

Judith Bassett: Waterfront dream now within reach

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Successful waterfronts around the world have common factors. The good news is that in Auckland we now have everything we need to make it happen - a plan, Government interest and commitment, projects under way, collaboration. And now a significant impetus to get things moving - the Rugby World Cup in 2011.

Auckland Regional Holdings (ARH), which has a major role in these exciting developments, recently completed a study of 60 international waterfront renewal projects in 50 cities which highlighted some very interesting and encouraging information supporting current plans for the Auckland waterfront.



The 2011 Rugby World Cup gives Auckland the push it needs to get its waterfront in order. Photo / Brett Phibbs

The ARH research concentrated on the governance and delivery models of waterfronts - what worked, what didn't and why. It also looked at port precincts and how they inter-related with waterfront developments and central business districts (CBDs).

One surprising finding was that most successful international waterfront cities retained their deepwater working ports close by and integrated the ports precinct with the business district and harbour.

International experience has shown that to make the Auckland waterfront a world-class destination for people, it is essential to retain the vibrancy and atmosphere of the working waterfront. The port, marine and fishing industries which have shaped the economic success of Auckland will continue to be vital for the region's economy in its future.

This means cruise ships, ferries, fishing and marine activities and the working port linking seamlessly with the business district.

Another critical success factor for making a waterfront renewal succeed - and there were many examples of waterfronts around the world which started, stuttered and failed to deliver - was the need for integrated management of the whole of the waterfront with a masterplan to guide it.

An overarching vision for Auckland's waterfront is in place in the combined councils' "Waterfront Vision 2040".

Auckland City Council's masterplan for the waterfront will form the platform for more detailed work. The central business area and waterfront is also one of seven key programmes in Auckland Region's "One Plan" - an end result of collaboration and co-operation between councils and their agencies.

Regional Holdings research showed that an enhanced governance structure with a strong mandate to deliver a world-class waterfront can break down barriers caused by fragmented ownership. Interestingly, what's in place in Auckland now is not particularly fragmented - many waterfront developments around the world have been subject to multiple layers of governance approvals.

The current Super City plan for a waterfront development agency is probably a step in the right direction but with provisos. Our research found a single agency is not a "silver bullet" for success.

It needs a raft of other key success factors to make it happen. If any are missing, there's a higher risk of failure.

The other important success factors were control of the land, committed funding, appropriate phasing and timing, and co-operation and collaboration.

All of these features are reflected in the award-winning framework agreement between Auckland Regional Holdings and Auckland City Council which governs the funding, roles and terms for Wynyard Precinct's (Tank Farm) revitalisation of the waterfront area.

The Wynyard revitalisation project has the potential to be a world-class destination. It is a 25-year programme to transform 18ha of industrial land, ripe for redevelopment, into a vibrant, fishing and marine urban village with parks and retail areas.

The project is being rolled out under a comprehensive contractual agreement directed by Auckland Regional Holdings' company, Sea+City Projects Ltd, for the partners ARH and Auckland City Council.

Sea+City has its own high-calibre and commercially-skilled board with experienced chairman Kerry Stotter at the helm to drive a project of scale, duration and complexity. It is co-ordinating both public and private interests in this development, a connection which failed to happen in many waterfront renewal projects worldwide.

At London Docklands, for example, the Government lost control of the public realm and failed to provide supporting infrastructure for private investment.

The master-planning for Wynyard is based on a precinct by precinct roll-out, which has been the success pathway for other waterfront developments. Those that tried to do too much at one time ended up with poor, mismatched or incomplete developments.

Wynyard Quarter fills a unique role as the pilot for a range of initiatives which are strategically important at a city, regional and national level, such as quality urban design, sustainability and city building.

Improving the waterfront and its surrounds will improve Aucklanders' quality of life, the Government says. John Key has said that the plan for Auckland's waterfront could be a development whose speed and scale really does justify being called transformational. He urged Auckland leaders to make it happen.

It is happening. The purchase of and access to Queens Wharf is another major step forward. In the Wynyard Quarter, Jellicoe Street, North Wharf and Silo Park will be redeveloped by 2011 into a high-quality boulevard with shops, restaurants, working wharves and leisure attractions for families. And with a Rugby World Cup viewing area.

Major projects like Auckland City Council's planned Marine Events Centre have been brought forward. There is now a sense of urgency with the Government's commitment, the Rugby World Cup and Super City plans to not only make it happen but to do it well and deliver the waterfront Aucklanders have always dreamed about.

*** Judith Bassett is the chairwoman of Auckland Regional Holdings, which owns Ports of Auckland and 18ha of waterfront land within Wynyard Quarter. Also Sea+City Projects Ltd provides project leadership and management services to ARH (part of the Auckland Regional Council Group).**