



**Submission**  
by the  
**Victoria University of Wellington**  
**Students' Association**  
on the  
**WCC Draft Spatial Plan**

Prepared by

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**VUWSA also wishes to make an oral submission.**

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To	<b>Wellington City Council</b>
From	<b>Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)</b>
Date	<b>5 October 2020</b>
Subject	<b>Planning for Growth Draft Spatial Plan</b>

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## **1. Introduction:**

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) advocate for and represent the 22,000 students of Te Herenga Waka— Victoria University of Wellington. Students, and under 35-year olds, comprise a large portion of the Wellington Central population. The way students think about housing and urban planning is substantially different to the general population, and represents the unique way students experience Wellington. Anxiety around flat availability and cost, the efficiency and convenience of public transport, and access to green spaces are all everyday issues for students. To address these areas through urban planning is essential for maintaining a thriving and sustainable city.

We are pleased that Wellington City Council (WCC) are consulting with the public on their Draft Spatial Plan for housing in Wellington and considering the long-term future for Wellington City.

VUWSA strongly supports the Draft Spatial Plan, granted this addresses the concerns expressed by students and young professionals. Any reform would have strong impacts on wellbeing, and should be centred around the principles of safety, affordability, accessibility and climate resilience. The reform of housing in Wellington would affect both the academic and social experience of students - with many having their first experience living independently or away from home.

Wellington is a youthful city, filled with students, young professionals, and artists. Students from across New Zealand choose to come to Wellington to continue study and seek new opportunities. By creating a city which acts as a functional space where students can live and work in, VUWSA believes these changes will contribute to student retention after graduation. Additionally, reviewing the Draft Spatial Plan through a student lens, and prioritising the experiences of students, will enrich and benefit the lives of all, while offering a forward-thinking perspective.

Given Wellington's immense projected growth in population, it is critical that the Council ensures the city has the correct infrastructure and planning to protect the welfare of these

new citizens. Failure to do so is both irresponsible and disappointing. This means ensuring access to affordable accommodation, allowing citizens to keep both safe and warm without having to compromise on going without groceries or internet.

This submission outlines the current state of student housing, and in doing so highlights the importance of reform to housing in Wellington. We also point out areas where we believe the Spatial Plan does not go far enough, and the principles we wish the WCC to be keeping in mind when finalising the plan. In writing this submission, we gathered responses and testimonies from our community of their experience with housing in Wellington.

## **2. The current state of housing for students**

Housing is currently inaccessible for students. Rent has risen from under \$200/week, to roughly \$240/week over the last two years. A large majority of these flats are cold and damp, leading to higher electricity bills, increased likelihood of sickness, and mould-ridden rooms. In addition, there is not enough supply for the high demand.

Flat hunting is incredibly stressful and poor housing conditions often cause mental and physical suffering for students. Students are often forced further into outer suburbs in order to find accommodation that within budget and does not compromise their health. This shift from the inner city has huge impact on the diversity of the city, which in turn, affects its culture. It also means that students become even more time-poor, due to longer commutes to and from the city.

Additionally, many students rely on part-time jobs to supplement the current student living cost allowance from the Government to afford rent and other living costs. Full-time study already accounts for 40 hours a week. Failure to keep rent in the central city affordable not only negatively affects student wellbeing, but also their quality of study and often means forgoing other interests, such as recreational activities and socialising.

### **3. Further areas of Development**

VUWSA supports this plan as we believe it will create a more equitable society for students and ensure that their wellbeing is prioritised. We support the proposals for denser housing for the reasons further detailed in this submission.

We also believe that the plan is missing key areas of development which would be beneficial to students. This includes:

- Further upzoning of Kelburn, a student area. However, we do not want Kelburn to be prioritised as an area to upzone at the expense of areas with better transit. This principle also applies to Northland.
- More emphasis on residential housing, instead of mixed-use development.
- In cases where there are mixed-used dwellings, the upper levels must have accessibility access options.

