8 January 2008

Submission to the Rotorua District Council

Revitalisation of the Central Business District

The Rotorua Chamber of Commerce (RCC) makes the following submission on behalf of the business community towards creating a vibrant Central Business District for Rotorua.

In preparing this submission the RCC has taken cognisance of the feedback and opinions of its members gained over the last three years.

- A series of meetings with the CBD Revitalisation Focus Group comprising representatives of individual and national retailers, property developers, Ready to Retail (Retail Rotorua), Chamber of Commerce, and Destination Rotorua Economic Development.
- A series of meetings and workshops undertaken by Opus International Consultants and attended by retailers, developers and other interested parties.
- A meeting with Vision Rotorua – a think tank of business leaders from the Rotorua community at which a number of the issues related to the CBD were discussed.
- A meeting with industry representatives of the Tourism Advisory Board at which a number of issues related to the CBD were discussed.
- A web-based survey of the membership of the RCC that included a specific section on the CBD
- Personal interviews with individual Chamber of Commerce members

The RCC acknowledges and commends the Rotorua District Council (RDC) on the formal consultation process that it is undertaking in relation to the CBD Revitalisation Project. We have elected to submit a more formal submission as many of the issues referred to in the consultation response form are inter-related.

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The RCC sees a wonderful opportunity to develop a Central Rotorua that adds a new dimension to further enhance Rotorua's position as the leading tourist destination in New Zealand and provide a facility that can be enjoyed by visitors and residents alike.

The following points of the submission are not prioritised but considered as important to an integrated development of the city centre.

An integrated Centre City Rotorua

The Central Business District (CBD) should be considered as that area defined by Victoria Street, Hinemaru Street, Ranolf Street, Lake Road and the Lakefront. The retail area known as Rotorua Central should be considered an integral part of the CBD.

The development of the CBD project and the development of the Lakefront project should be integrated to ensure a coordinated and seamless visitor/ resident attraction.

The recent developments in Rotorua Central, with the opening of a number of new stores, has moved this area towards its capacity as a larger outlet retailing centre. The combined retail area as defined above may now be too large as a retail precinct for the current resident and visitor base of Rotorua and to sustain viable commercial activity throughout 12 months of the year. This view is supported by the number of empty premises within the area and the length of time to lease. There is also anecdotal evidence from a number of retailers that the last couple of years have been a difficult trading period.

Victoria Street Development

As a major highway through the city, Amohau Street dissects the area that is defined as the CBD. It also acts as a separation between Rotorua Central and the rest of the CBD. It is difficult to envisage the full integration of Rotorua Central with the rest of the CBD without the removal of that dissection. With the development of Victoria Street, Amohau Street would become an inner city lateral street similar to Eruera Street and provide additional parking facilities. It would therefore be an advantage to planning of the CBD if the proposed roading changes were made in the early stages of the development.

The ideal situation would be that the Mall within Rotorua Central, the crossing of Amohau Street, and Tutanekai Street all become part of the precinct with preference given to pedestrian traffic.

A Central Spine for the City

Because of the questionable retail viability across the whole of the CBD (as defined above) the development should concentrate, during the initial stages, on creating a strong viable spine. This spine should start at the southern end with the Mall area within Rotorua Central, flow down Tutanekai Street and merge into the Lakefront. The opportunity provided by this combined development could create an enhanced

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tourist attraction for the city, rather than the current CBD which may be considered more of a retail service area.

There are a number of additional considerations that would enhance this central spine:

A line of sight. Create a line of sight from Rotorua Central down Tutakekai Street to capture the view of Lake Rotorua. This takes advantage of the landmark feature of the Lake and would link in with the storyline of Hinemoa, Tutanekai and Lake Rotorua. This would require the relocation of the services currently provided by the City Focus building (but not necessarily the streetscape features and sails).

Removal of the City Focus Building. The City Focus as a concept has contributed to the image of Inner City Rotorua. However, recently with the development of Rotorua Central and the change in pedestrian traffic, it has become a barrier. There is a perceived difference between the area of Tutanekai south from the City Focus to Rotorua Central and from The City Focus north. The one way system that is in place turning to and from Tutanekai Street into Hinemoa Street is a challenge for visitors to negotiate their way around the city. It is acknowledged that the services provided by the information centre in the City Focus and the work undertaken by the City Focus Manager have been considerable. The control of tagging and unsavory behaviour has maintained an improved image for the CBD. This service should be continued but may be provided from another outlet.

