In a Christchurch Frame of Mind

This project is for Christchurch. It proposes to provide useful low-cost space for the little businesses, privately owned, operating from a small capital base, that are essential to the restoration of this great city’s heart.

Despite interventions from various groups, Christchurch struggles with its revival, four years on from the massive earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 that ripped apart the heart of this great New Zealand City.

The key groups tasked with reconstruction have created several extensive masterplans which set out a lot of ideals, yet little is happening to implement their visions. Even where things are happening, they do not align with international insights into city rebuilding.

In a city once filled with small businesses, the small businesses have left, and the Central Business District appears almost defeated. But does the planning encourage their return? The heart of the city has dispersed and relocated: the real revival of Christchurch will depend on the availability of space for the previous occupants - diverse small to medium sized businesses that generate activity and human proximity.

This project explores the potential for a bold new approach to collaborative business in order to revive small businesses, harness untapped resources and bring a struggling part of this city back to life.
My sincere thanks David Turner and all the staff at Unitec who have helped me start to understand architecture.

To Nova. This project is as old as you are now, thanks for the greatest year of my life so far.
An absolute joy, you are the best baby.

To Bec. Thank you so much. For helping me decide to become an architect, for helping me through these years (and years) of study with your sharp eye, patience and love.
You are the best, baby.
The core topic of this study is of viable commercial space for small businesses in the new Christchurch CBD. The idea for this came about in 2014 when an architecture firm I was in contact with started searching for edgy, urban, central premises.

With an office of 8 staff based in a house in the Christchurch suburb of Papanui, we found that this proved an improbable task. Very few available options existed and prime commercial leases near the CBD were around $400 per square meter. These rates were comparable to Auckland, where the economy was strong and CBD already vibrant and full; in Christchurch, however, high rents were driven by extreme shortages of space due to the earthquakes.

On closer inspection, it became apparent that the rebuild process was not happening quickly enough to get the central city back up and 'running' again, hampered by a raft of developmental, legal, planning and economic factors. The economics of rentable commercial space for small businesses were unaffordable, and even worse, economic forecasters were saying that the urban design proposals didn’t stack up: the proposals did not offer diversity of pricing in new business accommodation.

Visiting Christchurch I found a mix of small and large business beginning to open up and function in the face of adverse conditions. Although few people were around, one or two businesses had still found the support, premises and tenacity to begin again. The place felt almost electric again, as though a tiny spark was going off. The CBD was always going to be the place to visit – but who would bring back all those people to help these businesses thrive?

The answer started to become clear - small businesses would bring the people back and create the revival that all the politicians were trying to construe. But it wasn’t happening; the rhetoric wasn’t being met with actions. Where were the open doors, incentives and loopholes that might enable people and commerce to repopulate the Red Zone?

These questions formed in the early stages of this enquiry have led me to dedicate this research project to finding a way to generate viable space for small and young businesses looking to start back up in Christchurch.

Initial Research
Introduction
This study aims to contribute in some way to the reconstruction of Christchurch. It is a beautiful city with a unique heritage. It has so much heart and soul but is currently in a state of flux, at risk of losing its core should the centre of the city be poorly designed and developed.

The ultimate dream for the city centre is about people and the gathering place of culture. It is to see Christchurch become a strong, resilient city again, a place of vitality, strength, innovation and change. This dream will be enabled by finding a way to provide accessible, useable and affordable space for the diverse people, businesses, enterprises, organisations and groups that once thrived in central Christchurch. Well designed space that fits into the existing fabric and culture of the city.

This field has been chosen because it represents a real and present need. The aim is to find a creative, responsive architectural solution to this need.

Space must be made, found and reclaimed again for the diverse people, businesses, enterprises, organisations and groups that once thrived in central Christchurch.

The design outcome of this project takes one large tract of big box retail land within the CBD and addresses the potential that lies within this site.

The outcome will include a new treatment of this land, designed to exploit existing potential, aligning its programme to better serve the area. The final design will contribute to existing retail, improve urban conditions and revive connections to activities in the area.

It could be thought of as a model of big box remedial treatment that may be adapted by other retail stores in the area, and further afield. It might also be seen as an attempt to anticipate the future of retailing in a post-big box, post-supermarket model in which the dominance of the suburbs is gradually replaced by increasingly wealthy central city populations less dependent on private transport and more engaged with the cultural and social activities of the city.

Initial research into viable commercial space in the Christchurch CBD proved that the way was not open for the small businesses that hold the key to a revived CBD. Contributing factors such as the economics and a slow rebuild pace add to master plans and planning rules that don’t appear to be working. The solution has to involve finding some sort of space for these small businesses to re-inhabit to generate organic urban revival outside of the current planning, economic models and status quo development.

This initial research concluded with these key questions and propositions:

1.0 PRIMARY QUESTION
Is the current model for rebuilding commercial space in Christchurch’s inner Frame viable for small businesses?

1.1 PRIMARY PROPOSITION
There is a better model for rebuilding commercial space for small and medium businesses in Christchurch CBD.

2.0 SECONDARY QUESTION
Are big-box retail stores with vast tracts of parking space in close proximity to a CBD still relevant in the city of tomorrow?

2.1 SECONDARY PROPOSITION
The current use and treatment of this space is at odds with the plans and vision held for Christchurch.
As much as possible, I aim to keep this project anchored in the real world. In this way it will have scope to benefit Christchurch with technical viability and potential for change.

The most useful of the material I offer here is intended to be a guide to citizens, small business owners, developers, designers, planners and architects who hope to ignite the fires of community based urban occupation.

To keep it 'real world' I have used current plans, master-plans and real social requirements. I have stayed abreast of local and national news regarding developments in Christchurch throughout the year, and have tried to work within viable economic models and budgets. The current events and statistical values that have guided this research, such as planning documents and rental rates were current in the first seven months of 2015.

As well as trawling through planning documents, research included three trips to Christchurch and many conversations with locals, small business owners, architects, planners and council staff. This methodology is referred to throughout the document.

Although the economic, political, business and design ideas presented here may be seen as unrealistically alternative by some; they have the intention of inspiring movement toward a better future model that might work in the real world.

The Architecture that this study adheres to is the kind of design work that provides a catalyst for nurturing communities, where the presence of people improves the surrounding spaces, as the people are uplifted by the buildings.
Supermarket Precinct: The area of Christchurch between Madras Street, St Asaph Street and Durham Street South, north of Moorhouse Avenue that features three supermarkets within three adjacent blocks.

Sub-Frame: The greater area that encompasses the Supermarket Precinct, south of the South Frame. This area is bordered by CPIT to the east and Sydenham to the South, forming a neglected element within Christchurch’s masterplanned CBD.

Viable space: Affordable, attractive and well thought out leaseable premises.

Why viable space for small businesses?: The combination of these two elements of a city is a recipe for revival of any city.

Small and large businesses alike bring people, finances and a whole network of connections that feed other businesses and benefit from proximity. Small businesses are by nature more adaptive, easier to set up and simpler in their needs, which work well in a city undergoing restoration. While many other factors are involved in the revival of cities, bringing business into the city is intrinsically related to the cultural, social and economic vitality of cities.

Motor-Centric De-progression: A method for slowing automobile speeds as they move toward a point through the treatment of a series of road elements and street design strategies.

Mixed Use: The act of planning in such a way that many differing uses bring vitality to the daily activity of life in an area with an ever-changing streetscape and symbiotic relationships.

Keywords and definitions

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A lot of attention has been given to Christchurch and its efforts to rebuild in the past few years. Much of what is currently said on the topic of the rebuild consists of pessimistic criticism. Reports continue of struggling families, drawn out insurance claims, infrastructure issues, population flight, and legislative failure.
High costs to rent commercial space.

At the time of proposing this question, it was relatively expensive for a small business wishing to set up in the CBD. Rents on the few available CBD commercial spaces were in the range of $400 per square meter per annum - due to the high costs of rebuilding, rents must start at a certain level to generate a return. Losses are made up for either in high rents, or poor returns. High rents are a barrier to entry for a myriad of community scaled activities that are looking to establish themselves here.

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For a small business with 8-10 employees needing 150m2 this rate of rent, with tax, amounts to $70,000 annually, or the salary of at least 1 member of staff.

Reverse planning.

