



# The future of our cities

Briefing for Incoming Ministers

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## About the New Zealand Institute of Architects

The New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) represents more than 90 per cent of all registered architects in New Zealand. It is a professional body supporting the needs of its members through a range of services. The Institute is committed to promoting architecture that enhances the living environment of all New Zealanders.

## Our Cities Drive our Prosperity

The economic, social and cultural importance of cities is increasingly recognised and acknowledged. Cities lead national economies. Increasingly, countries have a leading city – Beijing, Tokyo, Sydney or Auckland – which drives growth and provides opportunities for international exchange. Effective cities are vital to the success of a country.

Cities offer opportunities through the interaction of their inhabitants and the resulting intellectual collaboration. Cities enable people to maximise their opportunities; when they do, the whole country benefits.

Design and architecture play a pivotal role in facilitating this exchange. The function of good urban design is to attract and retain population and make exchange easier. If the urban form isn't conducive to exchange, then our cities, our economy and ultimately our future prosperity will suffer.

The successful and resilient cities in the world have, at first sight, a cascade of diverse influences associated with cosmopolitan living. Beneath is a strong strategic and functional backbone shaped by the disciplines – architecture, urban design, planning and landscape design – which provide the support required for a successful city.

The architect, as the integrator, is a leader in this pivotal space. The NZIA is concerned to help architects make a unique and tangible contribution to the modern New Zealand city.

In this briefing we have identified a number of opportunities to address regulatory issues and other matters that will assist in making our cities successful.

The architectural design space has become highly complicated. The arena is crowded with large numbers of regulations, government agencies, industry associations, local authorities, urban planners and other stakeholders. The complexity is causing confusion rather than the clear path we need for economic and social development.

To gain and maintain such clarity, we have been advocating for the appointment of a 'Government Architect'. This position would provide a focal point for high level, independent design advice, enabling the government to cut through the complexity and focus on outcomes.

All Australian states and other contemporary jurisdictions have recognised this need and taken this action. So should we.

The consideration of the Government Architect role is not new and figured in the 'Building competitive cities' discussion document issued by the Ministry for the Environment late last year. As you will be aware, a majority of submitters supported the creation of the position and its alignment with a proposed 'Urban Design Panel'.

We believe it is an appropriate time to restate the importance to our cities, and therefore to the country, of the Government Architect.

## **Auckland**

As our largest and fastest growing city, Auckland has its problems. Despite that it is New Zealand's most attractive urban destination. It is home to one third of New Zealand's population, 37% of whom were born overseas. It is cosmopolitan on an international scale.

Auckland is economically hugely significant: a third of our GDP can be attributed to activities in the city.

The government recognition that the success of Auckland is a priority has driven local government reform and infrastructure development, particularly transport. This is consistent with Auckland's aspiration to be a truly international city.

For now, Auckland is a city in transition. It has not yet attained international city status, but is rapidly growing beyond a local or regional centre. This transition needs to be carefully managed, not only for the sake of Auckland but for the sake of the whole country.

To successfully transition, Auckland will need to draw on the wide range of urban development disciplines. Architects have a key role in leading the design approach.

The NZIA has been closely involved in drawing a "roadmap" for the future of Auckland and as a professional group we are keen to be involved all levels of development. We believe that coordination of this activity is another key role for a Government Architect.

In Auckland, the Government Architect could facilitate creative architectural thinking and development of the future 'look and feel' of the city. Functions could include leading Urban Design panels, facilitating public discussion, engaging Government and departments in urban design, providing judicious and impartial advice to the City, reconciling national and local design aspirations, and challenging staid thinking where it exists.

## **Christchurch**

The redevelopment of New Zealand's second largest city presents an entirely different set of challenges. The earthquakes have created huge challenges, and opportunities. The City Council has delivered its first draft of the Central City Plan which is being vigorously debated.

The challenges of Christchurch are different from Auckland. The opportunity in Christchurch is to create a contemporary city with a strong urban design focus.

