

Nine approaches to buildings

by Dr Melissa Laing



Creating case studies of successful pathways to building ownership was an important part of the Stable Spaces research. They model strategies and tactics that we can learn from and repeat. They also tell an important piece of history for the arts in Aotearoa.

Significantly, these concrete examples show us that artists, independent arts organisations and community members have immense capacity to run their own spaces. In the words of Jo Randerson from the Vogelmorn Community Group: “We are way more capable than we give ourselves credit for.”

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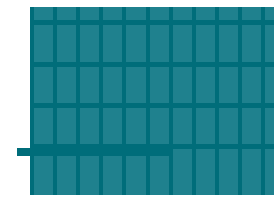


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The nine buildings

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ASB Waterfront Theatre, Auckland

The ASB Waterfront Theatre in Wynyard Quarter was built by the Auckland Theatre Company (ATC) in 2016. They raised \$36.5 million dollars to fund the development which sits on council-owned leasehold land. The 675-seat theatre filled a gap in venue provision in Auckland and is Auckland Theatre Company's home theatre.

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Gonville Centre for Urban Research, Whanganui

The Gonville town centre was a municipal complex consisting of a fire station, swimming baths and town hall, all initially built in 1911. It is now privately owned by Frank Stark and Emma Bugden as a home and community venue. Under the banner of the Gonville Centre for Urban Research (GCUR), they host researchers and architectural archives, and support local creative activity through affordable hall hire.

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Hamilton Citizens Band, Hamilton

The Hamilton Citizens Band is an incorporated society with band rehearsal rooms in Clyde St in Hamilton that used to be a tennis club. The band bought the building in 1993 and have a 20-year renewing ground lease from Hamilton Council. The renovations were managed by two society members who were trades professionals.

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Hihiaua, Whangārei

Hihiaua started out as a workshop for whakairo in a run-down boat-building shed on a small point of land in Whangārei. In 2009 the trust put together a multi-staged plan to build a multi-purpose arts facility on the point. In 2019, stage one – a renovated shed and added waka store and launching gantry – was completed.

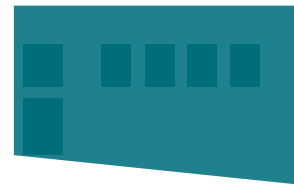
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McCahon House (and Shadbolt House), Auckland

McCahon House is an artist residency and museum in French Bay. The land and the dwelling (previously lived in by Colin McCahon and his family) were strategically purchased by the Waitākere City Council in 1999, and later gifted to the McCahon House Trust. In 2006 the Waitākere City Council sought to repeat their success by buying author Maurice Shadbolt's house. Unfortunately the property was not transferred to an arts body before the formation of the "super city" in 2010.

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Old Folks Association Coronation Hall, Auckland

The Auckland Old Folks Association Coronation Hall was built in the 1950 by the then thriving Auckland Old Folks Association. It has remained in the hands of the association ever since. In the 2000s, performance artist Sean Curham established an ongoing relationship with the association, culminating in the eventual transition of the society to an intergenerational arts-focussed membership base.

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Te Matatiki Toi Ora The Arts Centre, Christchurch

Te Matatiki Toi Ora The Arts Centre is a 23-building campus on a two-and-a-half hectare site in the centre of Christchurch, gifted by the University of Canterbury to The Arts Centre trust. According to its current director, Phillip Aldridge (ONZM), The Arts Centre is "a community centre in a very grand setting." Since 1974 it has provided essential infrastructure for Christchurch arts communities inside its heritage-listed Gothic Revival architecture.

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The Incubator Creative Hub, Tauranga

The Incubator Creative Hub was established in 2013 when a small group of artists rented a run-down barn in Tauranga's Historic Village for artist studios. In the subsequent ten years, The Incubator has grown to a creative confederation housed across 16 buildings. It recently bought a building in the Historic Village, through a combination of a grant from the Lottery Community Facilities Fund and a rent-to-buy agreement.

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Vogelmorn Community Group, Wellington

The Vogelmorn Bowling Club was forced to close in 2014. The members planned to sell their buildings to fund a new foundation for the benefit of the local community. Vogelmorn Community Group negotiated a different result: paying to subdivide the property and then buying the club building off the foundation for a nominal sum. They now operate it as a mixed-use community and arts facility.



