

A Better Aotearoa is Not Just Possible, It's Waiting to be Built.

A proposal for a simpler, more flexible planning system designed for people, communities, and our future.

Our Planning System is Built on a Foundation of Unmanageable Complexity.

New Zealand's current planning framework is fragmented across the country, resulting in a bewildering number of zones **that stifle development, create inconsistency, and increase costs. This complexity serves as a barrier to building the homes and communities we need.**



This Complexity Leads to Arbitrary Decisions and Poor Urban Outcomes

The current system enables subjective “urban design nitpicking” that delays projects and undermines economic viability. Developers face inconsistent feedback on fundamental design elements, while our cities suffer from auto-centric design that prioritizes vehicle movement over human well-being.

The Carpark Flip-Flop



The Front Door Dilemma



A developer lost ~\$8 million in pre-sales after planners forced the removal of carparks in favor of garden areas, a decision the market rejected.

Planners gave three contradictory directives on front door placement for a single development—facing each other, clustered, or offset.

The Arterial Road Trap



Intensification is often pushed onto large, polluted arterial roads ill-suited for residential life, creating negative health impacts, especially for lower socio-economic groups.

We Can Rebuild Our System on Four Principles of Public Good.

The Japanese Land-Use Law of 1974 provides a powerful precedent. It was enacted to solve chaotic development and speculative investment by establishing clear, foundational principles. This approach moves from reactive control to proactive enablement.



1. Public Welfare First

The common good is the primary consideration.



2. Natural Resource Preservation

Planning must protect the natural environment.



3. Healthy & Cultural Environments

Protect and foster quality living spaces.



4. Balanced Development

Ensure planned, harmonious land use.

The Engine of Simplicity: National Standardised Zones (NSZs).

Instead of thousands of bespoke zones, the Japanese model uses just 13 base zones, creating nationwide consistency.

The system is layered, layered, allowing for overlays and special districts, but the foundation is simple and easy to understand. This provides certainty for developers and efficiency for councils.

The 13 Japanese Land Use Zones

RESIDENTIAL ZONES		COMMERCIAL ZONES	INDUSTRIAL ZONES
Category I Exclusively Low-Rise Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Primarily for low-rise houses.Allows small shops, offices, and schools.	Neighborhood Commercial Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none">Focused on daily shopping needs for residents.Allows shops, supermarkets, and small businesses.	Quasi-Industrial Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none">Light industrial activities that do not worsen the environment.Allows small factories and workshops.
Category II Exclusively Low-Rise Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mainly low-rise housing, with slightly looser regulations than Category I.Allows larger shops and offices (up to 150sqm).		
Category I Mid-to-High-Rise Oriented Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">For medium to high-rise apartment buildings.Allows hospitals, universities, and larger shops (up to 500sqm).	Commercial Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none">Major commercial hubs.Permits department stores, offices, cinemas, and entertainment facilities without size restrictions.	Industrial Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none">Dedicated to factories and industrial use.Permits all types of factories, including those with environmental impact.
Category II Mid-to-High-Rise Oriented Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Similar to Category I, but allows larger commercial uses (up to 1,500sqm).Permits certain types of offices and small factories.		
Category I Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Predominantly residential with mixed-use.Allows shops, offices, and small factories (up to 3,000sqm).		
Category II Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mixed-use residential area.Permits most types of shops, offices, and hotels.		
Quasi-Residential Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mainly residential, but allows various uses including larger commercial facilities and specific types of factories.		
Country Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reserved for agriculture and forestry, with very limited non-agricultural development.		Exclusive Industrial Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reserved for heavy industry and port facilities.Restricts most non-industrial uses.

A Clear Division of Roles: How NSZs Would Function in Aotearoa

The system aligns planning responsibility with the appropriate level of government, creating a coherent cascade from national strategy to local implementation.

Central Government

- Drafts the National Spatial Plan.
- Defines the ~15-20 National Standardised Zones.



Regional Councils

- Draft Regional Spatial Plans.
- Apply the base Urban and Rural NSZs.



City & District Councils

- Manage sub-zones, district plan areas, and smaller-scale renewal projects within the NSZ framework.

*(Unitary Authorities, like Auckland Council, combine Regional and City/District roles.)

An Adaptable Blueprint, Not a Rigid Imposition.

A successful model must be tailored for Aotearoa. This involves creating specific zones for our primary industries and a dedicated framework to enable Māori to develop ancestral land according to their needs and traditions.