The NZIA's involvement has already included:

- Appointment of an 'Architectural Ambassador' to advocate for good architectural and urban design outcomes for the reconstruction and provide independent architectural and urban design advice to Christchurch City Council
- Assistance to government agencies, e.g. the Department of Building and Housing and Housing New Zealand
- Briefings by the Architectural Ambassador and the NZIA President to Government ministers, the Christchurch Mayor and Councillors
- An intensive programme by our local branch to develop an informed and non-partisan submission to aid the City Council as it prepared its draft City Plan
- An exhibition and speaker series led by our local branch – held after the September 2010 earthquake and revived after the February 2011 earthquake – promoting public education and participation in the debate about Christchurch's future
- Communicating the importance to the economic and social recovery of Christchurch of high-quality building and urban design solutions in public forums and the media
- Advising private philanthropic interests seeking to help the city through sponsoring visits by overseas practitioners with relevant urban renewal experience

This is, of course, in addition to the work of individual NZIA members who have been helping their clients, reconstruction agencies and communities, and to the work of Christchurch City Council's own architectural division.

We recognise that an event such as the February earthquake in Christchurch and the subsequent challenge of reconstruction are national issues requiring national assistance, resources, advice and direction.

The multi-disciplinary vision and clarity that the architect can bring to this situation is vital. The Christchurch recovery and reconstruction would benefit from the appointment of a Government Architect to provide clarity of vision, offer non-partisan advice, and assist with collaboration between the design-related disciplines.

## **Cities are pivotal, but are they affordable to live in?**

Affordable housing presents both familiar and novel challenges. Creating affordable housing is one imperative; building affordable and self-sufficient households is another.

Affordability is not just about the cost of materials. It extends to the price of land and the total affordability envelope: close proximity to services (to reduce transport costs); efficient use of site (to reduce land costs); efficient permitting (to reduce compliance charges); streamlined building processes (to reduce costs of construction); and energy efficiency (to minimise running costs). There is also the cost to the community of long lines of infrastructure, such as roads and power reticulation, where denser but well-designed communities would be more affordable and sustainable.

A housing strategy needs to acknowledge the role of improved architecture combined with more skilled urban design as key enablers of improved housing outcomes.

The NZIA recognises that while affordability is a factor in the decline of home ownership levels, it is also the case that home ownership or the detached suburban dwelling may not be the aspiration of segments of a more mobile population that pursues a series of earning and non-earning roles rather than a traditional single and relatively static career.

Architects, generally, and a Government Architect, in particular, can lead public thinking and challenge developer mind-sets by providing alternative models which both enhance housing affordability and accommodate non-traditional housing requirements.

The NZIA acknowledges the high cost to society of poor quality housing in terms of health, education, economic and social outcomes. We recognise that Government has a range of initiatives underway already, e.g., the Building Act amendments that provide more prescriptive building techniques. We also believe the need is not so much for increased amounts of legislation and regulation as for a more effective administration of existing controls. We advocate accountability at Local Government level so that consents can be “relied upon” in a legal sense.

The NZIA supports the Government’s aim to improve capability and capacity in the building sector. We recognise that there is a significant segment of the industry that, at least in part, has not kept pace with the rate of change in construction techniques and development methodologies.

## **Strengthening the Design Profession**

In advocating for a stronger design input, especially into our cities, we are also advocating for a more robust profession to deliver this requirement. At the heart of this concern is the definition and registration of design and architectural professionals which ensures high standards of capability and performance.

A symptom of the underlying problem is the productivity decrease evident in the building and construction sector workforce. The Government’s Productivity Partnership is working to address issues of productivity.

Many factors contribute to productivity improvements but consideration needs to be given to professional roles, both traditional and new, while at the same time encouraging all those who work to create the built environment to become more collaborative.

We suggest that the right way to encourage consistency and efficiency is to rationalise registration and licensing in the sector into groupings which allow for layered registration systems. Such organisation would encourage participants to grow their skills in order to gain registration at higher levels and thereby make a greater contribution to the sector.

We suggest three levels of registration:

- the engineering profession at its various levels
- the construction trades; and
- the design professions.