How I chose the case studies

To create the nine case studies in this report, I interviewed thirteen people involved in building acquisition or management. This included having the pleasure of touring their facilities. There are many amazing building-owning organisations that I didn't talk to.

I identified the case studies through a combination of media searches for asset-owning arts organisations and advice from members of the arts community. I prioritised buildings acquired after the introduction of neoliberal economics, or Rogernomics, in Aotearoa. This is so that our examples demonstrate approaches to financing building acquisition that are relevant to our contemporary situation.

Examples from earlier times that come up repeatedly were Centrepoin in Palmerston North, Driving Creek in the Coromandel and the Quarry Arts Centre in Whangārei. I'm sure my readers can think of others.¹

Eight of the nine case studies are in the North Island, and one in the South Island. Five are in main centres and four in regional centres. Three organisations are focussed on a single artform, and six are mixed-use. Eight are Pākehā-led, one is Māori-led. None were Pasifika or Asian-led (or led by any ethnicity other than Māori or Pākehā), an issue that I discuss in the Stable Spaces report.

The case studies were written using the transcribed interviews with additional detail sourced from newspaper articles and books about the organisations; trust or society records; land records including property titles; and architectural assessments and proposals.

Their stories demonstrate the four main approaches to building acquisition: asset transfer (by gift or nominal payment); community asset transition; asset purchase at market value; and construction of new buildings. They show how organisations combined these approaches along their journey.

A building fit for the work: Auckland Theatre Company's ASB Waterfront Theatre

Model:	A new fit-for-purpose building on leasehold land with a deferred lease payment
Built:	2014 - 2016
Key enabling factors:	A new local government body looking for a signature project; existing, clear needs analysis and business case for a new theatre; high-skill trustees with experience in property development; ASB Bank relocating its Head Office to the Wynyard Quarter; a high-profile successful arts organisation with a loyal following
Key stakeholders:	Auckland Council, Waterfront Auckland (now Eke Panuku), Auckland Theatre Company (ATC), ASB Bank, AUT, Foundation North, the Lion Foundation, NZ Lotteries Grants Board, ATC-subscriber base and Creative NZ
Legal protections:	Two Limited Liability companies with Charitable Purposes owned by Charitable Trusts which allow for the financial separation of the program from venue operation
Interviewed:	Lester McGrath and Natasha Pearce

What we learn:

- Have a clear needs analysis that supports your project
- Be able to tell a story about the bigger picture of the building reaching out into community and economy and creating opportunities
- Corporate sponsors undertaking construction in the neighbouring area can offer a temporary window of opportunity for both naming rights and facilities sharing
- Once you have the blocks in place, be ready to recognise and seize the moment of opportunity when it arises
- People may be more likely to perceive you as well-run, professional and/or “established” once you are in permanent accommodation
- Your subscriber base can be your lobbying force
- When designing your building, consider how it can support not only your core performance activities, but also a great experience for your audience beyond the performance space
- Having construction and development experience on your trust board is invaluable
- Have a business plan for how your building will operate, but understand that it will inevitably change after your building opens due to the incremental changes that occur during the build, and changes in economic environment between making the plan and opening
- Charging what it costs to run the building can place the price of the venue out of reach for non-commercial projects
- Having a Charitable Trust mechanism means you can raise funding for capital projects
- Separate legal structures can insulate one part of operations from the other, however they can also confuse funders / the public
- The lack of available operational funding for venues places stress on venues to raise revenue
- As part of the fundraising process organisations should seek to secure stakeholder agreement to contribute to the ongoing operational funding

History and context

The Auckland Theatre Company (ATC) emerged during a low period for professional theatre in Auckland with the closure of the Mercury Theatre Company. It presented its first production in 1993 in the now demolished Watershed Theatre and has been operating as a professional theatre company ever since. The company's focus is spoken theatre, presenting six – eight works by New Zealand and international playwrights annually. For former General Manager Lester McGrath

“[The] mission for Auckland Theatre Company is about building sustainable, professional theatre in Auckland. And they're really important words, sustainable and professional. And what does that mean? That's about people being able to earn a living and have a profession and practise their craft.”

By 2005 the company had matured to the point that they could seriously begin to work on securing their own buildings, firstly to house the company's production team and rehearsals, and secondly to present work to the public.

At the time the ATC production team were working out of temporary accommodation in one of the old warehouses in Britomart, downtown Auckland. But the buildings were slated for redevelopment. According to McGrath,

“We were very keen to get rehearsal rooms. A place that was equipped and properly set up for making theatre, for rehearsal, instead of in temporary spaces that you couldn't mark out the stage.”

In 2008 they took on the derelict basement of the Council-owned Mt Eden War Memorial Hall, raising around a million dollars to renovate it into a usable space for the company. For McGrath

“[The rehearsal rooms] really established the company. They send out a clear message that it's a professional company, you've got proper space, it's run properly, that it's resourced. That really changed the way people viewed the company, the company viewed itself and the way that the performers viewed it.”

The ATC had reached a scale of production and audience size that made securing spaces for its annual program a challenge. During this time, Auckland's theatre venues were in flux. At one end of the scale the independent sector was growing. In 2007 Silo Theatre transitioned into a production company leaving its venue to be transformed into an independent theatre incubator – The Basement – seating up to 120. At the other end of the scale, both the Aotea Centre and the Civic could seat over 2000. In between were a handful of venues that could support the technical needs of traditional theatre. The Herald Theatre could seat 186. The Maidment Theatre at the University of Auckland could seat 448, but its use was being reviewed by the University and in 2015, after a fire and a changed earthquake rating, its doors were closed. Finally, the Sky City Casino, whose theatre could seat 700, was shifting its priorities. McGrath recalls:

“They wanted things that were much more aligned with an entertainment brand, less about a theatre brand and they really wanted to add value to the gaming customers they had coming through the door, which wasn't really [the Auckland Theatre Company audience]”.

As a result of the changing landscape ATC were facing the problem of where to present their work.

“We couldn't get dates. And we spent hours and hours trying to find [them]. And in fact, one year [2010] we even did the end-of-year musical in a Spiegel tent down on the waterfront. It's because we just couldn't get into a venue. So we thought, right, let's put up a tent and do a show in a tent” – McGrath

Q Theatre with its reconfigurable 270 – 470 seat Rangatira space was under construction, opening in 2011, but it was being built to serve the wider theatre sector whose needs were not the same as ATC's:

“There was a real tension between getting Q Theatre up and running and supported and Auckland Theatre Company needing its own home. It became very clear that Q Theatre was primarily for the independent sector. And it wasn't designed as a venue for Auckland Theatre Company.” – McGrath

For McGrath and the ATC it was clear they needed their own venue.



Getting it off the ground.

One of the enabling factors for ATC's vision of a home venue was a needs study Auckland City Council commissioned in 2008 from Horwath HTL. Part of the study compared the number and variety of venues in Auckland City to selected benchmark cities particularly in Australia. McGrath recalls that it demonstrated there was a common hierarchy of venues in a city.

"You have a couple of the really big theatres and then a number of mid-scale venues and a larger number of smaller venues at the 100 to 350 seats. There was no midscale theatre in Auckland. So we made a case that Auckland needed a midscale theatre, which is really around the 550-600 seat mark."

Reflecting on the ASB Waterfront Theatre's place in the theatre ecology of Auckland in 2023 Natasha Pearce, ATC's current Head of Strategy said

"The benefit to the broader community of arts organisations is having another venue to put work on. And when all of the arts organisations in Auckland have something happening, all of the venues are full. You know, we might be on in our theatre and New Zealand Dance Company might be on at Q and Te Rehia will have something on at Te Pou and you know there will be the orchestra in the town hall and the venues that are empty are the 2000 seat ones because there's very little that is locally made that can reliably sell that many tickets on a consistent basis."

As McGrath explains, venue scale is important to the financial viability of productions. The smaller the theatre the lower the potential ticket revenue, which then constrains the scale of the production.

"If you wanted to do a show of scale, that employed more than two to four actors, you needed to be able to have a certain size audience and therefore you need a certain number of sellable seats across a season, to resource it appropriately. Auckland Theatre Company's aspiration at that time was to be a mainstream theatre company that served the wider Auckland region. This was reflected in the programming choices, the scale of production and the production values. But all of this costs money, so size and scale is important from a revenue generating perspective."

With staff support from Waterfront Auckland, ATC identified a potential council-owned site down in the Wynyard Quarter. The development work being undertaken by Waterfront Auckland in the area made it an ideal location for a theatre that could draw people in and anchor the night-time economy.²

"There was the America's Cup development happening down at the waterfront and so that area was all being done up. And Gordon Moller, who was on the board originally, then became the chair, was an architect that was involved in Waterfront's Technical Advisory Group. They were building this new community, which makes it residential and commercial. He spotted it and said, actually, the city is moving in this direction down there. There's an opportunity to put a theatre on the waterfront. It fits in what we're trying to do." – McGrath

A key enabling factor McGrath identifies was timing. Not only the timing of the waterfront development, but also commercial and political timing. ASB Bank was



an early champion of the project as they could see synergies between themselves and ATC to deliver community goals, through a shared theatre facility located in their new Wynyard Quarter Head Office. Named North Wharf the planned ASB Bank headquarters included a 200 seater flexiform theatre. ATC's larger theatre next door amplified the opportunity for ASB as it offered significant naming and branding options. ASB gave the new theatre proposal impetus, as they had their headquarters designed and in front of the Auckland City Council Development Committee in 2010, right as the Super City transition occurred. Riding on the coattails of ASB, ATC was able to take advantage of the first election process for the newly-amalgamated Auckland Council, and the new council and local board formations themselves, to lobby politicians and put forward a proposal to be the first big project in the area of the new Waitemata Local Board.

"Up until the transformation of the Super City, we worked hard on all the candidates that were going to go in for the Super City. We made strong alliances with the mayoral candidates and we went about that in a number of ways and also looking at where the politics of the whole thing would land. So when the Waitemata Local Board was formed we were in there on the very first meeting of the Waitemata Local Board and said, have we got a great project for you! And they went, 'this is terrific, it's the first big project that's in our area. It's a great example of the Super City all going together'. So it got shot up to the governing body and to [Mayor] Len Brown. (...) And it was only really that window of six months to nine months that suddenly all of those things aligned, that we thought we had a project, let's go for it." – McGrath

The governing body (mayor and councillors) approved a 99-year lease for the site, with a deferred ground lease payment, and committed \$10 million in capital funding, contingent on the ATC raising the remaining funding.

“We had council with a promise of 10 million and we had the ASB Bank and we had the opportunity of the Super City and so then we just had to fundraise the rest, which was tough. It was tough going. We did it. We fundraised through the [global financial crisis] and through the Christchurch earthquake and it was tough going but we got there.” – McGrath

Over the next five years they raised \$36.5 million, breaking ground in December 2014 and opening the building on 22 September 2016.³

The design and build process

The ASB Waterfront Theatre was designed by architect Gordon Moller ONZM, Chair of the ATC board, and managed by Matthew Cockram, who was brought on board as the chair of the new Waterfront Theatre Limited. Having these two property development experts on the governing bodies of the theatre company and the soon-to-be theatre ensured the success of the theatre build. Cockram brought his experience leading the Britomart redevelopment to the project, and Moller brought his deep knowledge of the waterfront development direction and the land as a member of the Waterfront Development Technical Advisory Group.

“Having [Moller] across those three areas – the land and the technical advisory group and company – and being the chief architect meant that when we took the drawings to cost to get priced, they were incredibly detailed and very accurate. So that’s why we were able to land on a very specific price with Hawkins. And so we went to market on the basis of getting that type of contract.” – McGrath

Thanks to Cockram sitting on the board of Waterfront Theatre Limited they were able to secure a project manager from Cockram’s team, reporting directly to them. Waterfront Theatre Ltd also secured a fixed-price contract with Hawkins, with very little wiggle room. This meant the risk was carried by the contractors instead of the risk being managed by the organisation, and the contractors brought it in on time and on budget.

