmed with the applicant. Panel sessions are held weekly, usually on Thursday.

The Design Review Panels Lead will work with the Council urban designer to identify the appropriate mix of Panel Members, including whether a Ngā Aho representative or Heritage

Architect is required.

They will also determine whether additional experts or Council officers are required to advise the Panel.

The Panel Assistant will send an invitation to the selected Panel members, the applicant, the Council urban designer and planner, and any additional experts or Council officers.

Step 5: Information Requirements

A follow up email and calendar invitation will be sent to the applicant and Council officers by the Panel Assistant outlining dates, timeframes and requirements for submitting the Panel Information Requirements.

Step 6: Draft Information Requirements 2 weeks prior

The applicant will submit their draft electronic Information Requirements pack to the Council urban designer for vetting of adequacy and relevancy against the Information Requirements Checklist.

Council's urban designer will advise the applicant on any additional information required for the final Information Requirements pack.

Step 7: Final Information Requirements 1 week prior

By Thursday at 12pm, 1 week prior to the Urban Design Panel meeting, the final Information Requirements pack, in accordance with the Information Requirements Checklist, must be received by Council.

The hardcopy package should be sent to:

Urban Design Unit
Auckland Council
Level 23
135 Albert St
Auckland Central 1010
Attn: Auckland Urban Design Panel Assistant

Note: The Panel meeting will be postponed if the above criteria is not met.

Step 8: Coversheet

Once the final Information Requirements have been received, the Council planner and urban designer will jointly prepare a coversheet and any relevant supporting material to highlight the key urban design issues that they are seeking advice from the Panel on.

The Information Requirements, Coversheet and supporting material is collated and sent out by the Panel Assistant to Panel members.

Step 9: Panel meeting

The Council planner, urban designer and Panel Assistant attend the Panel meeting along with the applicant, Panel Members and any additional experts and Council officers.

Meetings are always held in Auckland Council offices in the City Centre. Panel sessions operate on a tight schedule to ensure business is completed by close of day, following the schedule below:

- Panel briefing – Council staff and Panel members meet before the applicant arrives to identify the key issues identified in the Coversheet and to be explored during the meeting.
- Welcome from the Chair - The Chair invites the applicant into the room and introduces the parties involved.
- Applicant's presentation - The applicant presents the scheme.
- Questions/clarifications by Panel – Panel members seek points of clarification from the applicant after the presentation.
- Panel discussion - A discussion of the issues with the applicant occurs with the individual Panel members. The applicant leaves the room once the Panel discussion is completed.

- Recommendations - The Panel prepares the recommendations led by the Chair, and written up by the Panel Assistant.
- Close.

Step 10: Recommendations

The Panel Assistant is responsible for circulating the recommendations to Council staff and the applicant within 24 hours of the close of the meeting.

In instances where the Panel is unable to complete the recommendations within the scheduled meeting time, draft recommendations will be emailed to all Panel members. Any suggested changes will be sent in a 'reply to all Panel Members' email, with the Chair responsible for providing the final recommendations to the Panel Assistant within 3 days.

Step 11: Post Panel

Council's urban designer will discuss the recommendations with the applicant and any issues that were raised during the panel session, and provide clarification where required.

Once the applicant has had time to make any necessary design changes they are encouraged to meet again with the Council urban designer and planner prior to the lodgement of the resource consent to review the revised scheme against the Panel recommendations.

A subsequent review by the Panel may be required depending on where in the design process the project is at, the Panel's recommendations, and the nature of any changes made to the proposal.

A decision on whether a project should return to the Panel for a subsequent review will be made between the Council urban designer and the Design Review Panels Lead.

Typical Schedule for Panel Meetings - 1:30pm - 5:00pm

Panel briefing with Council officers	1:30pm
Welcome from the Chair	2:00pm
Applicant's presentation	2:05-2:30pm
Questions/clarifications by the Panel	2:30-3:00pm
Panel discussion with the applicant	3:00-4:00pm
Recommendations	4:00-5:00pm
Close	5:00pm

Express Panels

Terms of Reference

The Express Panel is part of the same AUDP service; however, this is specifically for less complex projects with only 2-3 urban design issues. Additionally, this format is designed for schemes which have previously received a Main Panel review and are returning to the Express Panel for the resolution of previously recorded urban design issues.

Triggers

New projects would still need to meet the triggers set out in the Terms of Reference to qualify for an Express panel review.

Format

Prior to the Express Panel, Council's Urban Designer will liaise with the applicant to agree on key issues and the Designer will discuss these issues with the Panel. As the Express Panel is designed to be quick and efficient, applicants are not required to attend the Panel meeting.

All requests are made to the Council's Urban Designer and are to be approved by the Design Review Panels Lead. Once the request has been made, the Express Panel is booked in and the Applicant will be notified of the Panel date.

Information Requirements

Generally, the pre-application drawings are used for Express Panel reviews and the applicants are not asked to prepare any additional information or attend.

Panel Day

Schemes will be reviewed by 2-3 members (including a Chair) selected from the main Auckland Urban Design Panel member pool and recommendations are circulated to the applicant the following day.



Find out more: phone 09 301 0101
or visit www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz