

Towards a Better Understanding of Planning for Urban Intensification: Case Study of Auckland, New Zealand

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Abstract : In 2010, New Zealand's central government re-organise the local governments arrangements in Auckland, New Zealand by amalgamating its previous regional council and seven supporting local government units into a single unitary council, the Auckland Council. The Auckland Council is charged with providing local government services to approximately 1.5 million people (a third of New Zealand's total population). This includes addressing Auckland's strategic urban growth management and setting its urban planning policy directions for the next 40 years. This is expressed in the first ever spatial plan in the region - the Auckland Plan (2012). The Auckland plan supports implementing a compact city model by concentrating the larger part of future urban growth and development in, and around, existing and proposed transit centres, with the intention of Auckland to become globally competitive city and achieving 'the most liveable city in the world'. Turning that vision into reality is operationalized through the statutory land use plan, the Auckland Unitary Plan. The Unitary plan replaced the previous regional and local statutory plans when it became operative in 2016, becoming the 'rule book' on how to manage and develop the natural and built environment, using land use zones and zone standards. Common to the broad range of literature on urban growth management, one significant issue stands out about intensification. The 'gap' between strategic planning and what has been achieved is evident in the argument for the 'compact' urban form. Although the compact city model may have a wide range of merits, the extent to which these are actualized largely rely on how intensification actually is delivered. The transformation of the rhetoric of the residential intensification model into reality is of profound influence, yet has enjoyed limited empirical analysis. In Auckland, the establishment of the Auckland Plan set up the strategies to deliver intensification into diversified arenas. Nonetheless, planning policy itself does not necessarily achieve the envisaged objectives, delivering the planning system and high capacity to enhance and sustain plan implementation is another demanding agenda. Though the Auckland Plan provides a wide ranging strategic context, its actual delivery is beholden on the Unitary Plan. However, questions have been asked if the Unitary Plan has the necessary statutory tools to deliver the Auckland Plan's policy outcomes. In Auckland, there is likely to be continuing tension between the strategies for intensification and their envisaged objectives, and made it doubtful whether the main principles of the intensification strategies could be realized. This raises questions over whether the Auckland Plan's policy goals can be achieved in practice, including delivering 'quality compact city' and residential intensification. Taking Auckland as an example of traditionally sprawl cities, this article intends to investigate the efficacy plan making and implementation directed towards higher density development. This article explores the process of plan development, plan making and implementation frameworks of the first ever spatial plan in Auckland, so as to explicate the objectives and processes involved, and consider whether this will facilitate decision making processes to realize the anticipated intensive urban development.

Keywords : urban intensification, sustainable development, plan making, governance and implementation

Conference Title : ICSAUD 2018 : International Conference on Sustainable Architecture and Urban Design

Conference Location : Stockholm, Sweden

Conference Dates : July 12-13, 2018