The architects worked with a specialist theatre designer, Brian Hall, to develop the auditorium specifically for spoken theatre performances, and planned the entire audience journey to ensure that by the time they reached the auditorium and settled in to watch the work they were primed to enjoy the experience. For McGrath, too often an audience can lose their anticipation and joy for the evening’s entertainment through poor ticketing experiences, foyer design and seating arrangements in the auditorium. Having their own building allowed the ATC to control this variable.

“Now, normally when you do a building like this, you go, well, here’s the footprint. This is what we need. And you cram it all in. And because we knew that we wanted it for a spoken word theatre and the acoustics of how that was going to work, we designed the whole building out from the relationship between the audience and the performer. We spent the most time on that relationship of those seats, that shape of the auditorium, the relationship

to the performer and the stage. And then we designed the whole building out from that. And so that’s why we ended up with the theatre one floor up. It even informed things like the range of coloured seats that are in the auditorium so that not only does it look great if the audience is not full, it looks full because of the range of colours in it.” – McGrath

Even with that level of preliminary design work and planning, elements were added during the build. This included the introduction of the multi-storey-high Leo Villareal light sculpture – which wraps around the outside of the auditorium proper in the foyer, and can be seen from the street via the theatre’s transparent external walls as a warm, welcoming and exciting beacon inviting audiences in long before they’ve reached the building – and the film screening infrastructure that allows the ASB Waterfront Theatre to be a NZ Film Festival venue. Both of these required additional fundraising.

Fundraising

According to media reports at the time the ASB Waterfront Theatre Trust raised \$36 million, “\$17m from the central and local Governments, \$7m from charitable trusts and foundations and \$12m from AUT, corporate partners and private donors.”⁴ McGrath attributes their success to a range of contributing factors, including: the clear demonstrated need for a mid-sized theatre; the business plan the ATC developed for the theatre’s operation; the funding and political environment; and their ability to link the theatre to the urban regeneration strategy underway at the waterfront. To secure this funding, the ATC shared a vision that was greater than just a home venue for the company. It was a vision which included social, economic and cultural benefits for the city.

“The story that we built wasn’t just about the Auckland Theatre Company. It was about the viaduct, what this would add to the viaduct in Wynyard Quarter. What this would add to Auckland as a city that’s diverse, that’s about storytelling and the stories that go on in the city. It was about the “after-five” economy and how the theatre company would contribute to that. And then it was also really about building a strong wellbeing story as well, around the profession, the economic value, the social value, and what a flagship venue for wider Auckland could be, focused on this particular art form. And also recognising that, you know, that there’s 180-odd ethnicities in Auckland, they all have stories to tell and theatre is about telling those stories. Thinking about what that venue might be able to do in this place that celebrates stories was key. And so people came. There were many reasons in the story why people were able to support it.” – McGrath

Lion Foundation was one of the early funders. They supported all the planning work which then informed the fundraising campaign. ASB Waterfront Theatre Trust also secured grants from two major funders, Foundation North and Creative New Zealand, as well as money from Lotteries NZ and the Edmiston Trust. Creative New Zealand’s \$4.5 million investment is significant for the fact that the public arts-funding agency usually does not provide capital funding. In their own media release about the decision in 2017, Creative New Zealand stated that their only other capital investment up until then was “\$500,000 towards the Court Theatre’s new venue in Christchurch” in 2011.⁵

McGrath attributes their success in raising private donations to the long-term stability of the organisation. Over the 17 years the ATC had been operating they had never gone out to their subscriber base with a request for emergency funding.

“We had never gone to our donors and subscribers in the past and said, ‘we’re in a terrible time. Can you bail us out?’ Or ‘we need you to top this’. We’d never done a big ask before. And so in the life of the company, psychologically, it was a good time to be doing it. And also they were very excited about it. Being down in the waterfront caught their imaginations.”

Raising the full amount took incredible persistence from the ATC.

“You know, people used to cross the road. They’d see me coming down the street and they’d run. I’d be after them saying, ‘No, you promised me some money!’” –McGrath

McGrath recalls that many people only gave after it was clear the project would proceed, reflecting a common desire to invest in something after it was demonstrably concrete and likely to succeed.