With over 100,000m2 of commercial retail and office floor space set to become available in the CBD over the next year, rising to 290,000m2 by 2017 the shortfall in supply is set to be met yet with high rents and rising rates there are fears of an oversupply. The lack of tenants to fill these spaces could result in a city filled with empty new spaces. When visiting the CBD mid 2015 one is struck by the amount of large scale commercial construction in action, across the road from large, existing buildings that lie empty and marked ‘for lease’. The kind of planning that created these spaces has also squeezed out the businesses that might have rejected vitality into the city in the interim.

Ibid., 31.

Additional costs and fees in rebuilding.

Much of these expenses result from the developers need to recover the costs associated with building. In Christchurch however, these costs are particularly high due to various additional costs of building including new earthquake insurances, site testing, structural and seismic strengthening, alongside rising council rates and planning costs. These expenses stand in the way of any enterprise/businesses that might hope to build their own premises.

Commercial suburban flight.

Another factor slowing the return of businesses is that much of Christchurch’s business community has set up business in suburban locations. Following the earthquakes suburban premises were made available to assist the economic recovery. Now, after fitting out these suburban sites, establishing networks and attracting employees, many are finding little incentive to re-locate operations and entice staff back into the CBD.

This kind of flight also resulted in some small businesses, such as Otautahi Tattoo relocating to cities such as Auckland during Christchurch’s recovery years. Here, the lack of incentives to stay Christchurch lost not only small business but cultural icons, artists and artistic identity in the city. These losses are a result of failures of upper level planning following the earthquakes.
Few existing buildings are available. Action from governing groups saw existing Red Zone building stock demolished. The demolition frenzy was, to some ‘a scapegoat to mask decades of government inaction on strengthening old buildings’. This approach severely curtailed the ability of old buildings to serve small businesses, or those requiring cheaper rents. According to Sunand Prasad (Architect and former RIBA President), nearly 80% of buildings that will be in use in Europe in 2050 have already been built, set to be retrofitted and reused. The value of rebuilding, economically, ecologically and culturally has been a forefront issue in Christchurch, yet the city has had to bear immense disappointment here. Whilst much of the CBD was badly damaged, many buildings that still held value for interim use or long term re-use were destroyed to serve the government’s new vision, but not the CBD business community.


Sunand Prasad, Retrofit for Purpose (London: RIBA Publishing, 2014), 4. “80% of the building stock that we will be inhabiting in Europe in 2050 already exists... schools of engineering and architecture focus almost exclusively on designing new buildings and calculating their performance.”
In Christchurch CBD today it can be seen that lawyers, insurance firms and banks are the main groups rebuilding and re-occupying the central city. Commercial space is being built by the heavy hitters and developer tycoons with old money, resulting in large, expensive corporate buildings such as the recently finished Anderson Lloyd house. With underground parking and little interaction at street level these buildings and the spaces they generate do little to contribute to the urban fabric of a new Christchurch. While these buildings do serve one end of the market for commercial space, the issue they create can be felt in Jane Jacobs's maxim, 'Old buildings, new ideas'. This implies that while new buildings typically host the safer, established hierarchy of old ideas, old buildings (with inexpensive rents) must also be offered for the city wanting to become a hotbed of innovation and new ideas.

This kind of development has no relevance for the small business, the startup, the young designer or the not-for-profit looking for new premises, or for the non-tourist, non-high street shopper or the daily user of the city. In the words of Johnny Moore, owner of renowned Christchurch bar Smash Palace, "I know a number of people who’ve had a crack at small business and it’s just too hard. And... there’s a bunch of rules and regulations out there that just make it tough every step of the way. They can’t be bothered with the fight anymore."
Economic issues, summary and conclusions

In the current economic climate all types and sizes of business need to be able to make a fair start, establish themselves and find affordable suitable commercial space in the city, a city that needs to have them there. Any development or design solution must address the primary economic factors; reducing rents, repopulating the central city, recycling building materials and opening doors for small businesses.

Other economic issues stand in the way of a successful and timely city recovery, but the general situation is well summarised by macroeconomist Shamubeel Eaqub:

"Unless Christchurch, as a city, can offer a credible alternative, which is not only liveable with a good concentration of skilled workers but also affordable, it will not have a sustainable recovery." 10

Having lost a large swathe of floor area to Red Zone classification, the city, once thriving with small business and young enterprise now struggles to provide spaces that draw people back in to live, work and play. Thus, the current state of commercial space when viewed as an elemental part of the rebuilding of Christchurch shows signs of systematic failure. 11

A better model for rebuilding must involve shared capital, incentives and open doors. But where seed funding has been available from the Council, or from institutes such as CPIT who kick-started the small business space ‘Boxed Precinct’ pictured, the return of real activity to the city centre is still happening very slowly.

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Despite these failings there are many stories of hope and resilience at a grass-roots (less economic) level; such as the student armies clean ups, gap-filler projects reviving empty lots, artist works and recently built bike lanes, happening alongside repaired roads, infrastructure, houses and buildings.

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Planning

Blueprint Summary Plan, CERA, Christchurch Central Recovery Plan
Christchurch has always been a city of planning ideals. Captain Joseph Thomas had completed a survey of the area in time for the arrival of four ships of settlers to the port of Littleton in December 1850.

In 1898 Ebenezer Howard, (1850-1928) published ‘Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform’. This aimed to spread the idea of a “Garden City” - a radical response to the over-mongering and polluting of cities following the industrial era in Europe. This proposed idealised boroughs of limited population alongside beautified outdoor spaces. Around the world the extrapolated ideas of Howard, modified then to propose a “Garden Suburb” or low density sprawl have dominated city form. This concept is now a primary cause of traffic congestion, inequality, segregation, social isolation and pollution.

Known as the ‘Garden City’ of New Zealand, Christchurch did not directly follow Howard’s planning ideals, but became a low-rise, radial city that is now highly auto-dependent due to the way it was planned and as it developed over time. Like many urban centres in New Zealand, it did not escape the aforementioned negative social and environmental impacts resulting from such planning.

On the 4th of September 2010, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hit Christchurch and caused significant damage to buildings and infrastructure. Miraculously no-one was killed. The city was resilient and began to plan an improved city centre. Repairs had only begun when on the 22 February 2011, a second earthquake hit, this time closer to the CBD. Its destruction was widespread and caused 185 fatalities.

Armed with shovels, social media and a shared repository of memories, cultural references, values and ‘war-time spirit’, the people of Christchurch united in the face of adversity and engaged in a valiant recovery effort. Students, the army, local businesses and council’s united to confront the aftermath, disrupted lives caused by the quakes, aftershocks and major liquefaction throughout the region. But as time wore on, and as insurance claims were refused, that spirit appeared to weaken, the shared experience became one of loss - resulting in the people of Christchurch moving elsewhere to seek new lives.

Christchurch was desperate for an injection of some more of that spirit that unites and incentivises people to move forward.

History tells us that a vision, an idea, or a master plan, is what is needed when you have lost the impetus, or collective consciousness that tends drive and engage the populace. Ebenezer Howard communicated a vision that was so compelling and clear that it spawned Letchworth Garden City and a host of subsequent urban experiments from Hampstead Garden Suburb to Canberra, Australia’s capital city. 

13 Ibid, 48.
In response to the need for such a vision, various bodies have been assembled to create a broad and aspiring set of visionary plans for the rebuilding of Christchurch. Several plans have been selected for analysis based on their relevance to the chosen site and the amount they might impact the planning, architecture and revitalisation in this area.

The plans chosen for this review include:

- Christchurch Central Recovery Plan 2012
- Christchurch Land Use Recovery Plan 2013
- Christchurch Transport Strategic Plan 2012–2042
- Christchurch Economic Development Strategy 2013
- Sydenham Master Plan - 2012

Additionally, design drivers that these plans provide are surveyed to help inform the primary proposition “There is a better model for rebuilding commercial space in Christchurch CBD” and to ascertain whether large, big-box retail stores are relevant in a future Christchurch plan. Along the way, influential briefs are extracted in the form of questions pertaining to the design task at hand.
The Government-created Christchurch Central Recovery Plan (CCRP) is the official strategic vision for central Christchurch. 14

The CCRP appears on the surface to subscribe to the Jane Jacobs school of planning, using rhetoric such as: "Successful cities need attractive central city neighbourhoods with diverse communities to support business growth and development, and bring life to the city centre." 15

But the CCRP also introduces the Blueprint Plan, with its range of precincts and anchor projects hailed as key elements in a 21st century city. The precinct approach contradicts the earlier sentiment, as the type of city Jane Jacobs promotes is the kind where close proximity of people, events and enterprises creates the beauty of cities, and give rise to new ways of doing things. Eaqub calls this kind of organic development, "the lifeblood of innovation." 16

Innovation is a clear planning goal in the CCRP: two blocks in the south eastern corner have been penned into the frame and labelled 'Innovation Precinct'. The precinct treatment appeals to political and some economic aspirations, but seldom works for human needs. It is what happens when single meanings are attributed to typically multifaceted space. It happens when nominal area and suitable space as viewed on the planner’s political maps, take precedent over place. 17

The CCRP addendum, issued in late 2014 focuses on the South Frame, a strip that extends from Hagley Park to High Street and the East Frame, between Tuam Street and St Asaph. This includes a finer grain of planning rules favouring retail, dining out, ‘locally produced products’ and retail activity relating to the health, innovation and education sectors. The plan bans vehicle servicing and trade supply activities, while defining the areas and types of business to be established here, hoping to turn car yards into campus style office development – another such addendum claims that growth in residential activity along the East Frame will house around 2,200 people, raising the population of the CBD by 45 percent. 18

Rigorous and engaging, this plan is also fluid and alive, responds to ongoing needs with addendums and re-issues. In all it presents a bold, considered and viable vision for the city.

The precinct approach of the CCRP may dry up large tracts of urban space, the addendum’s legislative potential and predictions hold promise for the viability of an increase in density, diversity and activity on and near the chosen sites.

15 Appendix A.
18 Robert Hughes, The Shock of the New (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 125. On precincts, Hughes writes; "This is what you get when perfectly decent, intelligent, and talented men start thinking in terms of space rather than place, and single rather than multiple meanings. This is what you get when perfectly decent, intelligent, and talented men start designing for political aspirations rather than real human needs.%22
The Land Use Recovery Plan has been set up by CERA to, in short, re-house, re-zone, support recovery, monitor infrastructure repairs and development, monitor relevant environment constraints. It is a support plan guiding land use for the next 10 - 15 years, covering the urban area of Christchurch, but not the Central City which is covered by the CORP.

This plan outlines the need for up to 40,000 houses in Christchurch (in both greenfield and intensification areas) and the relocation and restoration of businesses and community facilities to suitable space following the earthquakes. This document is not directly relevant to the study site, but reinforces proposals for an intensified city centre and a planning culture of well-directed use of existing land resources.

CERA Land Use Recovery Plan

The Christchurch Transport Strategic Plan is a long term policy backed vision that places a strong emphasis on travel choice, transport options and resilient transport networks. Its vision, goals and actions are set out and integrated into a comprehensive transit plan. The goals include improving access and choice, creating livable communities, supporting local freight routes connecting hubs, parking and congestion management to support growth of commercial centres, followed by some ‘green-weak’ covering green infrastructure, adapting to climate change and more infrastructure enhancements.

This document is a long term regional plan. A CCRP transport addendum was issued to cater specifically to the central city in a shorter time frame. It should be noted that while the light rail was included in the draft CCRP document as a result of the Share An Idea campaign, this was cut from this addendum. Light rail would have had immense benefit in a densely populated CBD Christchurch, only not in the short term.

With regard to the study site, the transport plan holds promise. While Moorhouse Ave will continue to operate as a primary motor way, Madras Street has been designated as a result of the Share An Idea campaign. A significant cycle budget has recently been approved in connection with this plan, and cycle lanes and tracks have begun to spread veinlike throughout the city. Cycling in Christchurch is a pleasurable activity as it is so flat. Cycling is widely known to have economic, environmental and health benefits for the broader community. It should be noted here that the 1:1000 scale planning maps accompanying some of these master plans show Moorhouse Ave dappled in large, leafy green trees like Canterbury’s own Avenue des Champs-Elysees.

23 Simon Kingham, “The structures that support bad transport decisions” in Bennet, Once in a Lifetime, 207. Kingham notes that the reason the CCRP is not looking at more expensive transport projects like light rail is due to central government policies and funding, whilst roads are sure to see much investment.
24 Appendix A
The Canterbury Economic Development Strategy 2013 (CEDS) indicates several key opportunities, initiatives and improvements that aim to strengthen and grow Christchurch's economy. The then Mayor of Christchurch, Bob Parker stated that this economic strategy will ultimately lead Christchurch to “becoming one of the safest, most environmentally sustainable, economically buoyant and culturally rich cities in the world.”

With an eighteen year scope, the CEDS report outlines economic drivers drawn up around improving GDP known as 'The big 5':
1. Maximising earthquake recovery opportunities
2. Effective water resource management
3. Improving productivity through innovation
4. Successful central city design and build
5. Increased import and export distribution networks

Looking at the project site through this lens, the contrasts are so apparent it is surprising the site has not been scheduled for re-designation and development already. Clearly, the site was developed long before the plan was formed, but it is interesting to note the following conflicts that the site holds to 'The big 5' initiatives:

1. This large tract of land is a recovery opportunity, with its proximity to the CBD, neighbouring CPIT, the rail line and Sydenham. The unused space devoted to parking, undamaged in the earthquakes, could be economically repurposed in a city where rents are rising and space is now limited.

2. Water from the roofs of these large commercial buildings is not being collected for re-use, and the runoff from the carpark is not mitigated. With nearby marshlands, annual drought and a regional economy based on agriculture, this is an opportunity that is being lost every day.

3. The current programme on this site is a traditional model of supermarket retail. It does not exhibit innovation and shows no evidence that productivity would be improved. With two other major supermarkets within 500 meters of the site, economic drivers such as diversity of use and optimal resource management fail in the current site layout.

4. The site is limited in the contribution offered to the central city with limited access paths, motor-centric orientation and an unwelcome approach to those arriving on foot.

5. Importing and exporting networks are a part of the supermarket’s daily operations, yet they could form an even more critical element of this large hub due to its strategic placement near the railway line and main southern motorway. The supermarket is essentially a distribution network. Could this be re-assessed in terms of its place within the wider business community?

While it is hard to dispute these key drivers in this plan, they are macro strategies, and fail to discuss the assistance, investment and incentives required for the growth of small business at a micro scale.

“The various micro-scale ‘alternative’ activities in Christchurch, challenging the current status quo, are testament to an appetite for change, and the need for pragmatism and flexibility for resilient reconstruction”

Alongside such reconstruction, micro enterprise need support, opening of doors and financial partnerships to help with micro-economic recovery. The kinds of businesses that once thrived in Christchurch appear to have been forgotten in this strategy.

26 Ibid, 03.

The CEDS report goes on to outline key initiatives for keeping up with other cities, many of which raise potent design driving questions in the development of a mixed use brief for any site in Christchurch:

If an ageing population is a driver for mixed use planning, how can design appeal to retiring age residents moving central as they downsize the family home?

Could successful design make the University more appealing, connected and accessible? As a result, would the city expect an increase in local education and skills?

How could good design, mixed use and urban planning engage with such business - community linkages, making it easier to do business in Christchurch?

How can a larger business, such as a supermarket mutually benefit from supplying space, capital investment and services to smaller businesses?

In what ways can good land use decisions here benefit the local economy?

What kind of growth sectors belong to a site like this?

Is this site a strategic business site?

How might developing a site well help with marketing Christchurch to promote innovation and liveability while attracting international talent.

The Sydenham Master Plan states that the district “will have a mix of owner-operator retail spaces, office based ‘new economy’ activities and will be widely known to support innovative start-up businesses and small to medium enterprises.”

Promoting its unique location, density and range of activities aligned along Colombo Street it appears to be a viable plan for the intensification, revitalisation and improvement of this area. With ambitious goals espoused by former Mayor Bob Parker to become a unique gateway to a rebuilt Central City, the ideas promoted in this document are complementary to this study’s chosen site. However, given the high potential for gentrification to occur naturally in Sydenham as the city’s economy recovers, this document appears token - an attempt to claim credibility from the successes of inevitable organic revival.

Sydenham: Awaiting and undergoing good clean gentrification.

28 See appendix A.

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Sydenham Master Plan


Summary of the Christchurch Plans

In summary, all of these plans feature good intentions, visionary rhetoric alongside varying degrees of regulatory inflexibility and cohesive direction. They appear to have failed in varying degrees to provide for Christchurch the action, definition and momentum required for actually rebuilding a great city.