#### **4. On the character protections**

We believe that the current spatial plan encompasses the right amount of character and heritage protection whilst also allowing for more development. All heritage will continue to be protected and so will some key character homes. Whilst some character homes will be demolished, this is a tradeoff we should be prepared to make given it will create opportunity for building more medium to high density housing.

Heritage and character homes are a want, not a need. What students and Wellington need are more better-quality housing. These character homes, which are often older dwellings and unsafe to live in, are mostly occupied by students. The mass expense of upgrading these homes is passed onto these student renters, further exacerbating the financial struggle of many studying in Wellington. In truth, we consider the only character these homes add to the city is to the dominant portrayal of flatting in Wellington being a cold, damp, mouldy, draughty and miserable experience.

Wellington is a city defined by its individuality, shaped by its people, musicality, food and art scene, and cultural spaces such as its museums, memorials and city spaces. It is this incredible culture that helps make Wellington the 'coolest little capital', drawing people from all over the world to it. At no point are Wellington's cold and damp character homes a part of Wellington's cultural draw. Rather, it is the people, its students, artists and creators, which make the culture. These people cannot contribute to the culture of the city if they are too occupied trying to make ends meet with rent and food every week.

Given this, we see the current provisions around character housing as being at an adequate level. However, the impact of further prioritisation of character housing will be felt by students. It will maintain the status quo of poor-quality, expensive housing, in low supply. Young people are already alienated from the city due to its high living cost. We want a diverse city that is accessible to all, not just those with wealth. This spatial plan is an incredible opportunity to make the changes Wellington needs right now. For the sake of young people's mental health, physical health, and financial accessibility, we implore you to support the spatial plan with the current provisions around character overlays. The desperate needs of students far outweigh the wish for unnecessary character overlays.

## **5. Amenities**

### 5.1 Green spaces

We support creating more green spaces in Wellington. Green spaces are incredibly important for mental health, recreational purposes, and community. When these green spaces are created, they need to:

- Prioritise indigenous biodiversity
- Be accessible – such as being wheel friendly and free
- Have adequate safety measures to protect the community – such as lighting
- Have some green spaces that are suited to the Wellington weather and can be utilised no matter the season

### 5.2 Public Transport

We believe there should be a greater focus on public transport in the Spatial Plan. City planning and public transport planning are interconnected and must be viewed holistically to achieve better city design. We support the efforts of *Let's Get Wellington Moving*. You cannot build or plan for residences without considering how those homes interact with public transport. People rely on public transport to move around the city to access work, education, recreation, and supermarkets, to and from their home. We believe public transport should be:

- Free
- Safe (such as provision of adequate lighting around bus stops)
- Frequent, and around the clock
- Accessible
- Prioritised

### 5.3 Community spaces

We believe that there is not enough in the spatial plan to provide for community spaces. Community spaces are essential for mental health, recreation, and creating a sense of community. We would like to see more:

- Provisions for community centres (such as Aro Valley Community Centre)
- Community gardens
- Community composting
- Provisions for communal housing
- Provisions for communal living (such as laundromats)

### 5.4 Infrastructure

The predicted city growth will lead to increased demand and pressure on infrastructure, which is already struggling to provide for our current population. We believe greater attention needs to be paid to the maintenance, growth, and upgrades of Wellingtons infrastructure. Listed below is the infrastructure we believe needs to be improved and/or expanded upon:

- Waste
  - Both collection and landfills- greater education provided around collection is needed and our landfills need to be able to sustain waste locally as opposed to exporting waste
  - More bins (including recycling and composting) around the city
  - Better education and resources around waste in Wellington
- Water
- Electricity
- Lighting
  - There needs to be better lighting around the city, including stairwells. This will improve city safety and accessibility.
- Crossings

- Our crossings do not adequately support people with disabilities. They need to be upgraded and looked after to provide sounds and lights. Failure to do so creates a city that is not safe, walkable, or accessible.
- Pathways
  - Provisions must be put in place to create safe pathways that do not abruptly come to a stop, are uneven, and have e-scooters across them.
- Cycle ways
- Water fountains
- Public toilets