“I remember one particular person saying to us, ‘oh, you’re all a bunch of dreamers. It’s never going to happen.’ And we said, ‘right, well, watch this space’. And they actually came round in the end and made a donation.” – McGrath

However, raising the \$36 million took time. When ATC first pitched to Auckland Council in 2010 they predicted that they’d have raised the money within a year. Realistically it took much longer and they had to request the \$10 million commitment be carried over to later dates on several occasions. At one point the sentiment of the councillors was not in favour of extending the funding offer and, on learning this, the ATC successfully mobilised their subscriber base to lobby their ward councillors in support of the extension. McGrath recalls Cameron Brewer, the councillor for Ōrākei ward where many of ATC’s subscribers resided, saying words in the finance committee meeting to the effect of “I’d be voting against this but my constituents are telling me they’d never vote for me again. Just in the last 10 minutes I’ve had 160 emails coming in.”

As McGrath says, projects of this scale are not for the faint of heart. Vision, timing, storytelling and savvy political operation were all brought to bear to get the ASB Waterfront Theatre across the line.

Even though the theatre has now been open for the better part of a decade, the need to raise funds to support the building hasn’t stopped. The ground lease payment has not been deferred indefinitely, and building and theatre technology renewals are coming up. The ATC is planning for these costs and strategising where funding will need to be raised. Pearce recognises the challenges this will pose as a ground lease and technology renewals are not as marketable as a new building, nor is the need as socially evident.

“If you have a structure that’s a trust, then it gives you a mechanism for [raising the money]. But then what all of those trust funders are balancing up are: “do I pay for new theatre lights? Or do I invest in a school food programme?” There is a more immediate, pressing need and everyone’s going to the same trust [funder]s.” – Pearce



Legal structures

When building the theatre, the ATC made a strategic decision to legally separate the ASB Waterfront Theatre building from the performance company. To do this, it established, for the building, both a limited liability company with charitable purposes and a charitable trust to hold the shares of the company. This decision provided the ASB Waterfront Theatre with an independent fundraising mechanism, allowed AUT to take on a 15% shareholding in the company in return for their investment and continues to insulate the ATC from any potential future failure or closure of the theatre and vice versa. All of these factors are valuable to the company, but this approach has also presented a drawback. It causes confusion amongst funders and audiences.

“People either buy too heavily into ‘it’s a separate thing from ATC’ or think of everything that’s on in the venue as ours. Neither is true and both are true. So technically it’s separate from ATC but it’s our theatre, we run it. The technical legal framework is really a construct, when being built, to protect the [Auckland Theatre] Company.” – Pearce

The ATC and the ASB Waterfront Theatre both have separate boards, but their charitable purposes are complementary, ensuring the goals of one rarely conflict with the goals of the other. In addition the ATC appoints the majority of the trustees to The Waterfront Theatre Trust, ATC staff manage the theatre’s operations and, as a performance company, the ATC considers the ASB Waterfront Theatre its home.

The reality of running a venue

The case for the ASB Waterfront Theatre was supported by a business plan, something both McGrath and Pearce consider key to demonstrating the future viability of the theatre to the funders. However, it’s important to understand that the business plan will necessarily change once operations are underway. As Pearce puts it:

“Business cases are on the face of them partly theoretical as well. You know, in a theoretical environment, if the building is X, it will cost Y to run and be able to generate Z revenue. And then when you build it and inevitably, you know, little bit of tweaks here and there throughout the building process means you end up with something that needs to be run A and generate revenue C.”

With the opening of the ASB Waterfront Theatre, the ATC became

“a producing theatre company who has a venue, not unlike the National Theatre in London, for example, or Sydney Theatre Company, or many other companies around the world who produce theatre and have their own venue. So we are a producing theatre company who has its own venue. And one of the things we do as a producing theatre company to make our venue viable is we hire it out to other people.” – Pearce

The ATC effectively hires its own venue for each production staged at ASB Waterfront Theatre, but they only occupy the theatre for four to five months of

the year (in non-consecutive periods). The remainder of the time, the theatre is filled with a combination of commercial, performing arts and community hires. A core part of the operation of the theatre is for it to fulfil its charitable purpose to “support the activities and continued promotion and development of the performing arts in Auckland, particularly live theatre and dance”.⁶ To help do this, ATC structures its venue charges according to a sliding scale. However, setting these charges is a balancing act between bringing in the revenue the building needs to cover its operations and acknowledging the relative lack of available money in the arts economy. This means an economic structure that uses corporate hires to offset the reduced revenues of community use.

