

15 August 2005

Re: Proposed Penthouse Cinema Extension, Brooklyn

This submission is from the Wellington Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington.

1) Opposition for the Proposal

The Architectural Centre does not support this application for resource consent.

2) Specific Comments

a) The site coverage is more than twice allowable (i.e. 35% permitted, 42% discretionary, 84% coverage is proposed (p. 12)).

We are concerned that approval of this scheme for 84% site coverage would set an unhelpful precedent, and would question the role, importance, and relevance of the WCC District Plan and Design Guidelines.

The provisions for site coverage are to ensure appropriate outdoor social space. The Multi-unit Development Design Guide notes that: "a well designed area of around 35m² is sufficient for passive adult outdoor activity, but the practical minimum required for children's play is about 100m². Should the private open space be required to include a garden, a minimum of 160m² is probably required." (p. 11). The Private Open Space Guideline G1 requires a total minimum area of 35m² including a minimum area of 4m x 4m. We do not consider that Guideline G4 (shared housing) applies in this circumstance.

We believe that as three (or more) bedroom apartments, it can be assumed that family (and therefore children) must be considered as likely occupants of these apartments. In this case, the proposal does not provide appropriate outdoor social or recreational spaces.

b) External appearance

While we appreciate the attempt to provide a facade that makes reference to the Penthosue Cinema, we find the references to art deco naive and unconvincing. We strongly encourage a rigorous contemporary design which is competent and convincing over a faux art deco facade which has tenuous connections to the art deco designs of the 1920s and 1930s. If art deco is favoured as a style, we strongly recommend that the designers research this, particularly in relation to the arc of the curves on the facade and the relation of the facade to the other elevations. Currently the facade as drawn appears tokenistic and unfortunate rather than a positive addition to the street. We also consider that the elevations (especially the east elevation) are unimaginative, often relying too literally on sun access planes.

In a similar vein, we find the attempt to disguise ventilation vents as palm trees as unfortunate.

c) The internal planning and the floor area of the interior of apartment living spaces.

In addition to the lack of adequate exterior recreation space, the apartments are very tightly planned and have a minimal floor area for three (or more) bedroom residential



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spaces. The three bedroom apartments are 96m², with other apartments (including one four-bedroom apartment) having a maximum of 127m² (p. 9).

We are particularly concerned about the design of units 1-4, which are inappropriately labelled "houses." This planning and floor area is more akin to temporary residences (e.g. motel units or youth hostel accommodations) rather than permanent dwelling places. These units presumably are to accommodate either families or up to three couples. The quality and general lack of interior social spaces does not appear adequate for the living requirements for up to six people. This amount of floor area would in our view be the minimum appropriate for a two bedroom, rather than a three bedroom apartment.

It is unfortunate that there is a growing trend for this kind of minimal housing. In the 1950s (at a time of government restrictions of floor areas due to labour, material and housing shortages) single-storey three bedroom houses also had minimal housing of approx. 90 m². This was with adequate outdoor recreational space, and (as single-storey dwellings) these did not have to accommodate space for staircases.

It appears that commercial gain is privileged here over providing pleasurable and humanly responsive living environments and socially responsible housing. We strongly recommend that the WCC adopt minimum floor areas for residences.

d) Noise

The application claims that "It is anticipated that proposal would not create noise above the permitted levels" (p. 12). While this maybe the case, the provision of residential accommodation (which may accommodate families with young children) above a carpark seems inappropriate. The Penthouse regularly has film showings which finish at 10pm or 11pm at night throughout the week. As this carpark will be available to patrons it is expected that the carpark could generate noise disturbance late at night.

While the proposal notes that "the design of the complex is such that all outdoor living areas are facing inwards" (p. 18), more detail is needed regarding the construction of the floor between the carpark and the lower apartment level to determine the impact of noise on the lower level bedrooms which are immediately above the carpark.

Conclusion

We recognise that there has been attempts to acknowledge the heritage significance of the Penthouse theatre, and to provide additional carparks. The addition of residential use to provide funding for the project has meant that these are not considered first and foremost as places for living, but rather as places for generating capital. We believe that the design of the apartments needs to be rethought in terms of providing better environments for living, including better provision of outdoor and indoor social and recreational spaces. We do not support this application for resource consent.

Yours sincerely

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The Architectural Centre