Specifically, design professionals should be registered as what they are and potentially drawn together under a common identity. These design professionals might include:

- architects
- architectural technicians
- urban designers
- landscape architects

In this scenario, not only would clients understand exactly what skills they are getting and could expect, but they would experience collaborative practice designed to achieve the best outcome.

## **The Rationale for a ‘Government Architect’**

The rationale for a Government Architect is clear. Such a person can help focus the design community on the bigger picture of national development, particularly our cities, and lead a collaborative approach amongst built environment design professionals.

The proposal for a Government Architect has been mooted in the ‘Building competitive cities’ discussion document released by the Ministry for the Environment in 2010. The proposal received majority support and it was recommended the role be aligned with that of a proposed national urban design panel.

A Government Architect would provide independent advice to the government at an appropriate level, i.e., not just on the micro level of individual buildings – although important public and institutional projects may well require scrutiny by the Government Architect. The real contribution would be at the macro level of the design and functionality of the city, design standards and procurement processes.

Such an office, removed from partisan concerns, and moving between government and the private sector, could both assist local agencies and enhance transparent processes in the running of competitions and awarding of significant commissions. It would be a means to capture and filter the many urban design and architectural proposals that emerge, for example, in a post-disaster situation. The office could lead thinking on affordability throughout the continuum from the design board to the construction site.

Our cities are becoming more complex, and the central government investment in civic infrastructure is huge. There is consequently a need for an overarching position that both advocates and enables a high quality design output for all that investment.

Cities, and nations, are now more aware of the competitive advantage of well-designed urban environments, and inhabitants and would-be inhabitants of our cities have increasingly high expectations of those cities. A Government Architect would promote the economic and social advantages to be won through high-quality urban environments.

At a local or regional level Christchurch, for example, might well benefit from the establishment of independent Technical Advisory Groups, such as those set up to advise the agencies supervising the development of the Wellington and Auckland waterfronts. These groups have a significant design focus and architectural input, and have made a considerable contribution to the processes that have produced positive results in both cities.

Despite their vital contribution, Technical Advisory Groups are not the bodies to give national leadership in design of the built environment. That is the gap that a Government Architect would fill.

We have drafted a high level job description in Appendix A.

## **Actions**

In summary, we recommend that the Minister:

- Support the proposal for a Government Architect as discussed in the ‘Building competitive cities’ discussion document and advise officials to progress the establishment of a Government Architect
- Ensure that an early task of the Government Architect is the development of an overarching “cities design strategy”/’National Statement on Urban Design’ to replace and update the ‘Urban Design Protocol’
- Advise officials to investigate the rationalisation of registration and licensing in the sector into groupings which allow for layered registration/licensing systems.

# Appendix A - High level job description for the Government Architect

## Summary

The New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) believes that establishing the position of Government Architect will assist to achieve a high level of design excellence and performance from planning, and construction as outlined in our Briefing to Incoming Ministers. This will ultimately enrich the lives of all New Zealanders, providing significant economic, environmental, and social benefits.

## Background

The government plays a vital role in how our built environment is shaped. This influence is through direct decision making on key social and institutional infrastructure – such as in the construction of our schools, courts, hospitals, and network infrastructure. This influence is equally exercised through other means – such as policy, regulatory, and legislative frameworks.

Given the significant proportion of infrastructure and construction work undertaken by, or on behalf of the government, there is an onus to lead by example through support of high quality design outcomes. Unfortunately, public architectural procurement has too often been characterised by political expediency and numerous departmental reviews and steering committees consisting staff that may not have the necessary skills. This has been costly and often resulted in little or no progress in projects.

There is a need to circumvent these troubles especially given increasing population pressure on New Zealand's major urban centres and the government's desire to invest significantly in infrastructure development. The transition of Auckland into a truly international city and the rebuild of Christchurch provide new impetus for the establishment of this position. Without a Government Architect in place, the government has limited access to high level design advice and there are few avenues available to agencies for design leadership.