## **6. Design Principles**

### **6.1 Sexual harm prevention**

Design of public spaces should be created so that they remove opportunities for sexual harm to occur. Natural and built environment should both prioritise this. Te Aro Park, between Dixon and Manners St, is an example of poor design creating potentially unsafe situations. The roads, and the positioning of the public toilets mean that there is poor lighting, and certain areas act as chokepoints, where it is easy to corner someone. The current water features and stairs mean that it is difficult to move quickly across the open space. It is critical to mitigate, or at bare minimum, discourage such situations through design of public spaces.

### **6.2 Universal accessibility**

VUWSA believes that access issues and disabilities should not be a barrier to experiencing Wellington. Therefore, it is important that the Spatial Plan should consider universal accessibility as a key principle. This includes accessible green spaces, accessible pathways which prioritise pavement safety, adequate signage (including Braille), and accessible public transport. It also means that in multistory buildings, lifts should be a compulsory feature.

### **6.3 Sustainability**

Young people are anxious about climate change. We know that it will be a burden we will have to shoulder as we graduate, and begin working. This is particularly more pertinent in Wellington, where we are prone to rising sea levels and earthquakes. We believe that it is important to build infrastructure that plans for the long-term, and ensures that we prioritise the environment, the preservation of our native flora and fauna, and reducing our carbon emissions.

#### 6.4 Inclusive Community building

We want the design of Wellington City to encourage community building as a place where people can come together. COVID-19 has shown us that there is a persistent need for us to all be connected to one another, so we can rely on our neighbours in times of crisis. The way the city is designed and built should encourage this. Wellington is home to a diverse community, and each year international students come to VUW and enrich that diversity. We want Wellington to be a welcoming home to the international and domestic students who move to Wellington to study at VUW.

#### *6.5 Pluralistic housing options*

We want a range of housing types to support diverse living arrangements including flatting, homes for both small and extended families, communal living and smaller apartment-style living. We need a full range of options to support our diverse and transitory student community. We would like to see the special plan encourage a wide range of housing types.

## 7. Further comments

VUWSA has compiled these comments from groups we have worked with to discuss the student perspective to the Draft Spatial Plan. They may also be making their own submissions independently.



### 7.1 Disabled Students Association

The Disabled Students Association is the representative group for disabled students at Victoria University. We seek to ensure that the large population of students with disabilities - including physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health conditions, chronic illness, etc. - have an equitable and enjoyable University experience. We are particularly concerned with the lack of accessible housing and transport in Wellington, and hope to see meaningful change in this area.



### 7.2 UniQ Victoria

UniQ Victoria is the Queer Students' Association of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, and we support this submission by VUWSA and the Draft Spatial Plan for Wellington City. As representatives and advocates for LGBTQIA+ students in Wellington, we are concerned about the growing inaccessibility and unaffordability of housing and transport in Wellington as well as the various unsafe environments in our city. As a community, LGBTQIA+ people are disproportionately affected by many things, among them homelessness, poverty, sexual violence and physical harm. This spatial plan is a step in the right direction, and we support the many suggestions of this submission to create a more inclusive, accessible and safe city for LGBTQIA+ students.



### 7.3 Victoria University of Wellington Women's Collective

VUW Women's Collective are the representative group for women at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington. We advocate for women, as well as provide social and safe spaces. Women in New Zealand are still over represented and underappreciated in the "care economy", and suffer from the pay gap. We contribute more to childcare, household chores and emotional labour than our male counterparts and it is crucial that women are included in the spatial planning process from beginning to end. Planning must consider our safety, our independence, our access to community, and our livelihoods.



### 7.4 New Zealand Union of Student Associations

We are NZUSA, the national voice for tertiary students in New Zealand, and we support this submission.