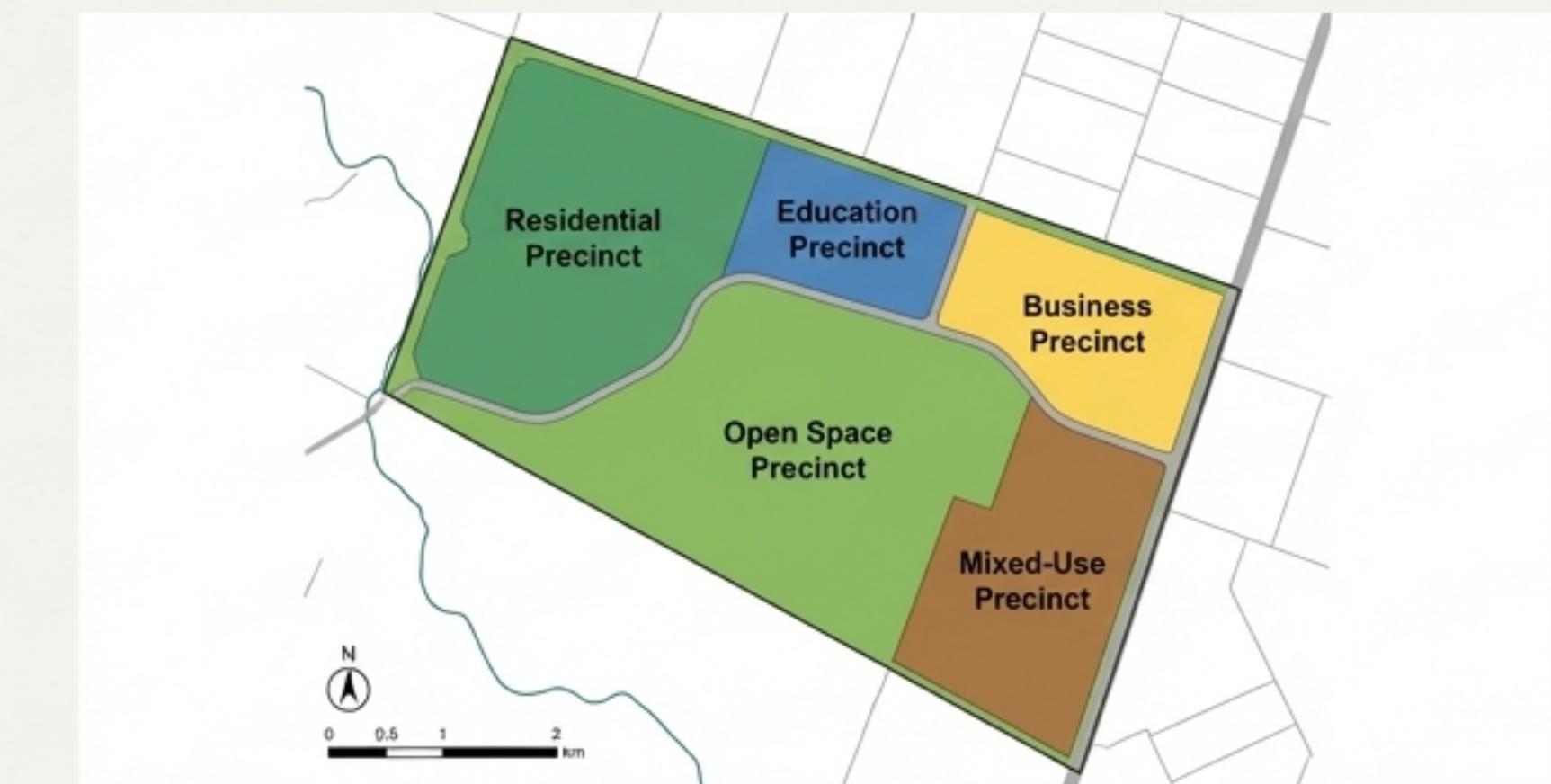
Defining Our Rural Landscape

Propose Aotearoa-specific rural NSZs: Rural – Production (large-scale farming), Rural – Mixed (smaller farms, tourism), and Rural – Extractive (mining, quarrying, forestry).



Integrating an Indigenous Worldview

Introduce a 'Special Purpose Zone' within the NSZ framework to accommodate unique cultural and economic aspirations, such as the **Hopuhopu Zone** for Waikato-Tainui. This is supported by the **National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga (NES-P)**, enabling communal settlement on ancestral land.



