

# Ngati Whakaue Leads the way with a 100 year Rotorua Eastern Blocks Structure Plan



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## Abstract

Ngati Whakaue are leading the way for other iwi in the strategic planning of their 1,500ha Rotorua Eastern Blocks, located 4km from Rotorua CBD. In order to reduce the nitrate and phosphate run off into streams and lakes (as a result of past farming practices) and to provide a holistic use of the land, Ngati Whakaue in association with Beca have also developed a Structure Plan for a smaller 150ha area. The Structure Plan provides guidance for the protection, use and development of this smaller area of land known as the Wharenui Road Area for the next 15 to 20 years. This vision is based on the following urban design principles:

- Raising the bar – providing a benchmark for future Rotorua development initiatives (large areas of open space, safe pedestrian friendly walkways and cycleways and an active reserve)
- To serve cultural needs, and reconnect people with the land.
- A blend of urban and rural and live/work/play.
- Enhancing the amenity of natural features and providing heritage reserves (e.g. extensive gully systems and diverse ecologically significant vegetation).
- Promote sustainability via green corridors, cycling and walking tracks.

The most unique aspect of this project is that it is a Maori land development initiative where Maori would retain land ownership over some of the area.

The Structure Plan area known as the Wharenui Road Area (WRA) will provide for a mix of quality residential housing, neighborhood reserves, a village commercial centre, and walk-and-cycleway links. There is potential to develop about 1,000 residential units, accommodating a potential population of around 2,000-3,000 people.

The Structure Plan is currently going through a private plan change process with Rotorua District Council.

## Introduction

Ngati Whakaue are leading the way for other iwi in strategic planning. This paper provides a case study for how the development arm of an iwi organization can successfully develop and implement a structure/master plan and how this form of governance achieves good planning outcomes. In relation to the conference theme of 'Planning Pathways for the Future' and the work session theme of 'Governance and striding ahead/showing the way' we will also highlight the unique issues and solutions of iwi planning and how they can be utilized elsewhere.

Initially we will set the scene by explaining the iwi organizations interests and Rotorua land holdings. This will be followed by an explanation of how the Master Plan was developed and implemented. We will highlight the good planning outcomes achieved by Ngati Whakaue by examining iwi planning lessons learned.

## Background

Ngati Whakaue Tribal Lands Inc is a major land owner in Rotorua are made up of approximately 4,500 Maori shareholders. They have a vested interest in the long term (100 years plus) to:

- Improve and safeguard of customary lands;
- Maximise shareholder wealth; and
- Provide benefits to the Incorporations shareholders and beneficiaries in a way that improves their opportunities in life.

The organisations visions include:

- **By 2010:** Grow its net asset base to \$100 million and broadened its focus and investments to become a leader in farming, tourism and other key economic sectors in NZ and internationally.
- **By 2020:** Be recognised nationally and internationally as an excellent organisation with a portfolio of high performing, sound investments in key sectors of the national and international economy.

In order to achieve their purpose and visions recently Ngati Whakaue have investigated a number of potential sustainable development opportunities for 1,500ha of their Rotorua Eastern Blocks of land. These blocks are known as the Wharenui Block, Brent Block and Gee Blocks located 4km east of Rotorua CBD (refer to Attachment 1).

## Master Plan & Structure Plan

The Master Plan aims to provide for a blend of urban and rural and live/work/play lifestyles and to raise the bar for development in Rotorua. In order to meet this Ngati Whakaue undertook extensive investigations into ecology, landscape, transportation, geotechnical, soil contamination, infrastructure, urban design, social and cultural components of work for the Rotorua Eastern Blocks. A constraints and opportunities plan was developed as a result of these investigations and workshops undertaken to develop a comprehensive master plan for the future development, protection and use of the Rotorua Eastern Blocks (refer to Attachment 2). This work was complemented with stakeholder and public consultation input. The Master plan shows opportunities for living, working and playing in residential, commercial, and business zones and promotes sustainability via green corridors, cycling and walking tracks, and potential reserve locations.