### 7.5 Post Graduate Students' Association of VUW

The PGSA is the representative group for postgraduate students at Victoria University of Wellington. As representatives and advocates for postgraduate and mature students we are concerned with the availability and affordability of housing for international students and students with families. International students need greater access to affordable and flexible housing options to support their connection both to our community in Wellington and to their home. Mature students need affordable options with room for partners and dependents. We support VUWSA's submission on the WCC Draft Spatial Plan, and we

support the WCC Draft Spatial Plan as a step in the right direction for increasing the availability and affordability of housing in Wellington.



#### 7.6 Ngāi Taura - VUW Māori Students' Association

Ngāi Taura is the Māori Students' Association at Te Whare Wananga o Te Upoko o te Ika a Maui - Victoria University of Wellington. Our core business is to represent and advocate for the wellbeing of taura Māori during their time at Victoria University. We support this submission.



#### 7.7 Greens at Vic:

Greens at Vic support this submission and believe this spatial plan is an important tool in ending the housing crisis and mitigating the climate crisis. Enabling more housing is essential to ensure we don't prolong the housing crisis, and thinking ahead to the future now helps us prevent another one. Increasing supply is good for renters and good for affordability. A compact city is critical for becoming a carbon-neutral city. Continuing to sprawl outwards and forcing Wellingtonians out to Porirua and the Hutt, gentrifying those neighbourhoods, creates more emissions as residents are forced to travel long distances between home, work, and the cultural centre. Upzoning and mixed-use development, especially in the inner cities and inner suburbs in conjunction with LGWM, will allow more people to live in Wellington in close proximity to the supermarkets we shop at, the places we work at, and the facilities we study at. We tautoko this VUWSA community submission, and strongly support this plan!

## 8. Our consultation with our communities

We set up a survey form to get responses from young people in the university community. We got 75 responses from a wide range of young people. We have attached the full excel spreadsheet to this submission.

What Suburb do you live in?		
Suburb	Percentage of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Te Aro / Wellington Central	24%	18
Kelburn	18.7%	14
Mount Cook	9.3%	7
Northland	9.3%	7
Mount Victoria	6.7%	5
Aro Valley	4%	3
Newtown	4%	3
Brooklyn	2.7%	2
Island Bay	1.3%	1
Roseneath	1.3%	1
Thorndon	1.3%	1
Churton Park	1.3%	1
Miramar	1.3%	1
Crofton Downs	1.3%	1
Vogeltown	1.3%	1
Other / Unspecified	9.3%	7

Table 1. Suburb representation from consultation survey.

	Age Group		
	< 20	20-25	>25
<b>Percentage</b>	18.7%	80%	1.3%
<b>Total Number</b>	14	60	1

Table 2. Age representation from consultation survey.

Living situation?		
	Percentage	Number of Responses
<b>Flatting</b>	81%	60
<b>Living with Family</b>	8%	6
<b>Solo</b>	3%	2
<b>Hall of Residence</b>	3%	2
<b>Not Specified</b>	5%	4

Table 3. Living arrangement responses from Consultation Survey.

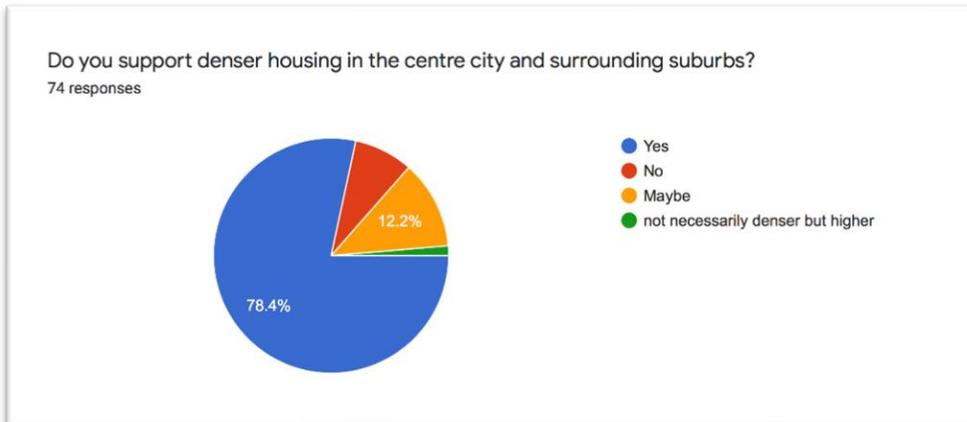


Fig. 1. Pie Chart showing support for denser housing in centre city and surrounding suburbs from consultation survey.

