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## Submission on Palmerston North Reserves Empowering Amendment Bill

### To:

Committee Secretariat,  
Environment Committee,  
Parliament,  
Wellington.

### Contact Details:

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### Background:

Environment Network Manawatu is the environment hub for the Manawatu Region with the key purpose of facilitating and enabling communication, cooperation, and increasing collective action amongst its member groups and the wider community. ENM provides leadership by underpinning, fostering, and encouraging environmental initiatives in the region and our 60 current member groups are from throughout the Manawatu River Catchment with interests including biodiversity regeneration, freshwater management, citizen science, food security and resilience, sustainable living, alternative energies, and active transport. The network is organised into two collective focus areas: Manawatu Food Action Network and Manawatu River Source to Sea.

We have 10 part-time staff and rely on our many volunteers for most of the ground action. We have consistently worked with Palmerston North City Council to achieve our mutual goals and community driven outcomes for our city.

ENM supports the submission to this committee from Railway Land Action Group.

## Submission:

### General Comment:

The site: The Huia Street land is located on one of the city's busiest intersections (so named as Huia Street once gave access to this land.) At peak times up to 30 cars can be backed up in any direction waiting to turn or drive through this intersection and all this where and when children are getting to and from nearby schools. Any intensive streetscape housing would add to the congestion and affect visibility across the corner between Fitzherbert Ave and Park Road. As Council are not now required to provide car parks on site, this could add to the cars parked in the vicinity, further increasing the risks associated with pedestrian street crossing and cycling.

Being at the city entrance to the exposed Ongley Park sportsgrounds on a hard surfaced corner there is need and opportunity for a sheltered landscape where people can get respite from winds and heat. It is ideally suited for seating for students and passers-by and as a community space with much potential.

In 1876 this Reserve area was set aside as public park, recreation ground and botanical garden. The Council's proposal for this land suggests that sale or development would help fund recreational projects. Recreational interests in the city are well provided for. There are many sports facilities in the city but no place where teaching environmental protection can happen within the living environment. There is no green space currently where people can go to learn about the wider environment and how they might interpret, conserve, and interact with it.

In 1876 and 1922, when the land was protected in legislation, the environmental concerns of today were not a consideration, but the value of public well-being and the environment's role in that, was well understood and accordingly enshrined in the Reserves Act.

As an Eco-City (one of the PNCC's goals), we should show this "Reservation" and spirit still holds meaning in something tangible and beneficial to us all, just as sports, theatre and arts facilities show that these are important. A Reservation also contains the Principle of Public ownership. An Eco-City should preserve green space especially in strategic sites which we are fortunate enough to have had retained as Reserve by the city's forebearers.

The 2006 effort to lift the Reserve status resulted in the Committee Chairperson stating that one of the reasons for the Bill not proceeding was that "there was uncertainty as to a Community Mandate behind the Bill". **This situation has not changed.** Following the failure of the 2006 Bill the land was left to become unsightly, resulting in some people in the community having a "get on with it" attitude as they just want it to look good and be used. In 2019 the Council staff made a recommendation to the Council in the form of a proposal to use the land for intensive housing and 3 visual options were presented. This together with 4 other suggestions went out to the public in a brochure with only housing (option 1) pictorially represented. There were no other pictorial represented options. Understandably we like to see what the site could look like.

80 submitters responded:

- Op 1. 32 supported a housing option
- Op 2. 3 supported landbanking
- Op 3. 34 supported remaining as reserve
- Op 4. 20 supported seeking community input
- Op 5. 0 supported a commercial purpose

1 seemed not to support housing but didn't state what they did prefer. 10 of the submitters supported both Options 3 and 4

47 out of 80 submitters specifically did not want housing on the site. Even with a flawed process, where the options were not given equal status and in fact swayed towards housing, it is evident that housing is not preferred by the public for this site. Any other options have not at any time been explored and the dereliction of the site is of choice and not because it is surplus to our needs.

It is acknowledged that Council staff needed to give their preferred option as part of their process, but the public now needs a robust genuine consultation process to input into the future use of their land. In Council's submission to this Committee it is stated that they give evidence of the consultation process. Consulting, according to Justice McGechan in respect to the RMA, stated that "Consulting involves the statement of a proposal not yet finally decided upon...". There would have been few recipients of the Council's brochure who would not have seen it as a fait accompli. It is also stated that this decision is "not significant" and that it supports its housing strategy. We believe that it is exceedingly significant and that it breaches the spirit of the Eco City goal.

In line with the 2006 Select Committee Chairperson's recommendation, ENM supported option 4 where the Council proposed to undertake a consultation exercise and engage with key stakeholders to consider proposals for the use of the site for a recreational, cultural or community purpose. This has not happened at any stage in relation to this land.

### Recommendations:

ENM recommends that the land remains in public ownership until such time as the public determines the plan and use that they prefer for this land.

ENM recommends a preferred option could include on the south and eastern boundaries some building and or housing, which would demonstrate renewable energy and incorporate the latest technology for water conservation and healthy buildings as part of the development, landscaping could include fruit trees, a community garden, plant nursery, children's garden and a perfumed garden to replace that which was removed when WildBase was built, and several sheltered seating areas closer to the corner. Any future presentation to the public for genuine consultation should include such a pictorial and descriptive option.

ENM recommends that this land not be listed at surplus to the city's requirements.

ENM recommends that PNCC proves that the term and goal of an Eco-City is not just a trendy catch phrase but a serious commitment to participate in working with the Environment Sector and the city to find and implement practical solutions to our particular local problems and inspire transition.

ENM supports the development of this site, but under the provision and assurance that this is done for long term community and environmental benefit and not intensive residential housing as proposed.