This larger Master Plan was then split into stages of development which are being progressed through separate Structure Plans. The first stage covers a 150ha area known as the Wharenui Road Area (WRA) and provides for a mix of quality residential housing, neighborhood reserves, a village with a commercial heart, and walk-and-cycleway links (Attachment 3). There is potential to develop over 1,000 residential units and lots, accommodating a potential population of 2,000-3,000 people.

The Structure Plan has been heard as a private plan change to the Rotorua District Plan and is currently (as of 4th March 2010) awaiting Council's decision.

## Difficulties with Iwi Planning & Potential Solutions

There are a number of difficulties faced with in iwi planning including:

- a) Retaining land ownership
- b) Balancing the practical needs of Maori with financial benefits
- c) Ensuring good design to raise the bar of residential housing
- d) Protecting waahi tapu sites
- e) Timing

### a) Retaining Land Ownership

One of the most difficult tasks in the development of the Master and Structure Plan was how to retain the ownership of land by developing it.

### i) Leasehold Options

The Brent & Gee land blocks have the potential to be sold as freehold properties, whereas the Wharenui block is held within multiple Maori ownership. The Master Plan was developed to reflect this potential landownership. For example, most of the areas highlighted for residential development are located within the Brent and Gee blocks. The Wharenui block is therefore complemented with activities which could more easily be leasehold e.g. commercial areas, reserves, rural farming activities, forestry, schools, a retirement home; and tourist operation (resort). There are also residential areas within the Wharenui block, however these would be held in longer term, 100year plus, leases. Economic studies indicate that if the lease period is long enough to provide certainty and security residential leases can work effectively.

### ii) Memorandum of Understanding

Another mechanism trialed in order to address issues like land ownership of key infrastructure such as a water reservoir was the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Ngati Whakaue developed an MOU which covered:

- **Rates, Development Impact Fees and Reserve contributions** - This segment sought the consideration of rates, development impact fees and reserve contributions in a holistic manner. For example the provision of onsite reserves, walkways, cycle ways and district recreation facility and the establishment works of these facilities would be undertaken by Ngati Whakaue and may be accounted for and balanced against the Reserve Development Contribution for each new residential lot created as required by the Council's development contributions policy. These provisions would be assessed annually and reconciled on a 5 year basis.
- **Public infrastructure** – Each facility will be subject to a separate agreement between Council and Ngati Whakaue. Excerpts are summarized below:
- **Roading** - Ngati Whakaue to construct to Council's standards and agreed level of service, then once agreed by Council they would be maintained and operated by Council over a public right of way or Maori roadway;
- **Stormwater Management** - stormwater management systems shall be designed and constructed by Ngati Whakaue in accordance with Council standards and subject to the granting of appropriate Regional Council consents and the conditions and all land used for stormwater overland flow paths, channels, swales and treatment ponds to remain in legal ownership of Ngati Whakaue (subject to access, operation and maintenance easements in favour of the Council).
- **Potable water supply** - the development would be on town supply of water,
- **Wastewater reticulation** -all development where possible would be serviced by a reticulated wastewater system connected to Council's wastewater treatment plant.
- **Recreation reserves** – all ownership of all recreational reserves shall remain with Ngati Whakaue and shall be subject to an easement in gross for public access over the land for specified recreational purposes consistent with public use of a recreational reserve.
- **Regional sports field** – Council want to provide for a regional sports field on the eastern side of

the city. Ngati Whakaue would make the site available for that purpose for Council to lease for a term of 99 years at a fair market rental.

- **Walkway and cycle way linkages** – ownership of land over which walkways and cycle ways are situated will remain with Ngati Whakaue and shall be subject to easements that provide for public use.
- **Rural land uses and riparian margins** – Riparian margins and ephemeral overland flow paths shall be protected from stock.