The principal objective of the Government Architect position is to assist the government to achieve high quality design outcomes and improve planning and construction performance by:

- Providing strategic advice to government about architecture and urban design.
- Assisting the government understand building design and delivery issues.
- Promoting the value of good design and best practice both in government and wider community.
- Promoting the use of best practice in the built environment



## The value of good design

At the heart of the proposal is the desire to realise the value which comes with good design. This has been the subject of a number of publications – the findings of which are highlighted here and can be summarised as follows – good design provides economic, social, and environmental value.

Good design adds economic value by:	Good design adds social and environmental value:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• producing high returns on investments (good rental returns and enhanced capital values)</li> <li>• placing developments above local competition at little cost</li> <li>• responding to occupier demand</li> <li>• helping to deliver more lettable area (higher densities)</li> <li>• reducing management, maintenance, energy and security costs</li> <li>• contributing to more contented and productive workforces</li> <li>• supporting the ‘life giving’ mixed-use elements in developments</li> <li>• creating an urban regeneration and place marketing dividend</li> <li>• differentiating places and raising prestige</li> <li>• opening up investment opportunities, raising confidence in development opportunities and attracting grant monies</li> <li>• reducing the cost to the public purse of rectifying urban design mistakes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating well connected, inclusive and accessible new places</li> <li>• delivering mixed-use environments with a broad range of facilities and amenities available to all</li> <li>• delivering development sensitive to its context</li> <li>• enhancing the sense of safety and security within and beyond developments</li> <li>• returning inaccessible or run down areas and amenities to beneficial public use</li> <li>• boosting civic pride and enhancing civic image</li> <li>• creating more energy efficient and less polluting development</li> <li>• revitalising urban heritage</li> </ul>
<p><b>Source: Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (UK)</b></p>	

## The role of a Government Architect in New Zealand

The appointment of a Government Architect would significantly advance design excellence in New Zealand. Rather than undertaking actual design or consultancy work, the Government Architect would perform greater advisory and educational functions.

In general terms, the two key roles of the Government Architect would be:

- **Advisory** – provide strategic advice to government and local government about how to achieve a better performing built environment. This would be achieved through liaison with ministers and agencies, through statutory positions on committees and boards, and the running of design review panels and design competitions.
- **Educational** – encourage an awareness of the importance and value of good design by providing leadership and strategic advice about architecture and urban design. This could be achieved through the development of papers and guidelines, seminars for the public service as well as the general public.

For the rebuild of Christchurch, the Government Architect will be able to provide clarity of vision, offer non-partisan advice, and assist with the collaboration between the design-related disciplines.

Specifically, the NZIA has developed the following outline for the Government Architect position:

- **Provide strategic policy advice** to the Prime Minister, Ministers, government departments and agencies, and local government. For example, the advice of the Government Architect could have been sought on the funding of Queens Wharf, and the design competition. The Government Architect could also provide expertise in times of rebuild after a natural disaster (such as in the case of Christchurch).
- **Provide design expertise advice** to all government agencies responsible for the delivery of public buildings and infrastructure projects. This advice could be focused on how to get procurement processes right to ensure that projects deliver maximum value.
- **Take a leading role in the governments' asset management** and infrastructure focus particularly in regard to the performance of existing and future government buildings and infrastructure. The Government Architect could provide input to government agencies, as well as the National Infrastructure Unit.
- **Communicate the value of good design** in government procurement processes, infrastructure development, and for the benefit of all stakeholders. This is part of the Government Architect's educational function.
- **Assist with design competition processes** for major government building projects, and where requested, assist with the major projects of local government. The Government Architect could provide valued independent advice on the running of design competitions. Competitions, when run well, excite public interest and get buy-in.
- **Establish and manage a Government Architects office** providing design and pre-construction advice in the areas of architecture, building engineering, urban

and landscape design, heritage conservation, adaptive reuse and quantity surveying. This would involve setting the processes and evaluation of options.

### Setting up the Government Architect within government

The effectiveness of the Government Architect role will to a large extent be determined by the degree to which the role is integrated into government decision making processes.

It is the NZIA's contention that little value will be derived from the role unless the Government Architect has specific avenues and opportunities to provide input.