In the following graph I have attempted to plot these varying attributes:

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Critical Analysis of the Christchurch Plans

In Christchurch, locals hold strong reservations to such plans, calling them poorly defined, next to useless and too small. Lack of community involvement, incentives, advocacy and support have resulted in movements to take back the planning power in locally led efforts.

Reservations lie toward the simplistic approach in creating precincts, particularly the Innovation Precinct. For the region that let Rutherford, Richard Pearce, Hamilton Jet and more recently the Martin Jetpack Company loose on the world, the Innovation Precinct attempts to honour this legacy. The problem is just that the actualisation - involving inventors, entrepreneurs and startups all moving into the same few city blocks to do innovating enterprise together - is destined to prove irrelevant, incorrect or demoting to its target market. A more innovative approach is required here.

The lack of clear direction that arises from the multitude of planning documents has lead to the poor planning management seen at Westende House, the first new CBD building constructed in 2013 following the earthquakes. Leasing to several well known businesses this premises, built for around three million dollars, became a symbol of the rebuild. Unfortunately it is now scheduled for demolition to enable widening of the roadway to six lanes serving the Christchurch Transport Strategic Plan.

Once the poster child for the city’s rebuild, the Westende House has now become a victim of it. Planning disasters like this demonstrate a lack of foresight, compassion and innovation exhorted during those early planning phases, as well as a lack of connectivity between the new plans and former planning documents.

The demolition of new buildings contradicts the vastly used motto for economic interest and urban revitalisation, “Together we will make Christchurch a better place.”

The final compiled set of 198,000 ideas gathered from Share An Idea was viewed by many as merely an exercise in public participation prior to the creation of top-down plans for the city. A disclaimer in the Sydenham Plan reveals more of this lip service culture at work, which has done little to advance development for the city:

“...the ad hoc panel will take the initiative and do more than just pay lip service to notions of livability and sustainability.”

It is becoming clear to many in Christchurch that a new course is needed. CERA’s CEO Garry Browne recently said that it is evident the community wants a change - A transition plan has now been issued by the New Zealand government in July of 2015 and while this is another step forward, it outlines a move toward a community centred approach. Calls are now being made for an alternative approach to authority, one that will explore and engage the community.

In conclusion, Christchurch is working hard to become the idealistic city that many of these visions put forward. Small changes are being made and implemented across the board. At a grass roots level, for the small business, things are simply difficult and much more real action is needed to meet the needs that businesses have.
Supermarkets
A Brief History

Driven forward by suburbanisation, supermarkets arose to serve the large decentralised housing developments across the USA in the post-war boom years. With everything from groceries, cleaning materials, meat and fish under their roof, early supermarkets forged a decline in the specialist stores that once lined the traditional streets of town centres.

Initially, large destination stores acted as anchor tenants in a mall, ensuring rent for the site whilst acting as a drawcard for the subsidiary stores. The larger of these store centres would serve around 150,000 customers living up to 40 kilometres away from the site - the majority commuting by car to arrive there. The ‘anchor’ store was often a supermarket, taking up at least half of the total site’s retail area. This format worked well for the anchor store and it’s accompanying shops considering the specialty and convenience offered to such larger catchments of consumers. As more centres were added to the suburban landscape, and as the supermarket diversified their standard offerings, the catchment of customers became smaller, competition increased, and the supermarket found that this dominance optimally required a destination of its own.

Architecture

The International Style, dominant during the formative years of the supermarket, was a perfect marriage for this new market programme with manifestos of function, rationalism and the removal of embellishments. The resultant economies meant that larger stores could be constructed for less money. Although the planning of the supermarket has constantly been refined and geared to meet, capture, refine and exploit consumer habits, its form - resulting from economical and technological imperatives - has changed little since the American supermarkets were built in the 1930's.
As supermarkets increased their dominance in the food trade, specialist retailers declined. The increased use of the car as a key part of the suburban lifestyle drove the tendency towards a once-a-week large shop. Multiple car ownership, employment patterns and lifestyle needs pushed for convenience in the form of larger carparks, extended store hours and distribution networks all meaning that the specialist retailers and smaller supermarket players struggled to compete.

Nowadays, fewer firms dominate the market than ever. In New Zealand Progressive Enterprises and Foodstuffs hold dominant positions. The competition brought on by this duopoly has meant that the major supermarket competitors have often seen the stores lose their initial purpose of serving regional markets, locating themselves closer and closer to competing stores. In this way they have become oversupplied offerings operating in an economically and environmentally inefficient manner.

Images: Supermarket precinct Street-Views.

Sleeping giants

The secondary question of this study asks whether this kind of development is still relevant in the new Christchurch. To answer this, it is necessary to look at where supermarkets are headed today and how they are becoming more relevant to consumers in a rapidly changing marketplace.

Supermarkets are undoubtedly changing. The traditional design was based on "outdated notions of the nuclear family with one wage earner as much as on cheap oil, land and water." Change is needed in order to match consumer shopping habits. These are becoming ever more diverse, due to factors including wider ranging working hours / styles, the changing shape of the average household, multicultural societies, and the internet.

Recent developments in market analysis has enabled supermarkets to closely track and analyse consumer habits. "We see our customers coming in if not daily then every two to three days" says Foodstuff’s North Island manager Murray Jordan, when "five to 10 years ago you might have done a shop more on a weekly basis." Citing the increased interest in fresh and healthy eating, as well as a growth in home cooking, he says that the shape of supermarkets are changing too, with more small footprint, convenience style stores on the ground floors of urban office buildings expected to be built in New Zealand in the near future.

Future Directions and Relevance

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Supermarkets have generally responded to such changes by extending store hours, extending product ranges, streamlining and automating check-out processes, and more recently, the growth and development of online grocery shopping. Online services offer a saving in time, reduced impulse spending, traffic and queue avoidance, home or office deliveries and features such as favourite items being remembered for subsequent orders. This last feature enables the regular online shopper to fill and purchase an extensive 'basket' of goods in a matter of a minutes. Progressive began online retailing in 2013 with Foodstuffs following soon after, and both have experienced considerable growth - enough to add Sunday delivery options in 2014.

A growing need for this kind of delivery service will require a new approach to spatial, architectural and transport needs in the planning and design of food storage and distribution facilities.


43 Sim van der Ryn & Peter Calthorpe, Sustainable Communities: A New Design Synthesis for Cities Suburbs and Towns (San Francisco: Sierra Club., 1986). xii.

In New Zealand the typical supermarket is a large format, single use development. These tend to be set back far off the street edges to incorporate large areas of forecourt parking. Walls to the exterior are typically large run sheet steel and concrete, minimally adorned save for colour branded finishes and large-scale signage. Unarticulated flat roofs keep climate conditioning equipment out of sight, while inactive edges ensure that shopping remains the sole reason for any public occupation. Landscaping elements are minimal amongst the milieu of car and trolley parking requirements. Emphasis is made on a visible entry, clear signage and clear, signposted access for vehicles. Inside, fruit and vegetables, with healthy appeal and high profit are placed at the front of the store; more essential items like milk are at the back of the maze. Architecturally the style of these buildings would be classed as commercial, low quality (culturally) and seldom innovative. They tend to be a check-box design exercise born of economic drivers.

Internationally, the typical supermarket bears many of the above features. In larger cities such as London, supermarkets are often integrated into existing urban fabrics, often with smaller footprints and parking areas, due to the availability of space and quality of public transport infrastructure.

Interesting examples from overseas include:

- **Tesco and Notting Hill Housing Trust mixed used development, Kensington, London by Bacec and Stanton Architects (2009).** This development places 75 mixed tenancy apartments with a central garden courtyard over the top of a flagship Tesco supermarket.

- **Tribeca, Seattle, by V3 Architects (2006).** A 1950’s supermarket set back from the street sold their airspace, roof rights and underground space to develop a new Safeway supermarket with 51 townhouses above, returning the traditional street form to the neighbourhood and optimizing pedestrian access. Vehicular access was provided for residents and supermarket delivery vehicles in the form of underground access. This project shows how the model can work, with revenue for clients and mixed-use, urban buildings for neighbourhoods.

- **Five Dock mixed use development, Five Dock, Sydney by Bates Smart (2004).** This development incorporates a supermarket, a public library and 102 residential apartments around a new urban square, creating a new urban form with a ‘mixed use civic character’. The apartments are varied in size from one bedroom maionettes to three bedroom terraced houses and penthouses.