Tutanekai Pedestrian Precinct. Establish Tutanekai Street as a Pedestrian Precinct. The Rotorua Chamber recognise that for some retail premises along Tutanekai Street there are limitations with the availability of adequate service lanes. It would therefore be practical that the precinct be pedestrian only. However, it could be established as a single lane one way traffic street.

Remove Angle Parking. To further enhance the pedestrian areas, the current angle parking should be removed and replaced with limited short-term (15 minutes) parallel parking loading bays. This could alternate first one side of the road then the other. Foot traffic count is a key criterion when considering whether or not to establish an outlet in a retail precinct. Perpetuating the behavior of shoppers wanting to park their car directly outside the shop does little to generate foot traffic. It is the understanding of the RCC that a recent study of parking in the CBD conducted by the RDC indicated that a considerable percentage of parking spaces were taken by retail outlet staff and operators. A visit to the CBD at 9 am on most mornings will discover a number of spaces occupied by cars. It is unlikely that these will be owned by early morning shoppers. The RCC has received complaints by retailers about other retailers occupying parking spaces in front of their retail outlet.

Additional Parking Facilities. The creation of a pedestrian precinct along Tutanekai Street would see a reduction in the number of parking spaces available in the CBD. This could be compensated by

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- Better utilisation of the Hinemoa Street parking building.
- Encouragement of worker vehicle parking in free all day parking in the fringe areas of the CBD.
- Encouragement of public transport utilisation and cycle use (as suggested in a recent discussion proposal from the RDC).
- Further development of the Haupapa Street car park opposite the Library building.

Street Scaping. The creation of increased pedestrian space along Tutanekai Street would be an opportunity to incorporate more street-scaping. Planters and tree islands could enhance the natural feel of the street. Island retail units selling a variety of goods including food and beverage could add considerable flavour to the street. Modern park type benches could also provide casual seating

Weather Protection. The RCC recommends that some form of all weather protection be considered along Tutanekai Street (providing protection from inclement weather and from UV during fine and hot days). This could be achieved by extending the sails concept both north and south along Tutanekai Street from the current large sail feature in the city focus. This concept was included in a submission made to the RDC by the CBD Revitalisation Focus Group in September 2005. It had the full support of the Retailers organisation Ready To Retail. Two sails would be installed in each of the four blocks of Tutanekai Street – Amohau/Eruera, Eruera/Hinemoa, Hinemoa/ Pukuatua and Pukuatua/Haupapa. Quotes obtained at the time indicated a purchase and installation cost per 20 square metre of approximately $11,000. The provision of some form of cover would enhance the shopping environment and the aesthetic appeal of the pedestrian precinct.

Lateral Streets. The lateral streets, Eruera, Hinemoa and Pukuatua all become two-way traffic from Amohia to Fenton streets.

There are many examples of recent retail developments that have incorporated pedestrian precincting as a successful concept. Amongst these are Emerson Street in Napier, several streets in Wellington city, Rundell Street (now Rundell Mall) in Adelaide. Rundell Mall is now promoted as one of the tourist attractions of Adelaide and is a feature enjoyed by visitors and residents alike. Emerson Street is Napier is well utilized particularly for events such as the Art Deco Festival.

Relocation of the Court Building

The feedback received by the RCC indicates that there is strong support for the relocation of the Court Building from the Haupapa/Arawa block of Tutanekai Street. The environment created by the client base of the Courts is in conflict with that required for a positive visitor and resident experience of what is the main thoroughfare of Rotorua. Many people feel threatened by the image and behavior of the gatherings to support those appearing. The images that are transmitted through the media are in conflict with the image of Rotorua as a friendly and safe tourist and

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resident city. It contributes to the external negative perceptions of the city, one of the challenges identified by the Bright Economy Advisory Board. Although the RCC acknowledges that this relocation would present a considerable challenge, it urges the RDC to commence discussion with the Justice Department to investigate its relocation. It is the Rotorua Chamber's opinion that the continued presence of the building, its function and its client base in this site would have a considerable negative impact on the investment made in redeveloping the CBD and Lakefront.

Grand Avenues

The Chamber of Commerce supports the concept of the Grand Avenues as outlined in the Opus Report. The enhancement of these major routes around the city by landscaping to create tree lined boulevards would visually enhance the CBD.

City Plaza and an Arts Precinct

Should the relocation of the Justice Department services be achieved and Arawa Street and Haupapa Street become Grand Avenues, there would be an opportunity for that section of Tutanekai Street to be a City Plaza (also a recommendation of the Opus Report). The Chamber of Commerce supports the creation of additional 'green' spaces within the CBD. The environment of a plaza or square and the surrounding area would be ideal for the creation of an arts precinct. The Courts building could be converted to an Arts Centre and create an added dimension to the Plaza. Already there have been a small number of arts related outlets that have established in that vicinity. The proximity of the café culture to the arts precinct would be complementary.

