

APRIL 2015

## VICTORIA SQUARE

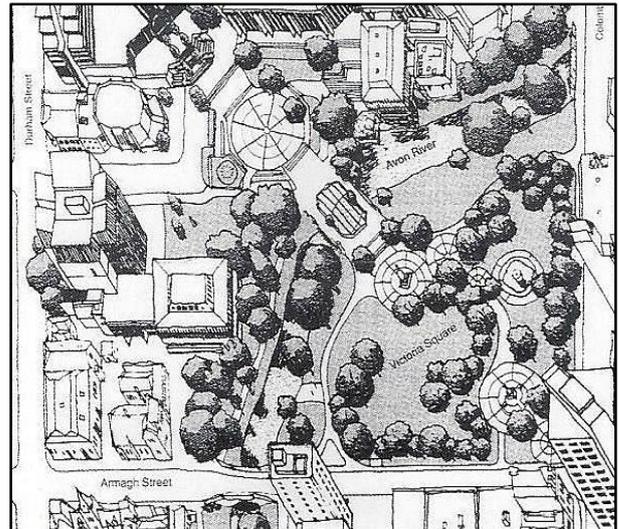
### We are Not Amused



Proposed design for Victoria Square

Without doubt, the quoted cost of around \$7million in taxpayer money to modify Victoria Square from the intact and much loved space that it is, to meet the vision of a few planners and dreamers, is beyond comprehension for the majority of Christchurch citizens. It is, in the eyes of those with sympathy for displaced red zone people and those still awaiting financial settlements, a travesty of justice to allocate such money to an unnecessary project, when other vital civic facilities are needed to replace those lost in the earthquakes.

It seems that those in decision-making positions can pick what they like from the Christchurch City Council's post-earthquake "Share an Idea" consultative exercise. There was no appetite evident in "Share an Idea" for modifying any of Christchurch's existing city green space squares. On the other hand, there was strong support for expanding green space. Therefore it is not surprising that since the public got wind of proposals to rearrange



Current design of Victoria Square

Victoria Square, there has been a rising ground swell of citizen opinion that seeks to retain Victoria Square as it is. This Square is an exemplar for the creation of similar tranquil contemplative areas elsewhere in the central city's rebuild.

The Avon River Precinct concept is promoted as a key project in the post-earthquake recovery plan for Christchurch. It is intended to enhance this water feature to let it remain an attractively landscaped corridor connecting significant spaces and places from the city to the sea, free of pollution and continuing its important role as a component of the city's drainage system. However, Victoria Square is not part of the Avon River precinct. It is a space that abuts that precinct.

To achieve the Avon River Precinct plan, there is no necessity to include a wholesale redesign of Victoria Square - an existing jewel that is part of Christchurch's diminished post-

## Chairman's Report

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In the months since our last newsletter, the Trust has been faced with a new issue. The decision by the CCDU to re-vamp Victoria Square with a much inferior design has raised some concern. The Civic Trust in collaboration with Historic Places Canterbury has formed a small sub-committee to make every effort to challenge the quite unnecessary spend of \$7 million on Victoria Square. We have to admit that there is damage to be repaired and this does need attention, but that is all. The destruction of an award-winning landscape architecture design is quite unwarranted. In many other more sophisticated Western societies, it would be an anathema to change a public space that really works.

On a more positive note, the Christchurch Arts Centre Trust Board Bill has been put out for public consultation, submitters have now been heard and we await a final decision. The new governance structure for Christchurch Arts Centre Trust Board is certainly timely in that it coincides with a new era in the life of the Christchurch Arts Centre.

Every so often we welcome new board members to the Trust and say farewell to others. The most recent is Prue Wignall, who was elected to the Board 22 years ago. Prue has given sterling service as a Board member and will be missed.

Early last month, the Civic Trust Board was pleased to host the internationally renowned heritage strategist and economist Donovan Rypkema, who was brought to New Zealand by Auckland Civic Trust to talk about heritage preservation and the economic benefits to Auckland.

This year marks a milestone in the history of Civic Trust as it turns and the Board plans to mark our Jubilee with celebrations later in the year. We will keep you informed.

-earthquake heritage.

Many citizens of Christchurch believe that Victoria Square should remain very much as it is now, providing an oasis for peaceful escape from the proposed nearby Convention Centre's commercial extravaganzas, as well as other hectic central city activity. Advocates for the retention of Victoria Square's present design suggest that it should not be subjected to changes to fit in with rebuilds that surround it, rather those rebuilds should be designed in sympathy with the existing square and its present functions.

The present design won a prestigious landscape award in 1989 from the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects. It now has numerous mature trees and landscape contours that contribute significantly to its general ambience. These trees would be at risk and would likely be removed if the CCDU's proposed design (now set aside while public consultation takes place) were to proceed.

It took some public outrage to achieve the change of heart leading to the general public's being consulted at all. It is to be hoped that the "setting aside" of the CCDU's plans is not just a pause to defuse the public outcry before continuing with the thrust of the now set-aside project.

However, the public questionnaire developed by the CCDU asks what changes would we as individuals or groups like to see take place, avoiding any suggestion of leaving the square largely untouched, apart from essential repairs to the Avon River bank and the Bowker Fountain. The Christchurch Civic Trust believes that there should not be an assumption of significant change and a new design emerging as the outcome of this public consultation.