Stockland Balgowlah and The Village by Allen Jack and Cottier Architects (2009) is a highly regarded mixed use development in Sydney. The Village features a supermarket, 50 specialty stores, 7 retail hospitality stores, 240 apartments, gym, pool, and around 1150 underground parking spaces. The development has been awarded prizes for urban design and for setting a benchmark for the new generation of mixed use developments in Australia.

A supermarket refurbishment precedent for this study is the Karges Falcounbridge re-furbishment of an existing 1965 Jubilee Foods supermarket and parking space in Minnesota into a energy efficient office building. The blind brick walls were opened up for natural light and the carpark was swapped out for a wetland.
Urban supermarkets in New Zealand have yet to embrace the mixed use models above, but some key examples of those that have departed from the traditional approach include:

Countdown Britomart occupies a highly trafficked site in downtown Auckland. This is raised from the street on a carpark podium, despite serving a high number of shoppers arriving on foot. Its urban location means that it is a central hub for many urbanites, and features a café and pharmacy complementing its entrance.

Using existing urban spaces and gearing design toward. With the supermarket situated above retail stores to street level, three levels of commercial office space above, and several levels of car parking below, the site will contain a wide range of activities and thus various consumer types. In addition to these primary uses, half of the site has been sold to private investors to develop residential housing in line with a master plan for the site. At the same time as freeing up capital for the project, this gesture has ensured that a small village of consumers will eventually reside at the store’s doorstep.

Supermarkets Precedents - Local

Images: Urban supermarkets in Auckland. New World Metro, Queen Street (left) and Cider, Ponsonby, coming out of the ground (above).
The benefits of mixing uses in planning architectural design include the creation of diversity, safety and a sense of community. As well as this, improved economic yield, reduced car trips and parking requirements incentivise such projects for developers and councils. The following exemplar projects, ideals and designs were examined in this study as they typified an economically viable alternative approach to mixed use, mixed tenure and community based design.

Andrew Maynard and Breathe Architecture have recently completed conceptual design of Melbourne’s Nightingale apartments. An exercise in residential housing for a new urban demographic, this place is high on design and low on overheads. Engaging simple strategies such as a co-owned cafe on the ground floor that pays the body corporate fees; non-existent underground parking to reduce construction costs; and hot water pipes that act as towel warmers, the design as a whole helps to keep the apartments acquisition and running costs down.

Accordia in Cambridge by CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, UK) and Allison Brooks’ housing at Newhall in Essex are excellent examples of increased density done well. The simple concept of housing with shop windows at ground level by HAB Architects creates the modern entrepreneurs ideal home. The utopian machine for living in Brendeland & Kristoffersen Arkitekter’s Trondheim concept propounds full immersion mixed use as the saviour of all; where the integration of every daily need is so layered that the varied programme allows the elderly to care of young children while parents take part in morning rooftop yoga before walking across the park-like street to the office.

Jane Jacobs is a central proponent for any study of mixed use development, with simple and clear conditions such as; multiple functions, short blocks, varied buildings and a dense concentration of people.** Of additional interest to this project were her examination of ‘Border Vacuums’** and the strategic opening up of University perimeters as public interest points.**

In Winter Park Village, Florida (1997) a failing old mall was turned ‘inside out’ to enclose outdoor promenades and communal parking. Office and retail was stacked on the site following by a cinema and new housing. This project has been a mildly successful restoration of a failing big box precinct, yet lacks street presence and design quality while feeling too insular.**

HUD and the Urban Land Institute describes ideal urban villages as compact, SILV mixed use developments that provide for transportation and affordable housing. Providing jobs in close proximity to housing is a central feature.** For the design of the surrounding streets and pedestrian spaces, the ‘Wales Manual for Streets’** and ‘Foot Traffic Ahead’** provide an ambitious standard of human scaled street design that parts of central Christchurch has historically aspired towards.

** 53 Jacobs, Death and Life, 150.
54 Ibid, 148.
55 Ibid, 267.
56 Dunham-Jones, Retrofitting Suburbia, 126.
57 Calthorpe, Sustainable Communities: A New Design Synthesis for Cities Suburbs and Towns, 58.
On the Southern edge of the proposed Christchurch Frame that borders the master plan for the city of Christchurch lies an unplanned precinct. This precinct features some 20,000m² of retail space serving three supermarkets, with an additional 40,000m² of car-parking space stretching across three adjacent blocks. Located just south of the southern edge of the new ‘Frame’ it stretches along the busy Moorhouse Avenue between Durham Street South and Madras Street, and it is on flat land that sustained minor damage during the earthquakes.

In re-planning the city from an almost blank canvas, this expansive block of land seems to have been completely overlooked. The land is accessible and well-positioned, sandwiched between burgeoning Sydenham and the South Frame growth area. From above however it appears as some sort of vast automotive garrison, a wasteland of asphalt and blank steel roofs.

At present, operations continue for the three big-box retailers here and there is no plan in place for change. In this study I will refer to these three blocks as the Supermarket Precinct.
Site Studies

BUS INTERCHANGE (COMPLETED 2015)
CHRISTCHURCH POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (EXISTING)
SYDENHAM TO WOOLSTON / RAIL TO LYTTELTON
TO CHRISTCHURCH STATION (2000M)
STADIUM (PROPOSED)
JUSTICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES PRECINCT (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)
RETAIL PRECINCT (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)
INNOVATION PRECINCT (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)
HEALTH PRECINCT (PROPOSED)
SOUTH FRAME / MEANDERING GREEN WAY / LINEAR PARK (PROPOSED)

Growth and Precincts Overview
1:10,000

Madras Street
Moorhouse Avenue
One of the sites within the Supermarket Precinct has been identified as an analysis point for this topic of investigation. The chosen site is the existing Countdown supermarket. The following site studies were undertaken to ascertain the spatial temporal intricacies of the site as a whole.

SITE VISIT
The site is accessed in five minutes on foot from the new central Bus Interchange and has views to the Port Hills and a clear proximal relationship with the neighbouring CPIT buildings. It is located on the quieter, tree lined Madras Street, yet faces toward the motorway-like Moorhouse Avenue. This contrast is apparent from within the site, however for most users, arriving by car or on foot, attention is directed at getting in and out of the anchor big box retailer. The intersection at the corner of Madras and Moorhouse has been treated as an inconvenience on a busy strip of ring road, with three to four lanes in each direction; limited pedestrian commodity and fast vehicles make this place intimidating on foot.

The main store is typical of many large suburban supermarkets and appears to have been oversized for its needs, with a large trolley bay that held two dozen trolleys, and wide, empty aisles stocking excess supplies of wares. It has a pitiful row of shops enclosed within its Madras Street edge, labelled as a foodcourt but with little room within the sterile space and even less street presence.

Site overview

This study applies typical supermarket catchment areas to Christchurch and the CBD. A typical supermarket catchment size of 4 – 7 kms, or 5-10 minutes travel time has been used.

Figure 1 shows abundant coverage of large supermarkets to service all of Christchurch’s inner and outer suburbs. There is an oversupply of catchment covering the Supermarket Precinct, North of Sydenham, yet at the 4-7km radius scale these central supermarket show an ability to serve the central city and inner suburb requirements.

The increased coverage for the CBD is explained by the increase in population levels at density, commuter shopping behaviours, adjacent key transport routes and the supermarkets proximity to business and industry. However the CBD population has traditionally been relatively low compared with other cities so these supermarkets are not optimally placed. Also the spread of supermarkets within the precinct is not consistent across the city, seen in figure 2. This is explained by land values north of the CBD being too high for such operations, and also in the way that these stores are designed - to be accessed primarily by private motor vehicle.

ACTIVITY WITHIN 500 METERS

Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT)

Whareora, a large recently built Sports Science and Wellbeing facility, a significant addition to CPIT.