Unleashing Vibrancy Through Mixed-Use 'As-of-Right'

True mixed-use communities are the bedrock of walkable, connected cities. The new system enables this by default. While Centres will permit a wide range of uses, residential zones will allow a narrow range of compatible activities on key sites, bringing daily needs within walking distance for everyone.

'Narrow Range' Defined:

Activities like a local dairy, hair salon, café, or co-working space that serve the immediate community without creating nuisance.



1. Corner café with seamlessly integrated apartments with adjacent townhouses



2. Classic stornfent dairy nesteen two-storey residential homes



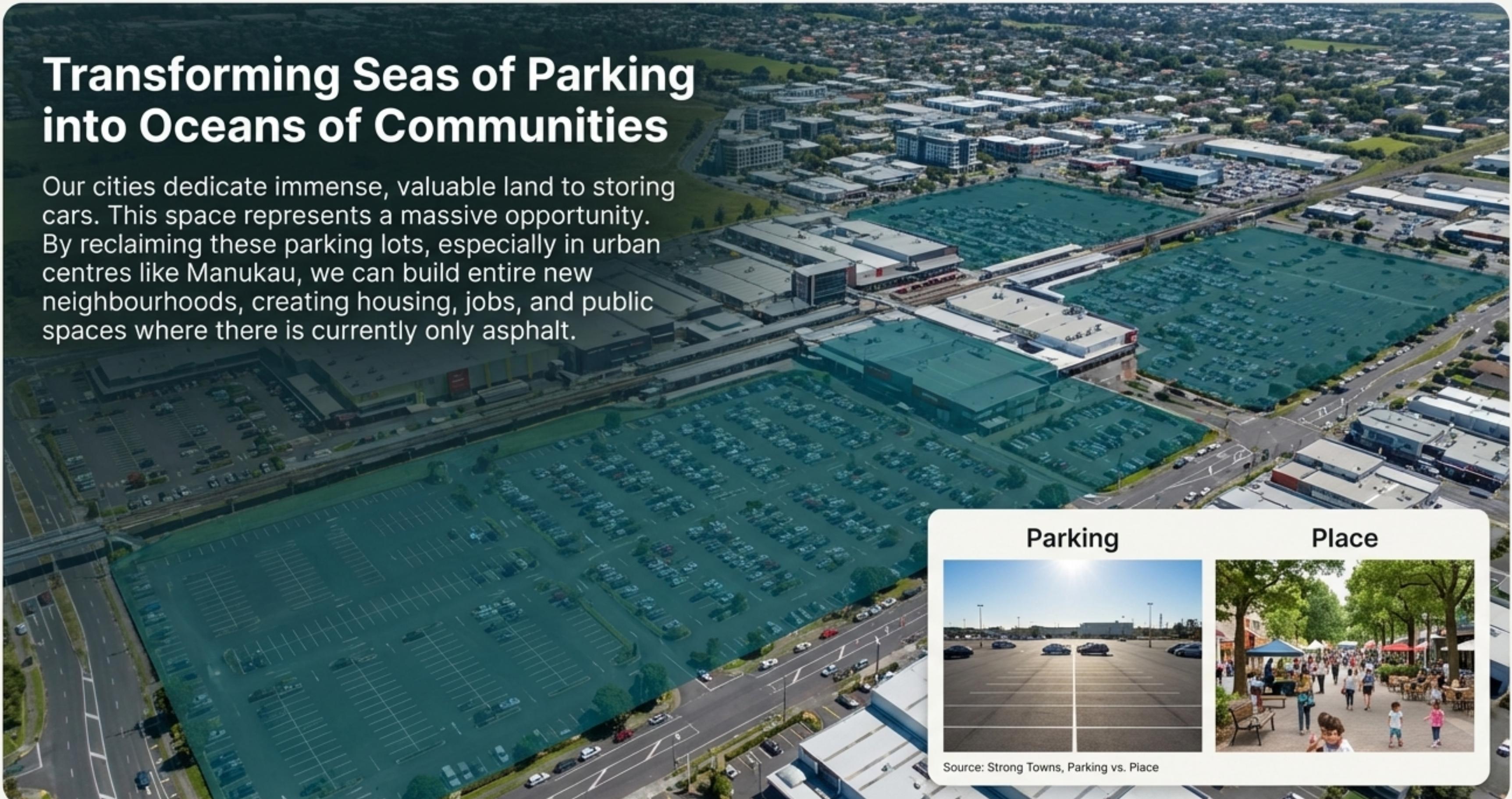
3. Ground-floor, co-working space wonens in Inter Regular



4. Residential street's corner hair salon, Inter Regular

Transforming Seas of Parking into Oceans of Communities

Our cities dedicate immense, valuable land to storing cars. This space represents a massive opportunity. By reclaiming these parking lots, especially in urban centres like Manukau, we can build entire new neighbourhoods, creating housing, jobs, and public spaces where there is currently only asphalt.