Those who would redefine Victoria Square's functions seek to embrace commercialism and hustle and bustle, rather than the retention of the quiet ambience with which it is now associated. Community events memorial gatherings, rightly belong in of a civic nature, such as the ANZAC day Cathedral Square. Cathedral Square and

Victoria Square should be seen as complementary to each other, rather than functional duplicates. Cathedral Square certainly needs attention to landscaping commensurate with its on-going importance as the vital civic heart of Christchurch. Much of that redesign and restoration is on hold, pending resolution of the fate of the damaged Cathedral that for long has been the principal iconic symbol for the city.

Cathedral Square has hosted market stalls in the past and probably will in the future. One has to step back a long time in history to see Victoria Square used as a major market place. As it is now laid out, Victoria Square cannot easily accommodate market stalls. It would seem smarter to have them in Cathedral Square, or other places that can incorporate that function in any rebuilds. Festival-type activities that temporarily need substantial areas of flat ground can still be served by other inner city green spaces such as Cranmer and Latimer Squares.

There would likely be strong support for a covered City Market, like those in Adelaide and Melbourne, developed in a space in the East Frame, given that there is recent historical precedence for a produce market in that vicinity. A regular undercover city market, not confined to fresh produce, might enliven that city quadrant more than an intermittently used sports stadium. There is even scope for generous shared parking spaces more so than

for Victoria Square. If the sports stadium is still to be foisted on the city at great expense, then conceivably, the stadium design could include an undercover city market, bringing daily vibrancy and a steady rental income to help defray the stadium's running costs.

*Chris Kissling  
Deputy Chair Christchurch Civic Trust*

## **Visit of Donovan Rypkema**

On Sunday 8 March, the Civic Trust hosted a visit to Christchurch by Donovan Rypkema the President of Heritage Strategies International, Washington DC. This is a firm that works in heritage building conservation and economics to provide information to the public and various organisations. Heritage Strategies has worked with communities in 49 US states and 45 countries.



**Donovan Rypkema (centre) during the tour of the CBD**

Some members may recall a lecture at the Town Hall delivered by Donovan Rypkema in November 2010. On that occasion he was the guest of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Donovan's recent visit to Christchurch was made in advance of a programme of presentations organised by Civic Trust Auckland and Wellington Civic Trust that focused on the sustainability of heritage retention.

While in Christchurch Donovan was accompanied around the CBD, during the morning, by 4 board members of the Trust, the Southern regional manager of Heritage New Zealand and the Chair of Historic Places Canterbury. Donovan was also shown displays in Quake City and Shop 7 and visited the recently rebuilt Isaac Theatre Royal. In the afternoon he was taken on a tour of the Red Zone as well as Sumner and Lyttelton. The Trust feels that the visit was worthwhile, as it provided Donovan with a good impression of the 2011 disaster and the progress of recovery.

## Arts Centre Trust Board Bill

In February the Civic Trust, through Chairman, Neil Roberts, made an oral submission on the Arts Centre of Christchurch Bill to the Local Government and Environment Committee. The hearing was held in Christchurch and the Trust spoke in favour of the Bill.

The Civic Trust has been involved in The Arts Centre since its inception and has had a representative on the Arts Centre Trust Board since 1987. Our current representative, Margaret Austin, has been instrumental in the formation of this Bill. The Trust has recognised the ongoing restoration of buildings at the Arts Centre site recently, with a Civic Trust Award in 2013 for the Registry building.

The Trust believes that the Bill represents the interests of the wider Christchurch community in a way that had been missing in the recent governance of the Arts Centre.

The Bill creates a Parliamentary check on any future Board changing the objects of their trust deed. The Civic Trust will lose its direct representation on the Arts Centre Trust Board, but has been recognised, as a body, as part of a wider electoral college, able to nominate a person for consideration for a vacancy on the new skills-based Trust Board.

In the submission, the Trust made detailed comments on two issues.

The Bill describes in the preamble and Part 1, that the Arts Centre is a collection of *historic stone buildings*. This is an archaic reference that probably relates back to the original 1978 Trust Deed. The point being that there are heritage buildings on the site that are only partly constructed of stone and others, notably the former Students' Association building, which have no stone construction.

The Civic Trust would also want to see the Arts Centre site recognised as a single entity.

The recent redefinition of land titles in 2010 tidied up some cadastral inconveniences that suited a redevelopment proposal at the time. It does leave open a door for the disposal of part of the site. This Bill sees the site as a single entity, but does not address this specific concern.

*Tim Hogan*

## Prue Wignall Retires from the Board

It is with regret that we must say farewell to Prue Wignall, who has been a valued member of the Civic Trust Board since 1993. Prue was Treasurer of the Trust from 1993 until 2002 and has served on various sub-committees. She has proof read the Trust newsletter for many years.

Prue has retired from the Board because she is moving from Christchurch. We wish her and her husband all the very best in their new life in Nelson.

## Civic Trust Jubilee

As many will be aware, the Christchurch Civic Trust was formed in May 1965. In recognition of this, the Trust Board will hold a major celebratory event for the membership in October. We also intend to publish a revised and updated version of the history of the Civic Trust '*Civic Pride Civic Trust*', written by John Wilson in 2005. There will be other events in conjunction with the Jubilee year yet to be advised.