Central Library on Manchester Street

Cathedral of the Blessed sacrament (Damaged)

Pak’n’save, New World and subservient retail

Countdown, Foodcourt, Burger King, McDonalds

Several small multi level apartments

Boxed Quarter - a recently built small business hub

Bars and cafes such as Black Betty’s, Supreme, Winnie Bagoes, Allen St Rock Club, The Monday Room

Car yards & vehicle servicing workshops

Small retailers and workshops / studios

Large big box retailers such as Smiths City, The Warehouse, Rebel Sport and Harvey Norman

Light industrial activity

This investigation examines members of a frequent shopper program of a grocery store and find that the mean distance to the store is 3.5 miles, and that 78 percent of customers live within 5 miles of the store. For this study on Christchurch Supermarkets, this number has been rounded to 4-7 kilometers for application in New Zealand. This study isolates Christchurch’s larger supermarkets similar in size to those in the Supermarket Precinct; it omits smaller scaled grocery stores and dairies, although these are in no shortage around the suburbs.

Figure 3 focuses a walking scale on the CBD: with a reduced radius of 1km. This shows that the north, east and central parts of the CBD have an undersupply of supermarkets accessible on foot within a ten minute walk. An outcome of this skewed distribution means inner city dwellers would require more vehicle trips as well as increased parking requirements at each end.

Lastly, figure 4 overleaf shows the walking catchment scale in relation to CERA’s blueprint for the CBD. The Supermarket Precinct shows an ability to serve the Health Precinct, Justice and Emergency Services Precinct, the Sports Facility, Stadium and Innovation Precinct, as well as the CPIT campus. However, there is little design for this apparent in the planning documents; the supermarkets remain faced away from the city, accessed primarily from arterial roads through large carparks.
### FIGURE 4

**Land Use Study**

It is estimated that 25-30% of land used in New Zealand cities and towns is primarily for transport needs, mainly in the form of roads and carparks. Across this 31.5 hectare 'Supermarket Precinct', roads and carparks comprise 62%. On the confines of the study site the figure is 55%.

The following figure ground studies examine the implications of this percentage by colouring the roads, buildings and public spaces. The first image, figure 5, shows the amount of car parking left over when buildings roads and public spaces are made opaque. The second study overleaf add red to the carparks and streets, showing the extreme of vehicular dominance in this area (figure 6) and on the site (figure 7).

63 Kingham, “The structures” in Bennett, Once in a Lifetime 203.
Carpark Area Spatial Comparisons

The following colour fields visually compare the area of the Supermarket Precinct carpark to nearby public spaces and retail destinations.

**SUPERMARKET PRECINCT CARPARKING**
TOTAL APPROX AREA 40,440 M²

**PROPOSED RETAIL PRECINCT**
APPROX AREA 60,500 M²

**CATHEDRAL SQUARE**
(COUNTDOWN)
TOTAL APPROX AREA 26,400 M²

**NEW REGENT STREET, CHRISTCHURCH**
(FEATURING 40+ BOUTIQUE RETAIL STORES)
TOTAL SITE AREA 3,000 M²

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The following table visually compares the area of the Supermarket Precinct carpark to nearby public spaces and retail destinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building area (m²)</th>
<th>Total car parking spaces</th>
<th>Spaces / 100m²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countdown</td>
<td>7,014</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pak'n'Save</td>
<td>6,474</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New World</td>
<td>13,039</td>
<td>903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Parking Spaces to Retail Area**

Kevin Lynch’s book ‘Site Planning’ indicates the number of parking spaces required for retail operation should be between 3 and 6 per 100m² of selling area. The three supermarkets within the Supermarket Precinct exhibit the following ratios.

One could argue that the treatment of this land is out of line with the planning documents and a change should be mandated. More progressive planning documents today exhibit a trend toward reducing the number of parking spaces. The three bus stops bordering the site’s edge and ten minute walk to the Central Bus Interchange also give reason for reducing this number.

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Lynch, Site Planning, 468.
Summary of research and design solutions
**Project Strategy**

**SUPERMARKET PRECINCT STRATEGY**

Spearheading an ethical approach to sharing resources and land.

The activity and regrowth patterns currently exhibited in Christchurch indicate a secondary frame of growth potential, that of the Supermarket Precinct. This area is not being actively re-programmed or included in planning documents. The onus is placed on property owners to re-vitalise and improve individual sites. Given that these businesses have more money as well as land, the ethical approach here is at the least, to refine car parking footprints and give space back to Christchurch during this time of need.

This proposal presents a design solution where larger businesses engage with the small business community by sub-letting land to meet the current shortfall and high cost of central city space. These strategies conform to the re-build principles advocated by the authorities, including CERA.

**SUPERMARKET PRECINCT STRATEGY**

**ONE USE TO MANY USES**

**EXISTING**

- **3 SUPERMARKETS WITHIN**
- **500m OF EACH OTHER...?**
- **50,000 SQUARE METERS OF SUPERMARKET PRECINCT SPACE**
- **62% OF THAT IS BOUNDARIES AND CARPARKING**

**PROPOSED**

- **INTERESTING, SAFE, ENJOYABLE**
- **100% SMALL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES**
- **100% POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE SYMBIOSIS**

**BOUNDARY ACTIVATION**

- **0% COMMUNITY FACILITIES**
- **0% SURFACE PERMEABILITY**
- **0% $ RETURN ON EMPTY CARPARK**

**SUCCESFUL**

- **30% BORING**
- **70% SUCCESSFUL**

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**712 URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY**

A plan to re-build and densify this supermarket and carpark gently, intentionally and viably in a way that brings new life into Christchurch CBD.

The viability of the site as a significant urban business hub and retail destination is clear. The increase in population growth and proposed plans for Christchurch CBD call for a finer grain of planning to be applied to the study site. Frontages of 6-15 meters and small footprints echo the historical density of the area’s accomplishment in small business strategy. The existing 20m height limit will be adhered to in ultimate level context for the Supermarket Precinct. The corner at Madras Street and Moorhouse Avenue will be strengthened, built up to reflect neighbouring buildings. Set backs will be removed, framing the site’s perimeter and inviting exploration.

The proximity of the Countdown site to CPIT, Sydenham, High Street, the South and East Frame, Innovation Precinct and neighbouring Pak’n’Save contribute to the site’s potential. Use will be made of surrounding connections such as the neighbouring Brutalist CPIT School of Art and Design building which opens up to a central courtyard directly across Madras Street. This access to rope Street will make this intimate lawn a public street once again. On the site’s Western boundary the small streets Mortimer Place and Eaton Place lead to Manchester Street. These connections will be activated and will guide external paths toward a central public outdoor space, outlined in the Destination Strategy in section 718.

Retaining rainwater runoff, recycling grey water and permeable surfaces will reduce the site’s impact on the local waterways. Increasing density on the site along with rooftop terraces, light coloured finishes and landscaping elements will reduce the heat island effect. Recycling existing materials will harness embodied energy existing in the built elements. Design orientation, outdoor space and a walkable urban solution all help to reduce energy demands and improve public health. Existing asphalt will be retained where possible and recycled where it is removed.

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**Site as built in 1945**

**Proposed Site**

**Master Plan**
TRANSPORT STRATEGY
A strategic approach to slowing and sharing streets.

The transport plan pinpoints Madras Street as a potential walking street or ‘shared street’ for driving, cycling and walking. Considered urban design planning should be applied to its length between Moorhouse and High Street. Existing trees on the site and streets can be retained where possible. Looking into the successful design of shared streets such as the Dutch Woonerfen as well as local examples in Christchurch’s historic, walkable inner city Streets and Auckland’s CBD provide examples of design elements that may be integrated into this site.

A motor-centric de-progression approach will be applied, curtailing the flow of traffic transitioning from Moorhouse Avenue into the shared street planned for Madras Street. A series of gradually more intricate streets will slow vehicles, reduce traffic through the site, and create a much more user-friendly urban experience. A hierarchy of streets, shown in figure 8 has been established for the immediate urban area, taking the design scale from 60km/h to a walking pace.

Car parking will be halved and hidden within the current site due to an oversupply in the immediate area and also indicating the intention to work within the rebuild plans. There are 257 spaces on the site. The proposed redevelopment will retain 33% of this with a mix of street and on-grade parking options. Mixing uses on the site will reduce parking requirements and encourage shared car ownership and public transport use.

Deliveries to the site by larger trucks will be redirected. The supermarket currently uses Madras Street, Rope Street and Eaton Place as a primary truck delivery route. To allow for Madras Street to fulfil its potential as a ‘shared street’ heavy transport will be redirected. The delivery methods that the distribution centre uses will be engaged into the design, allowing delivery bicycles, three wheeled scooters, small vans and flying drones to become an active participant adding to daily life in this busy urban centre.
A mix of residential dwellings add bring resilience, safety and community to the urban core.

