

SOUTH WAIRARAPA DISTRICT COUNCIL

19 NOVEMBER 2014

AGENDA ITEM D1

VUW FEATHERSTON STUDY

Purpose of Report

To briefly inform Councillors of the outcomes of the student study, to put in place a process to evaluate the concepts presented and finally determine which concepts (if any) are worthy of further development and possible implementation.

Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Council:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Refer the study projects to the xxxxxxxxxx for further discussion and evaluation, particularly with respect to which aspects are practical, affordable and able to be implemented over time.*
3. *Request the review group to make recommendations back to Council and the FCB on which aspects should be further investigated and possibly developed into a strategic plan of works for Featherston.*

1. Executive Summary

In June of this year Council was approached by the Victoria University of Wellington School of Landscape Architecture about a proposal for 2014-15 Masters Course students to use Featherston as a case study for their master's papers.

After discussions with Bruno Marques, Lecturer; members of the FCB (Cr Robertson/Katie Beattie and myself, it was agreed that a partnership would be formed between Council and the University, whereby the students work would become available to Council and the community, as well as fulfil the academic requirements of the university.

The idea was that the study projects may assist Council in reviewing (looking at what was working and what might be improved) the town of Featherston and put forward ideas for the further development of the town and surrounding district.

These study projects were to be framed principally within the context of the landscape architecture discipline, although other aspects were to be covered

in a more conceptual way where they related to the landscape work e.g. transport and traffic flows.

The projects have now been presented to both Councillors and Community Board members over a two day period, starting with the group level plan or strategy and following through into individual student projects (subsets of the group plan/strategy).

Having now completed that process a public exhibition is taking place for Featherston citizens to view and discuss and consider the ideas presented by the students. A people's choice award is also in place for each individual project to be considered against.

This has led to some obvious questions about where to from here. This report puts forward a process for Council and the Community Board to consider, and reasons for following the proposed course.

2. Background

Council officers were approached in late June 2014 about the possibility of forming a partnership with Victoria University School of Landscape Architecture, to enable the master's students (2014-15 years) to use Featherston as their case study. This partnership was informally agreed on the 27 June 2014 and a formal agreement reached in early June and signed off in July.

The reason for entering into this partnership was because it offered to Council an affordable means of reviewing previous "plans" for redeveloping the centre of Featherston (were the earlier ideas – in broad terms – still valid, were there new ideas that should be considered); for developing town scale ideas for improving Featherston (residential streetscape/services design); and for assessing the role both current and future, of Featherston in the context of its wider environment (the lake, the south Wairarapa, the ranges and the activities that take place in/on these features).

This analysis was to be largely "opportunity" based; how could the landscape architecture ideas students formulated be of economic, social, cultural or environmental benefit to Featherston. Their concepts were to also focus on integrating all those elements, that is their ideas, were to pick up on as many of them as was possible.

The process followed for this study was two step. The first phase was for 7 student groups to identify a particular theme and form a master plan. This selection and initial workplan were supported by a series of workshops run for the students in Featherston.

At the workshops a wide range of information was presented to the students by a organisations and individuals. Council staff gave presentations on the history of the development of Featherston, current planning provisions, infrastructure, community issues, Council initiatives and interests. The regional council looked at water management, while DoC

focussed on Maori settlement and the lake. Local iwi also presented historical and current perspectives on the town and area.

The second step, involved establishing the key components of the master plan, with these to be worked on by individual students.

The outcome of the group level work was presented to interested parties at the university and in Featherston in the following 2 weeks, as part of a community exhibition in late August (21st). Feedback was received from the community representatives invited to the presentations in Wellington and an academic assessment was also completed.

The community exhibition in Featherston on the master plans attracted public attention and much feedback was provided to the students about their work.

Since then each student has been working on their own project arising from the group master plan. The master plans have also been further developed where the initial ideas did not fully satisfy course requirements or the priorities that Council had indicated to the students.

These priorities were dealing with town focussed issues as much as possible, ensuring the proposals were as practicable as possible, were reasonably affordable and could be implemented overtime.

The presentations to Council and the FCB on the 3rd and 4th of November signalled the end of development of the individual student projects and the master plans.

