

# Aucklanders firmly reject waterfront apartments

**Aucklanders are overwhelmingly rejecting the proposal to turn the Tank Farm into apartments. They want a public park instead. ISABEL CARLYON, NATALIE SMITH and CLAIRE STARKEY take a closer look.**



PHOTO: CLAIRE STARKEY

**IMMINENT CHANGE:** Many members of the public want park land to replace tanks on the waterfront.

Proposed development of the Tank Farm at Wynyard Point on the Auckland waterfront has sparked controversy not seen in Auckland for years.

Aucklanders rejected the majority of the Auckland City's plans for the area with a barrage of submissions against its draft Wynyard Point concept.

The most contentious aspect is the proposal for apartments on the headland and the absence of a large park.

The public, alongside various lobby groups and individuals, is calling for the council to make the land a non-commercial, non-residential open public space.

Auckland City Council, the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) and the Ports of Auckland all argue that the development is an expensive one and some sort of revenue must be produced from the area.

Apartments, they say, are the ideal answer for the headland.

In his column for the *New Zealand Herald*, journalist Brian Rudman neatly defined the argument.

"The public's vision leans towards the pleasure garden end of the scale, seeing it as a once-only chance to reclaim this reclaimed land in the middle of the expanding metropolis, and develop it as a fabulous destination, for locals and tourists."

So what is the Tank Farm, why is it controversial and why has the issue erupted?

Wynyard Point is the area on the north-western front of Auckland's central business district (CBD) and sits between Westhaven Marina and the Viaduct Harbour.

It is approximately 35ha of land reclaimed between 1920 and 1940 on the foreshore of the Waitemata Harbour. The official draft Wynyard Point concept vision notes the area is one-twelfth of the size of the entire CBD, a substantial area of land.

However, it is the 8ha of the headland that the two sides are waging war over. The tip of this reclaimed land, where industrial storage tanks currently sit, is the most valuable area thanks to its proximity to the water and harbour views.

Wynyard Point is owned by the Ports of Auckland, which was bought by the ARC in 2005. The majority of leases currently held by the bulk liquids and other industries expire between 2016 and 2026, so redevelopment of the land is imminent.

The port and the western reclamation are predominantly zoned for port and marine industries. Current planning requirements do not provide for residential or non-marine commercial, retail and

entertainment activity.

In December last year the city council and the ARC released a joint document, the "Auckland Waterfront Vision 2040", outlining the proposed plans for the entire CBD waterfront including Wynyard Point.

Then in late February the ACC released its draft Wynyard Point concept vision which detailed further ambitions for Wynyard Point.

The public reaction came fast and furious from a range of Auckland groups, each with different areas of concern. There was, however, a clear message. The public wanted more green space and less allocation for apartments on the headland.

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Alex Swney, chief executive of Heart of the City Auckland, is one person leading the debate against this part of the concept. Heart of the City is a 5000-strong lobby group from the non-residential community of the CBD. These 5000 people represent one-quarter of all of Auckland City's ratepayers.

After the city council released the Wynyard Point document the group launched an advertising campaign in the *New Zealand Herald* and on a website. The group received more than 4000 submissions. A further 1500 submissions had been received by ACC directly.

More than 92 per cent of submissions strongly disagreed with the four to six-storey apartment height proposed by the city, which would potentially cover one-third of the headland. They also disagreed with the size of the proposed park land – three to four hectares on the eastern area of the point.

Swney argues the headland should be reserved for a wide open space for Aucklanders and tourists alike to treasure.

"Aucklanders would be losing the waterfront forever," he says.

"Around the world port land is becoming more and more available. No city in the world, however, is looking at developing apartments on this prime land."

He gives the example of New York City and the vast size of Central Park in the centre of Manhattan Island and Battery Park which borders the port areas.

In March in response to public reaction to the proposal, the ARC, led by chairman Mike Lee, announced that a wide open space should cover about half the headland which would be around 5 ha.

Swney and the rest of the opposition have indicated that ideally they would like the park to cover the whole 8 ha. However most are pleased with Lee's suggestion. Lee has further proposed a build-

ing of significance on the site, such as a new Auckland City Art Gallery.

All three groups – the ARC, Auckland City and Ports of Auckland – agree that a big park is an expensive operation and not viable without "mixed use" zoning on the land.

Although Lee told the *Herald* there should be a lot of space in the northern headland, he adds that it would be "irresponsible of the ARC, as stewards of the land, not to include some residential and commercial development".

He says the ratepayers of Auckland will be left with a burden of debt if the development is not generating some income of its own.

The minutes for the ARC's regional strategy and planning committee meeting on March 20 state "ARC recognises the trade-off with the provision of public space and supports the provision of development potential elsewhere". This is a statement that the ARC supports less open space to make way for the "trade-off" with development.

Auckland City is likely to gain 60,000 people over the next 10 years. The council therefore needs extra income for growth costs.

Money generated for apartments and commercial development on Wynyard Point will go toward funding public transport systems and much-needed storm water systems in the CBD and Wynyard Point area.

The draft long-term council community plan, which was released in late April, introduces amendments to development contributions which are a funding tool introduced by the Local Government Act 2002.

According to the draft development contributions policy, "they allow Auckland City Council to require contributions (usually money) from developers when they are granted resource consents or building consents".

If the re-development of Wynyard Point is accepted, then transport levies for each new house of unit on the point will increase to \$9800 per unit and the charge for storm water will increase to \$4200 per household.

According to the draft plan these contributions will provide "an appropriate way of recovering some of the costs related to growth form those who create new developments in the city."

The proposed apartments and commercial buildings on Wynyard Point will bring in around \$120 million, according to Auckland mayor Dick Hubbard.

Swney wants Aucklanders to realise that the ARC and Auckland City are

viewing the apartments as a mechanism for funding public transport.

"We need to ask ourselves, would Auckland ratepayers prefer a beautiful park in one of the most special locations on the city or a transport system that will only be sufficient for the next five or six years?"

He argues that transport subsidies required over the next three to four years would be covered by the expected \$200 to \$300 million that developing apartments would bring the city council.

Rick Carlyon strongly agrees with Swney. He was one of 1500 who put a submission forward to ACC. Carlyon argues that we shouldn't be looking at this area as a cash cow. Rather the land should be used for a purpose that will last long into the future.

Carlyon argues since a quarter of New Zealand lives in Auckland, "central government should be called on to pay the heavy costs of having a large park".

At the moment the asset has no real value as the ARC already owns it and the leases do not bring in a huge income, he says.

His suggestion is to essentially gift the space to the people of Auckland.

But councillor Paul Walbran, chairman of the ARC regional strategy and planning committee, believes that calling for purely green space on the headland is idealistic.

He says that Heart of the City has a conflict of interest, as it is concerned about business activity being established outside the immediate CBD.

Walbran adds there are major funding shortfalls that Auckland City needs to correct to catch up on transport issues.

So will the city council and the ARC take into account the mass of opinion against the proposed headland developments and make more of a balance between development and open park space?

A special meeting of the city's urban strategy and governance committee considered the analysis of public feedback. A final meeting of the committee will be held in May and changes to district plans will be announced soon after.

Swney is confident Auckland City will listen to the Heart of the City submissions. The council is generally wary of the group's opinion, he says.

The ARC's Paul Walbran says that the end result will be different to the initial plan.

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