A meeting with Ceciel DelaRue, Team Leader for Urban Design at Christchurch City Council helped me to understand larger strategies for the area, including a planned large big box retail, and possibly a multiplex cinema across Moorhouse Avenue from the site. This highlighted connectivity requirements through the site. The need for residential accommodation was highlighted and she agreed with my approach in applying finer grained strategy for the site, creating public open space, as well as building along the southern edge.

To her, these ideas aligned with the vision that the council had for the area, and she pointed out that the urban approach to this site held similarities to the Central City South Master Plan 2009.

Outlining a New Urbanist vision pre-quake, it covers many of the urban issues that are still apparent today. It promotes residential activity in the area and covers pricing, demographics and typology. This document still holds relevance - many current plans draw from an extensive base of such earlier research drawn up before the earthquakes.

While the target of this study is small business, this site is also suitable for a mix of residential activity - a key ingredient in an improved urban condition suitable for small businesses. CBD planning documents indicate an increase in residents at a density of 50 households per hectare and identify a target market of: 85% young professionals, retiring adults, entrepreneurs, artists, and; 15% small families, university students and contract workers.

It is interesting to note that the general urban strategy in this project aligns well with the New Urbanist approach found in the pre-earthquake planning document, Central City South Master Plan, and I am advised that many of the issues and aspirations are still current. This plan was discovered late in the course of research and came as a confirmation that the proposed urban strategy was on the same track.

Christchurch City Council, “Project: Central City South a World Class City with Heart,” (Christchurch: CCC, 2009).

Dunham-Jones, Retrofitting Suburbia. 109.
A vibrant retail area for locals with community, public events, food and bargain shopping at its core. Christchurch’s core is lacking a boutique-scaled supermarket. The existing store’s footprint will be reduced to accommodate a conversion from big box, to boutique food market, focused on quality and healthy eating. An international food court integrated with the food markets supply chain connects to the public outdoor space on the site.

Evidence of demand for a lower end retail offering can be assumed, as the north end of High Street is being developed with high-end retail. To balance the range of retail spread, small businesses, discount retailers and boutiques will occupy the site as the antithesis of the chain store / high end retail precinct. A variety of small businesses spaces including covered malls, walk up store fronts, cafes, bars and larger drive up spaces should be included to cover a range of suppliers and businesses with different retail strategies.

A public square for the south of the city with a sky-reaching landmark.

The loss of the train station and clock tower along Moorhouse Avenue to an overly eager demolition schedule has left the area south of the CBD void of a significant landmark. A core central destination could be established nearby, with a sky-reaching form marking the site once again as a worthy place within the city. The reuse of elements in the deconstruction of the supermarket will contribute to this new structure.

The lack of engagement by councils and government planning groups meant people in Christchurch feel voiceless and disenfranchised. The activation of an existing car park into a social site, with a performance stage, market place and public activity space will contribute some of the original Share An Idea concepts back into the city, engage the community and bring vitality to an under-utilised space. The added sky-reaching structure will engage with the community in various ways.

With a neighbouring large scale retail or cinema multiplex development pencilled in across the road at the former train station site, it is important to allow for possible future links towards this site. Opening the site up to Moorhouse Avenue in strategic places will allow for future connections to this development and into Sydenham.

See Appendix A
Primary Architectural Strategies
The reduced retail area will allow Countdown to operate a more focused, boutique grocery option, similar to the Whole Foods stores in the USA. This will capture the market early in preparation for growth in CBD residential population, while potentially increasing its current share of the existing market. Alongside a compact supermarket with a refined range, an intimate international food court (as requested by in the Share and Idea Campaign) with walk up storefronts to create a rich retail experience that the competition cannot match.

The new supermarket strategy will optimise its untapped potential, create a retail destination and continuously enrich Christchurch’s wider community.

The time is ripe for supermarkets to reinvent and re-programme their operations and move toward a model that is more efficient in management of resources, optimised through new technology and more connected with local production. Water retention, reuse and reduced runoff are essential elements in this, and are encouraged in the planning documents. This holds economic benefits in terms of research and development as well as marketing and branding for a progressive retail business.

The Countdown supermarket on the site has been identified as surplus to local requirements due to its immediate proximity to two large supermarket competitors and its excessive size. These images from the existing supermarket illustrate this.

This study proposes that Countdown reinvent itself on this site through the following strategic moves:
- reduced retail area;
- creation of a distribution centre;
- providing excess site area as affordable small business space.

A distribution and delivery centre will be created where stock for the supermarket and external distribution channels will be warehoused. This will enable Countdown to keep up with a rising demand in delivered goods. With online shopping on the rise, Countdown can retain its competitive edge by introducing innovation to the traditional activity of grocery shopping. This would include connecting with smart devices in pantries, refrigerators, cafes and businesses around Christchurch that communicate grocery needs to the centrally located delivery centre.

Delivery by bicycle, drone, scooter and delivery vans will be integrated into and through the public spaces to form a comprehensive distribution network serving central and greater Christchurch.

The last strategic move - that of discounted small business space - is the key to activating reduced price space for small businesses and attracting people, activity and vitality to the site. The incentives for Countdown to do this include increased foot traffic to the site, increased rental return on the land and the chance to create an innovative flagship concept for retail and mixed tenure. This is the kind of innovation that would help market the brand as truly progressive, as well as a key contributor in the recovery of Christchurch.
Breaking up the box...
GENERATION OF AFFORDABLE, FLEXIBLE SMALL BUSINESS SPACE

Ideal spaces for small businesses will be created from recycled, defunct big boxes. Taking into account growth trends, demand and planning forecasts, it is clear that affordable space for small businesses is needed. Sharing the site that these businesses occupy with existing large business provides a means to reducing lease prices.

Intensification of existing patterns of small business occupation could open the way for vitality to return to otherwise leftover districts. Incorporating space for small businesses that engage with CPIT allows for the university to activate existing connections to the site, enabling engagement with businesses and adding vitality to the community.72

The existence of “Boxed Quarter”, outlined in section 220 underlines the demand for small business space in the area, and would see mutual benefit from its proximity to the study site. It is an excellent alternative strategy that works toward the primary issue that this research focuses on.

I began explorations for the dismantling of the supermarket, replacing it with a finer grained business and retail destination. A simple strategy emerged driven by cost effectiveness and a restorative urban approach. Major services in the supermarket, such as the bakery, deli, and butchery sections were retained to enable a cheaper re-fit for the reduced retail strategy above.

When exploring the plans and designs of supermarkets, the portal frame emerged as an option for potential recycling. The existing supermarket building has a 64m clear-spanning linear grid with 12 portal frames. With excellent spanning capacity, the portal frame provided a strong base to begin recycling the supermarket from.

Store visibility is a key ingredient in supermarket retail, so this is not overlooked in the process of redesigning the store and embedding it within the block. A strategic, integrated and innovative approach to signage, attractive street frontages and marketing, coupled with the sky-reaching landmark will lift this store to the forefront of the Cantabrian psyche.

Explorations of recycling and rebuilding from existing building elements are inherently popular with the grassroots rebuild movements happening in Christchurch. A lot of buildings have been demolished without thought for the waste that this process creates. Thus, the existing supermarket will be recycled - adapted to its new operations and site contribution through the realignment of key structural, mechanical and service elements. This will not only reflect well on the supermarket brand, but also save on construction costs.

The existence of “Boxed Quarter”, outlined in section 220 underlines the demand for small business space in the area, and would see mutual benefit from its proximity to the study site. It is an excellent alternative strategy that works toward the primary issue that this research focuses on.

Spare parts and spare space

Countdown Moorhouse Avenue

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Portals could be extracted from the supermarket and aligned 9 meters apart along the southern edges of the site. These are then broken into eight small business spaces, each with a floor area of 144m². The northern face of the units would have walls that tilted upwards, enabling an outdoor or loading area to be added or removed on a daily basis, while the southern edge faces the street and a newly developed short term parking area, part of the auto centric de-progression strategy.

As 144m² was at the smaller end of the spectrum for small business space, the grid is divided again by inserting three 8m wide gantry units within the structure. These galleys are box like units with two walls braced 8m apart. They feature lofts and can be moved, rolled within the portal structure on tracks recycled from nearby train yards. These walls enable quick retrofits providing for adaptive commercial floor sizes. The loft floor utilises a composite timber and concrete floor to enable an unobstructed span between the two 8m moving walls. The excellent sound absorption of a 500mm thick floor enables various arrangements in the use of the loft as well.