An MOU covering the financial elements of the project is essential for any Structure Plan as it provides certainty and reduces financial risk.

This memorandum was not recommended by the CEO to Council for approval. One of the reasons for this is due to Ngati Whakaue's desire to retain the underlying ownership of land for infrastructure. Leasehold is the way of the future, and it is important for Council's to understand the increasing importance of this option as it relates to Maori owned land.

The MOU will however, prove a useful tool for other iwi/hapu organizations.

## **b) Balancing the needs vs financial gain for Ngati Whakaue People**

Another challenge in the development of the Master Plan and Structure Plan was to balance the needs of the Ngati Whakaue people by providing for affordable housing with the level and type of high quality development required to financially benefit Ngati Whakaue shareholders and beneficiaries, while still achieving the purpose of safeguarding and improving customary lands and creating good planning outcomes. It is the intention to provide for affordable housing pepper-potted throughout the Structure Plan area. International case studies show how affordable housing can be provided within high-end residential developments without the stigma associated with it, as the affordable houses are all the same as neighboring houses. The affordable homes are initially funded/subsidized by the developer, once on sold there are a range of options which include retaining the subsidized amount or returning to free market values.

The structure plan provides for a range of housing opportunities including conventional, medium density and residential lifestyle (rural residential).

There are other work opportunities for Ngati Whakaue people provided through the construction of the development areas and in the establishment of commercial and business areas which will attract offices and industries.

### **c) How to ensure good residential design**

The Master Plan and Structure Plan aim to raise the bar of residential housing in Rotorua. In order to avoid any potential negative outcome the development of the Structure Plan area (Wharenui Road Area) and associated plan change was focused on sound urban design measures/controls. For example, creating Appendix G3.1 an entire section focused on Urban Design Assessment Criteria and conditions around Site Planning, Streetscape and Compatibility, House Planning, Vehicle Access & Parking, Fencing, Soft Landscaping, and Site Facilities and Accessory Structures.

In order to provide the link to customary land there are other cultural opportunities provided in the Master Plan such as naming of streets, reserves, walkways, and buildings (e.g. schools) and urban design opportunities with pou, display signs, placards perhaps acknowledging founding members on stones, particularly in open spaces/reserves, entranceways etc.

### **d) Protecting Waahi Tapu Sites**

The Master Plan & Structure Plan were developed by first of all highlighting the areas of opportunities and constraints. Part of this involved the outcomes of a cultural assessment which highlighted key areas such as:

- Pukepoto Pa
- the Waingaehe Stream

These areas have been able to be protected/preserved in the development of the Master Plan by setting them aside from development and providing for stormwater corridors with opportunities for revegetation,

### **c) Development of Master Plan & Structure Plan Timing**

Given that the Master Plan and Structure Plan are Ngati Whakaue initiated, lead and managed projects, the mandate for the development of the area was already agreed too by the Ngati Whakaue people and there was no delay in consultation feedback from Ngati Whakaue.

The Master Plan, Structure Plan and associated Plan Change for the Wharenui Road Area was developed and processed in a relatively short time (within 2 years). Another essential factor in the success of the plan change in terms of the short timeframe undertaken to develop and process it, is a close working relationship with Rotorua District Council. They were provided with, and commented on, the draft plan change prior to lodgment and were very responsive and open to regular (sometimes weekly) meetings.

### **Conclusion**

Ngati Whakaue is leading the way with strategic iwi planning in the comprehensive development of the Master Plan and Structure Plan for the Rotorua Eastern Blocks. This case study has provided one example of how an iwi organization are improving their lands and incomes for Ngati Whakaue people through good planning practice. This also provides a learning experience in iwi development planning where lessons can be utilized by others in particular: how to retain ownership of land, balancing the provision of affordable housing with the financial and work opportunities of derived out of development, ensuring good residential design, protecting key sites and working closely with council.