Parking



Place



Source: Strong Towns, Parking vs. Place

Building Complete Communities Around High-Capacity Transit

To maximize our investment in public transport and create walkable communities, we must enable density where it makes the most sense. The reforms propose clear, non-negotiable standards for intensification around our key transit hubs and corridors.



Rapid Transit & Metro Centres

Major City Centres

Key Public Transport Corridors

Finding the 'Missing Middle': Gentle Density for Every Stage of Life

The choice should not be between a standalone house and a high-rise apartment.

The "Missing Middle"—townhouses, duplexes, and low-rise apartments—provides diverse and affordable housing options. It creates a compact, vibrant, human-scaled urban fabric that supports walkability, green space, and community.

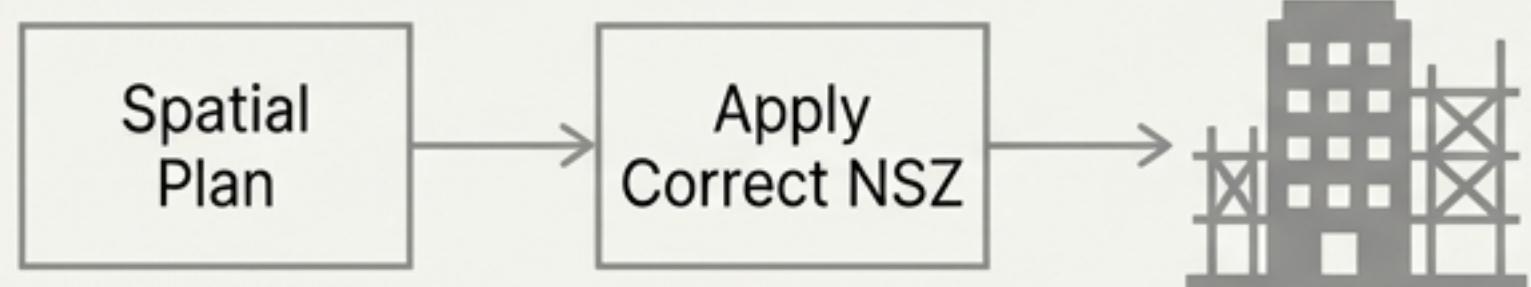
- Walkable blocks
- Mixed-use buildings
- Integrated green courtyards
- Smart density without sacrificing quality of life



The Planner's New Role: From Gatekeeper of the Private Realm to Champion of the Public Realm

A simpler system re-focuses the planner's expertise where it adds the most value. Influence shifts from nitpicking private development to leading the creation of high-quality public spaces that, in turn, attract and guide the best private investment.

Private Realm



Mantra: Provide the framework, then get out of the way.

Public Realm

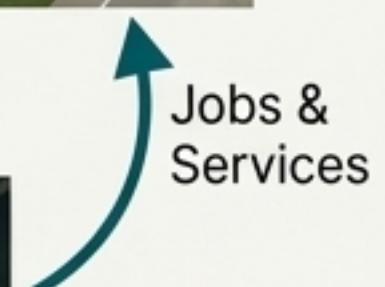
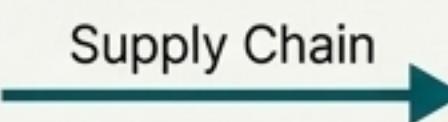


Mantra: Great public spaces inspire great private development.

Visualizing the System in Action: A Tale of a City

We can simulate how these principles create a thriving city.

In the “Marsden Point” case study, the planner uses the Whangarei Flats’ case study, the planner uses the land use plan (NSZs) to enable economic development. New industries (cereal, livestock, beverages) are established, supported by new infrastructure and a purpose-built satellite town, “Whangarei Flats,” for workers and their families. This demonstrates planning as an enabler of a complete urban ecosystem.



Sports Bar
Value-add local businesses

A Simpler, Smarter, and More Human Aotearoa.

This is more than a technical reform; it is a philosophical shift. By embracing simplicity, flexibility, and a focus on the public good, we can move from a system that restricts to one that enables. We can build connected, resilient, and beautiful places that work for everyone.

The framework is clear; the potential is immense.