These master plans are now open for public viewing along with the master plans that led to them.

3. Where to from here

3.1 Limitations of student work

All the work presented by the students to date, has had the dual function of meeting academic learning requirements and informing Council about aspects of Featherston's landscape in a local and wider context. The focus of the student's studies has been on landscape architecture. What has been produced has shown a high degree of skill and thinking within that discipline.

The work is not however comprehensive in respect to many other necessary components (disciplines), so is not presently in a state whereby Council can simply pick it up and run with any aspect of it. Areas which need further analysis would include transportation planning, land ownership, landuse planning, services and infrastructure, and last but not least cost/affordability.

In addition, while the group and individual projects have many common themes, as a whole they present many different concepts often to resolve the same development issue (e.g. stormwater), any one of which might represent the best solution or right approach. Many of the concepts have

aspects that could be easily followed through on while at the same time having elements that would be difficult to proceed with, yet one is dependent on the other for success. Lastly, the concepts are just that, they need to be reviewed, brought together and further developed in a way that would enable a coherent, logical and realistic plan or strategy to be put together for Council to consider alongside all other potential projects within the district.

These three needs have been known from the beginning of the study process and so, are not a surprise in any way. This all needs though, to be assessed and put through a sifting process to get to some preferred ideas.

Additionally a structure and process to deal with the above issues is required to be put into place, if in general terms the Council wants to move the ideas presented by the students forward in a planned way.

3.2 Possible approach

Council has two or three options with respect to setting a structure in place to enable the students work to be reviewed and a programme to be established so as to take the ideas forward into a more comprehensive Strategy or Plan;

- a. Council itself could do this work as part of its normal meeting processes or alternatively through workshops. This may be favoured because of the potential resource/cost implications for Council of undertaking any Featherston project derived from the student's ideas. It enables Council to decide both design and scope issues.
- b. Council could ask the FCB to undertake this work and report back its findings. This retains Council's ability to decide the essential issue of cost and resources, but does not give it a lead role in terms of design and scope of a proposal.
- c. Council could task a smaller combined working group to undertake the work and report back to both the FCB and Council. This enables Council involvement in a partnership role with the FCB in all aspects of developing any project yet retains final decision making authority in terms of resources and cost should this be required.

Some form of working brief would need to be developed for this process as well, regardless of which structure is used. At each stage completion as below, a report to Council would be generated for sign-off. At this early date, this work might therefore be to;

- a. Sift through the students work and identify which master plans are of most interest to Council and within them which individual student projects should be followed up.
- b. Integrate the master plan and individual projects identified in stage 1 into one or two coherent packages for further investigation.
- c. Decide on the nature of the further investigation work required for those packages, the scope of that work, the cost and delivery

timelines and responsibility for doing or commissioning of consultants to do, that work.

3.3 Implications

The student projects have inadvertently provided both Council and the FCB with a series of challenges in general terms. Their ideas have a general appeal and could through interventions led by Council, result in a different form (future) for Featherston.

Of the many challenges the most important is to manage the process of considering the ideas in a way that does not create unrealistic expectations while at the same time informing the community about the ideas. The second challenge is to take from the student work those ideas that have real currency and which can be achieved, and being able to put them into a medium to long term programme or package (probably through the LTP) to ensure they happen in a logical, affordable and timely manner.

3.4 Financial Considerations

Any project to change or reform the urban fabric of a community, even in a small town such as Featherston, has potentially significant financial implications. Greening streets, stormwater treatment, pathways, urban design changes in the town centre, and transportation route changes can be expensive. Any such programme or package should therefore be carefully developed and then weighed up against the districts other needs and priorities (e.g. wastewater treatment) for affordability and necessity.

4. Conclusion

The Victoria University of Wellington School of Landscape Architecture masters students have undertaken a study of Featherston. They have developed a wide range of ideas at a conceptual level which Council can now consider. A process and structure to do this is needed. This report suggests in broad terms the options and what a brief for this task might look like. It is recommended that Council chooses its preferred structure and adds or changes the broad tasks to be undertaken, as it feels appropriate.

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