An important aspect of the role will be to provide effective coordination to the many existing streams of work within the public sector. The Government Architect would have to be involved in some capacity in each of these work streams. A further option would be to consolidate each of these work streams and the associated effort into one programme of work lead by the Government Architect.

The table below briefly notes some of the main options:

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up on similar lines to that of the Chief Science Advisor, the Government Architect could report direct to the Prime Minister. This would elevate built environment issues.</li> </ul>
Department of Building and Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DBH has many responsibilities for the building and construction sector. DBH is the key department responsible for the Building Act and Registered Architects Act, among others. The current work programme of the department and its strategic direction could be a good fit for the Government Architect.</li> </ul>
Ministry of Culture and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is possibly a better natural understanding of the value of design and heritage preservation to be found in MCH. This would have clear advantages for the operation of the Government Architect.</li> </ul>
Ministry for the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most urban design responsibilities are currently located within MfE. Given the importance of urban form for New Zealand's development, and consideration of broader sustainability issues in the built environment there would be some advantages to locating the Government Architect within MfE.</li> </ul>

The table below outlines other options:

State Services Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The State Services Commission has a strong focus on public sector best practice which would fit well with the pursuit of design excellence. A major focus of the Government Architect will be</li> </ul>
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	to improve procurement processes across the public sector.
Treasury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locating the role within Treasury as a central agency and the government's main economic adviser would recognise the significant economic value of good design. The Government Architect will also be able to provide advice to the Infrastructure Unit on asset management and infrastructure development.</li> </ul>

The most appropriate physical and Vote location of the Government Architect should be finalised after consultation with officials and Ministers.

As already mentioned, important to fully realising the potential of this position is the involvement of the Government Architect as an ex officio member on as many relevant boards, councils, and advisory groups as possible. The greater the areas of involvement the greater the influence that the Government Architect will have.

<b>Body and authority</b>	<b>Explanation of role</b>
Historic Places Trust <i>Compliance with Historic Places Act 1993</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Government Architect could be an ex-officio member of the Historic Places Trust. The Government Architect would provide architectural and heritage expertise that assists in the protection, conservation, and preservation of significant cultural assets within NZ.</li> </ul>
Architects Registration Board <i>Compliance with the Registered Architects Act 2005</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Government Architect could be an ex-officio member of the Board within the Registered Architects Act. The Act regulates the activities of the profession.</li> </ul>
Technical Advisory Groups on urban design and infrastructure <i>Cabinet</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is currently a TAG set up to consider urban design and infrastructure development under phase two of the RMA reforms. The Government Architect could provide this group with expert advice on urban form and the role of design in infrastructure development.</li> </ul>

### **The qualities of a Government Architect**

For the Government Architect to operate successfully it will be important that the person who occupies the role is well-established and well-respected. Equally important will be the Government Architect's communication abilities. This person will be responsible for not only advising government on design issues but also educating the public on the value of design. This is a difficult role which requires a unique mix of skills and abilities.

NZIA would be prepared to provide a short-list of suitable candidates for ministers and officials to consider. It is the position of NZIA that these candidates must be registered architects – registration being recognition of the meeting of high standards of training and continued professional development.

## The cost of a Government Architect

The cost of the Office of the Government Architect will depend on the eventual model selected. Based on the above outlined roles, and the experience of a number of Australian states, the role could be part-time at a cost of \$250,000-\$300,000 a year. This cost would include salary, some administration support, travel costs, and publication production.

We recognise that the Government is prioritising a focus on streamlining the public service with an emphasis on more frontline services and a reduction of policy staff.

However, a quick qualitative cost benefit analysis of the Government Architect position would lead to the conclusion of the viability of the position. The efficiencies gained, and the economic and social impact from good design will be significant. Facilitating the process of making Auckland more efficient and Christchurch an attractive destination again has obvious potential to result in big gains.

The Government Architect could be supported by support staff responsible for the bulk of the development work. The total cost of running the office would also depend on the level of support received from other government agencies and could be funded from existing budgets.

As an estimate, the costs could be:

<b>Component</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Salary of Government Architect	\$120,000
Office running costs	\$50,000
Education role – publication production, seminars	\$80,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>