Food and Beverage Facilities.

The establishment of 'The Streat' as the entertainment precinct of the CBD and the growth of a café culture in Rotorua has resulted in this area becoming well established. Conceptually focused on the Pukaki/Whakaue block of Tutanekai Street it has now spread into the Arawa Street/Pukaki Street block and east down Arawa Street. There have been a number of food and beverage facilities that have opened in other areas of the CBD notably NB's Restaurant and Bar, and the Shed. Some of the existing food and beverage outlets offer pavement dining in an area to the curbside, others have only a limited yardage for tables, whilst others offer no facility at all. The current legislative environment is inconsistent.

Throughout New Zealand and in many overseas destinations, *al fresco* dining has become a feature of café society. There are numerous examples of restaurant precincts that have developed along this theme and not all are in destinations with guaranteed climate. Protection by overhead shades and side drop walls with a variety of heating devices see use of the facilities in a variety of weather conditions – Wellington provides a good example. The visitor to Rotorua cares little for the licensing distinctions between one form of outlet and another. The RCC would like to see a consistent legislative environment that applies to all food and beverage outlets to enable *al fresco* dining and extended use of pavement space.

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Creation of a Special Tourism/Retail Zone

The integrated development of the CBD and the Lakefront, and the creation of a strong CBD spine along Tutanekai Street provide an opportunity for the City to create a special Tourist/Retail Zone within the District Plan. The conditions and characteristics applied to this Zone could enable the RDC to on one hand encourage the types and styles of developments that would contribute to a tourist/resident experience; inhibit the development of outlets that detract from the concept, and identify legislative requirements (such as food and beverage *al fresco* dining) that apply only to outlets within that zone. The Chamber suggests that the Zone contain the Mall within Rotorua Central, Tutanekai Street and the defined Lakefront area.

Inner City Living

The RCC supports the concept of inner city living. Most residents of a suburb have a particular interest in what happens in their neck of the woods. The development of a community within the CBD would consider the area as 'their' suburb and would take a degree of ownership over its environment and culture. There is a sector of today's society that enjoys the facilities of inner city living, the proximity of the shopping, and the walking distance to the restaurants, with little concern for the need to tend the gardens. The pedestrian activity created by these residents outside of normal business hours would be increased. This would have the result of reducing the level of unsavory behavior.

There are a number of buildings in the CBD that are in need of redevelopment or refurbishment. The difficulty of trading in the current retail environment and the impact that has on achievable lease values does not encourage property owners to redevelop. The opportunity to a have a mixed development with retail on the ground floor and residential or office development on the floors above offers the opportunity for considerably greater return on the development investment.

The RCC acknowledges that there may be a number of challenges in providing inner city living. The requirement to provide on-site parking would be a barrier for some, particularly where access or available space is a factor. However, flexible solutions to provide off-site parking either in existing parking facilities or by couponed parking in other areas.

A Combined Local/Intercity Bus Terminal Interchange

With the impact of the trans-Tasman capability of the airport, and the resultant change in tourist travel patterns, there is a strong probability that the current Tourism Travel Centre provision of Inter-city Coach Services will be insufficient to meet demand. The local service bus stands in Pukuatua Street are close to the capacity of current services. With increased emphasis on public transport as indicated by the recent discussion proposal released by the RDC, there could also be increased demand for this service.

The development of the Haupapa Street parking area into a local/intercity interchange could meet the needs of increased capacity and provide an improved connection service. The development of such an interchange with multi-level parking above would meet some of the additional needs for parking within the city

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should the creation of a pedestrian precinct in Tutanekai Street become a reality. This development could be the opportunity for a private investor. The RCC understands that some investigative work has already been undertaken on this opportunity.

In conclusion

The RCC has participated in the ongoing discussions on the revitalisation of the CBD over the past four years. It applauds the RDC on the very active step that it has taken to seek public consultation on the concepts as outlined in the Opus report. It acknowledges that some of the recommendations outlined above have different levels of support even within its own membership. However, it is an important step that must be taken for Rotorua to continue to grow and develop as a tourist destination and a desired city that attracts an increased population.

We request that as an organization we be involved in the further consultation on the development proposals and look forward to working closely with the elected and appointed representatives of the RDC towards developing a Central Business District that is a feature of our city.

Yours sincerely

Roger Gordon, Chief Executive Officer

Christa George, President

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