Further exploring the idea of re-use and recycling, a site visit was made to obtain the range of materials that would be available for use on this building. Extensive straight runs of aluminium shopfront joinery, long lengths of steel canopy, high lighting fixtures, concrete tilt panels in excellent condition, as well as plenty of purlins and expanses roof cladding were identified in this inspection. The flexibility of the new smaller buildings would enable an ever-changing range of spaces for a range of programmes within the superstructure. In an environment of economic uncertainty, moveable floor plates provide an exact solution to varying spatial needs. These rolling walls are capable of fulfilling business requirements such as security, fire proofing and acoustic needs, whilst being able to be adjusted mechanically as the needs of tenancies change, ensuring longevity of tenancies.

With their bases touching the ground on recycled train trucks known as rigid bogies these walls reference the nearby railway line. They are also able to deflect the impact of seismic activity by rolling with the movement of the ground.

"The forms in which money is used must be converted to instruments of regeneration - from instruments buying violent cataclysms to instruments buying continual, gradual complex and gentler change."

Jane Jacobs
The Death and Life of Great American Cities, page 317

Conclusion

Looking at Christchurch through the lenses of current economic conditions, planning documents and urban renewal efforts, as well as studies into supermarkets and mixed use developments in Christchurch and around the world, this project has shown the potential to meld the economic imperatives of big box retailers with the needs of small business. This does this in a way that will significantly benefit the city, the environment and the recovery of a dead zone in the urban matrix.

Through this research it has been found that the current model for rebuilding Christchurch is not working for the small commercial players that once made up the heart of this city.

It was also shown that several big box retail stores in one part of the CBD with vast tracts of parking space are no longer the anchor tenants they once were, but are now misplaced behemoths, lying somnolently in the path of progress toward a revitalised, rebuilt, future Christchurch. Now is the time for change. Christchurch has an opportunity here to respond to spatial demands and new problems generated by social change; a time to create better institutions than those already established.

The proposal put forward as a result of this document in the form of design strategies and supporting architectural concepts is a solution designed to satisfy multiple parties, including supermarket stakeholders, small businesses, environmentalists and proponents of economic growth. At the heart of the project was an ambition to benefit the people of Christchurch, making their city better. The urban strategy, architectural approaches and economic concepts that this project outlines form a solution that does this. This project shows an alternative approach to rebuilding that is a viable, economically feasible improvement on existing plans. Incentives for the supermarket to do this have been found by way of land sub-letting, a refined retail strategy, intensification of the site and a re-distribution of existing resources.

The solution proposed from this study could be replicated internationally as the situation is widespread. Working with rather than against corporate giants for a common urban good is a solution that could benefit millions of people, save tonnes of emissions and revitalise streets throughout the world if the few major supermarket players catch on to its exciting potential, incorporating and building the idea repeatedly.

Proposed Design Solution

Taking apart the behemoth building that exists on this site, yet retaining its core service areas for a cost efficient retrofit, the supermarket is taken from 7000m² down to 2000m², and the big box is broken up. Portal frames and spare parts are redistributed throughout the site.

The supermarket is reduced to a market to suit the scale of customer needs and a growing desire for a boutique shopping experience. The volume of goods turnover is however increased with the addition of a distribution centre where trucks access via a re-routed path, and smaller deliveries can be made from here.

The footprint of the new supermarket reflects the changing consumer market. The online model and distribution centre allows it to save its premium so that the service becomes cheaper and thus more popular. Less staff, more space and lower running costs all mean online shopping can be made cost effective and convenient.

The big box is now split up into a number of smaller boxes. A mix of retail spaces occupy these smaller boxes, fronting the streets and the central plaza.

These have replaced 2/3rds of the car parking capacity of the site, so that 10% of the original 230 spaces remain. This space that was formerly sitting dormant is now earning rent for the supermarket store, whilst attracting a range of customers who wouldn’t have otherwise been there. In this way viable rents could be achieved for small business tenants over time.

When one tenant needs to expand its premises, the moving of the gantry wall is much simpler than the retrofitting of internal spaces. The flexibility that this arrangement offers catalysed for small business needs in a rapidly changing city. The urban strategy actually revolves around the car, acknowledging its ever-present part in Christchurch. To make the site attractive to both pedestrians and vehicles, an auto centric de-progression strategy is put forward.

A shared street with retail and hospitality spaces facing CPIT, where one of the portal frame buildings exhibits a rooftop garden bar, and one has apartments overlooking Madras street. The low cost accommodation upstairs comprises ten 2 bedroom apartments, likely to be used by students and young families working and studying in the area. The project is kept to 2 storeys to keep the costs of development down.

Lastly, the plaza with its sky reaching folly highlights the site to the people and visitors of Christchurch, anchoring it as a fun, affordable retail district at the south terminus of the high street retail district.

The proposal as a whole revives the grain of the former area, complimenting its surrounds, and provides an attractive destination south of the CBD.
Existing supermarket services
Re-programmed supermarket
View locations

- Small business spaces
- Re-planned boutique supermarket
- Covered mall and international foodcourt
- Foodcourt small business spaces
- Mid size retail spaces (pharmacy etc)
- Supermarket distribution center
- Online purchase collection lockers
- Online purchase dispatch docks
- Truck loading zone
- Flexible small business spaces with rail mounted sliding gantry units
- Hospitality spaces with seating to plaza
- Office / medium sized retail stores
- Ground level retail / hospitality with rooftop seating
- Ground level shops / offices with 2 bedroom apartments above
- Public place with interactive weather balloon sculpture
- Parking - 105 proposed parking spaces to replace 260 existing
- 15 minute parking area
- Shared street
- Bus stops
MADRAS STREET - PROPOSED SHARED STREET
8 - 11m

ROPE STREET - PROPOSED LANEWAY
5m

MOORHOUSE AVENUE - PROPOSED INTERVENTION
12m

MOORHOUSE AVENUE - EXISTING
32m

AUTO CENTRIC DE-PROGRESSION
ROAD WIDTHS, LANES AND DIRECTION INDICATED
REFERENCE LIST


“Project: Central City South a World Class City with Heart.” Christchurch: CCC, 2009.


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“Plan of Christchurch and Suburbs.” Christchurch Library, Heritage Maps


Ibid. 68, 98


“Moorhouse Avenue” Google Street View.


“Market Basket - Grand opening”
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“Market Basket - Drawing”
http://smg.photobucket.com/user/Vexorg/media/Sledgehammer/Crossroads/MBStore_Drawing_BA12-5-63.jpg.html

Countdown Pop-up Ads
www.countdown.co.nz

http://www.transformingcities.co.uk/the-future-of-birmingham’s-local-centres-and-the-green-belt/


“Karges-Faulconbridge”


Drawing by Joseph Davis with assistance from Emma Gakkin from rough sketch by Peter Buchanan.


Canterbury Maps, Aerial Imagery.
http://canterburymaps.govt.nz/viewer/

“Site Overview” Google Earth.

“Figure 4 Christchurch Central Projects and precincts map November 2014”

“Supermarket Precinct Streetscape” Google Street View.

Christchurch City Council, “Project: Central City South - a World Class City with Heart,”[Christchurch: CCC, 2009].

“Christchurch Train Station”
https://www.flickr.com/photos/philbathweaver/804499667/
The CCRP claims the central city, as defined by the new frame, will become vibrant and well-formed, attracting people to a safe, easily accessible place that has multiple uses, such as work, education and entertainment as well as places to live and invest. To achieve this vision, the CCRP will define the form of the central city, locate anchor projects to generate investment and growth, and outline block plans to show what the city could look like in the future. These key elements all involve further planning stages, some appearing in this document and more are found in maps and guides on the CERA / CCDU Websites.

The Integration of courtyards & gardens In & around buildings.

There should be no fast food outlets...

An area of the central city rebuilt or designated as a “China Town”, with yummy restaurants, shops, celebrating Chch’s ethnic diversity.

An ethnic food court place.

Ethnic themed areas.

Would like to see a Chinatown concept developed for Asian restaurants.

Ethnic themed areas.

Make a market/Chinatown area.

Ethnic food court place.

More outdoor eating ethnic areas grouped.

Ethnic food courts.

 Ethioc food court place.

Encourage ethnic areas – they add so much life to cities.

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