### 8.1 What does Wellington's character mean to you?

Our top responses were: culture, community, the people, and art.

Notable responses:

- “Wellington's character is prohibitive of growth and sustainability. It perpetuates inequality. Keep one of each we don't need 100. Wellington's character should reflect its people and their experiences. There is no need to place symbols of colonialism on pedestal.”
- “Wellington's character is more alive in the works of art and creative use of architecture and space around the city than it is in the heritage buildings and sites. To me, Wellington's character is created through the space that the people of Wellington have to express themselves. I love seeing the collaborative works of those from different cultures and backgrounds through community created art work and murals around the city. I think there is room for the history of our city to be preserved through art and expression, alongside an appropriate level of maintaining heritage

buildings. Appropriate = Not at the expense of building dry, healthy homes”

- “Wellington's character is partially about the buildings but more so about the people who make up the city. The community and culture is predominantly about how the people use the spaces provided for them.”
- “Character is something that builds upon the residential culture (coffee, etc has evolved from the people that live and grow in Wellington)- prioritising so called 'heritage' site if it has no real or genuine historical connection to Aotearoa is over development for property that will facilitate healthier/safer living environments and more housing is selfish (and possibly something only people with their own homes have the privilege to say).”
- “I think it's important to preserve a degree of culture/heritage, because it gives the city vibrancy and character. However, these buildings need to be made livable, and mid-high density needs to move in alongside them.”
- “Wellington's character is constantly evolving, and changes with each generation. I think there reaches a maximum point where buildings must be preserved, and it comes at the expense of proper housing and good conditions.”
- “Character is important, but not at the cost of proper living conditions. Many houses that are considered 'character' homes are far below the standard of living we should be promoting in New Zealand. Furthermore, we forget that much of Wellington's charm and character comes from new builds within the city that wouldn't even fall under a category of heritage or character.”

## 8.2 What are your experiences of flatting in Wellington?

Our top responses were: unaffordable, cold, damp, mouldy, stressful, bad landlords, cramped.

Notable responses:

- “Mostly damp and cold, property managers are also the worst. Not alot of selection and what is available is overpriced and not liveable. My 2nd year flat gave me pneumonia from the mould”
- “Terrible quality of life in damp, mouldy, old houses. Single glazing, no insulation, no light, no heat. Also massively overpriced rent for this.”
- “I have a nice flat but they are incredibly hard to get and incredibly expensive. People are stopping coming to vic because they can’t afford to live here. This will completely change the makeup of our city if we don’t work out how to build more housing.”
- “Mainly poor. I’ve experienced verbally abusive property managers, mouldy flats where mushrooms grow, and sky-high rents”
- “I had an awful flatting experience last year - our bathroom leaked into our kitchen for 8 months and our landlord didn't do anything about it.”
- “Feral - people are sacrificing bare necessities of healthy homes in desperation. Landowners are preying upon vulnerable demographics and capitalising off their desperation.”
- “As I move from hall to flats it’s clear that my group and I are going to have to take whatever we can get, no matter how terrible it may be. Finding a flat in Wellington as first-years going into second-year, without contacts, is an absolute rat race. It’s emotionally draining and leads to huge anxiety. We feel like we are at the bottom of the pack - this shouldn’t be the case at all (everybody needs a place to live!)”
- “SO EXPENSIVE for poor quality places. lived in a large garage that had been converted into a tiny three-bedroom house in first year, still being charged \$220 EACH because it was on the terrace. It wasn’t safe (falling down a hill/walls detaching from other walls) and was

super damp and leaky. The problem is that landlords know that students are desperate and so we'll pay the extortionate price for anything - blatant exploitation"

### 8.3 What do you want Wellington to look like in 30 years?

Our top responses were: cheaper and more affordable, more green spaces, more community spaces, more sustainable, more accessible, safer, better flats, more reasonable rent, better public transport.

Notable comments:

- "More community based. More community spaces. My biggest prob and also fave thing with Welly is that everything is condensed into this tiny little compact CBD. It's great because you can walk everywhere once you're in the CBD, but means theres limited opportunity for living nearby the action. Would be cool to see smaller communities within the community, with essential shops and more community spaces, places to dine/hangout further out from the CBD. Kinda like Newtown but more widespread and less mouldy housing (: but I also think we should go up instead of out with housing development which is kind of contradicting to what I just said... maybe balance between the two. and green space and community gardens and most importantly, less cars."
- "More medium density inner-city housing with local business thriving as well as it is today without large multi-national companies taking over local business places."
- "More housing supply so that tenants can have more choice in where they live and landlords have to compete to maintain good tenants. Denser housing in the city centre and other central suburbs which would provide warm dry and hopefully reasonably priced accommodation."
- "A car free city center with low cost, high density housing. Lots of accessibility and safety for pedestrians and cyclists (more e-bikes around

would be good to see). Reliable and affordable public transport from outer suburbs, where people can still pursue their quarter-acre dream. I also want to ensure our cultural icons (places and people!) aren't priced out of the city or otherwise forced out.”

- “Every person should be able to have a house to live in, they should not have to be working two jobs to do survive”

#### 8.4 What do you want to keep in mind when Wellington City is designed?

Our top responses were:

- accessibility (especially considering Wellington’s geography),
- safety (especially for women),
- sustainability,
- environmentally friendly,
- quirky aesthetics,
- Te Ao Māori,
- accessibility to public transport.

#### 8.5 What amenities do you want to see more of in the city?

Our top responses were: public spaces, toilets, green spaces, safe zones, community gardens, more public artwork, expanded walking/cycling areas, another supermarket, footpaths, compost bins, bike parks/storage, picnic tables

- Majority of respondents wanted more green spaces.

#### 8.6 Other comments:

- “I currently have rent I can afford and ideal location but it comes with the cost of no sunlight causing issues with my health and studies and I struggle with wanting

to find a new place for my health but then also wanting to stay because it's the only place I can afford and is ideal location for uni.”

- “Resistance to the spatial plan seems like a waste of energy. Buildings with heritage value will still be protected with the passing of the plan.”
- “Students should not have to suffer financial debt to live in welly. Houses should be affordable and safe.”
- “Students shouldn’t have to suffer at the expense of heritage and rich old people.”

## **9. Consultation**

We are incredibly disappointed with the consultation process undertaken with the Spatial Plan. VUWSA had to reach out to councillors in order to understand the plan. As students are one of the key stakeholders in the future of the city, the council should have engaged in proactive consultation with Wellington’s student population from the plan's inception. Whilst councillors did visit community centres and residents' associations, these are inaccessible and not welcoming for young people. This plan disproportionately affects young people in the city and our experiences and needs must be taken into account respectively. It is unacceptable that we, as students, have had to fight to have our voices heard on an issue that will immensely impact our own futures.

Additionally, neither the way the council takes submissions on this plan, including navigation of the website, or the way the spatial plan is explained, are student friendly. In future, the Council must proactively consider the student voice, or risk alienating and negatively impacting a major stakeholder in the future of Wellington.

## **10. Conclusion**

This spatial plan is essential in creating a better future for students and young people in Wellington. We strongly support the spatial plan and ask our councillors to do the same. It will make a positive difference to our mental and physical health, cost of living, ability to study, and overall quality of life. To support this plan is to care about young people and our futures.