“If you’re bringing in a theatrical production of any description, then your hire agreement includes some non-performance days because you need to pack in and you need to do your technical rehearsals and all of that. If you’re coming in as a purely commercial client doing a conference, then it’s a different kind of thing again because you work in a different way. So if you’re doing a conference you might be in and out in two days including your setup and pack in. Or if it’s something a bit fancier where you need lighting and sound, then there’s that. Then we have our small meetings which are just small meetings. We also do community hires which are pretty much just break even, whatever it costs for us to turn the lights on and if you can do your own cleaning then we can trim that back as well.” – Pearce

A long-term goal is to be able to strategically program the ASB Waterfront Theatre across the year to ensure that there is a balanced range of theatre, dance and film, enabled through supported and commercial hiring models.

“The vision is for this overall mix of arts and entertainment happening down in the theatre that brings vibrancy to the city and adds to the cultural framework and cultural landscape and brings people into the Wynyard Quarter and creates some life and vibrancy on a year round basis. We had yet to get to the point where we were able to do that. We were working towards it before COVID. And so now the industry as a whole is having to recover.” – Pearce

Part of the challenge to this aspiration is the reluctance of funders to independently support the operational cost of ASB Waterfront Theatre. The general approach is to fund projects and productions with a venue hire charge incorporated into their budgets. Even the Auckland Regional Amenities Funding, a legislatively mandated pool of funding for eight regional amenities, including the ATC, considers that its funding should be applied to the programs of ATC not the ASB Waterfront Theatre facility. This is indicative of an industry-wide issue for venues – and beyond – where funders prioritise projects rather than operational funding. This is often exacerbated by funding applicants struggling to fit their operational costs into project budgets within the funding amounts and revenue models available to them. Pearce asks the question

“If we want arts, then what is the mechanism for making sure we are able to have an infrastructure that supports that? Because we can’t charge everybody what it costs to turn on the lights. That would make theatre only available for some.”

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage did recognise this as an issue in their Covid-19 response funding, establishing a targeted venue fund to cover the loss of revenue from cancelled projects. Pearce suggests that organisations heading into a project like the ASB Waterfront Theatre should secure an agreement from their stakeholders for ongoing support as part of the development funding package.

The benefit of the venue for Auckland Theatre Company

The ASB Waterfront Theatre was built to address a concrete problem for the ATC – they could not secure professional theatre space of the appropriate size for the six to eight productions they present each year. In addition to solving this problem, having a home venue (with a maximum seating capacity of 675) has brought a number of other benefits to the ATC program. In Pearce’s words:

“It creates the opportunity for us to have a broader canvas that we can use to decide what it is we want to put on, the partnerships we want to do, and how we want to stage them.”

Having confidence in the availability of the theatre and a thorough knowledge of what it costs to put on a work in the space – from set design and build to the technical production – means ATC has the confidence to take on ambitious projects with large-scale set building like *King Lear* (2023) or *North by Northwest* (2022) and take risks on works like the 2022 poetry theatre production *Scenes from a Yellow Peril*, which on paper are not obviously commercial.

For McGrath, an additional benefit of the company having a home venue is building audience relationships.

“Companies need [theatres], because that’s where they build their home, they build their audience experience. There is something about the repetition of going back to a space that builds in the audience’s mind that layer upon layer upon layer of experience. And that’s how you build your theatre-going muscle, if you like, in the audience.”

Advice for others

Despite having led three separate building projects over his career McGrath does not advocate for performance companies owning buildings as the default approach. For him the key question is how you are able to use a building:

“I don’t think the theatre companies need to own the asset particularly. It’s really about the usage of it. Owning the asset comes with its own set of headaches. But having the usage is the key thing. And where does that start? And where does that stop? And, I suppose, do you have the ability to modify it or not?”

Similarly, Pearce advocates for first clarifying what the actual need is.

“If you were going to build a new theatre, you would need to think, ‘what else is in my area that is serving my community that is of this size?’ And if there’s something already there doing it, then is building a new building the right approach? It could be because the old building might be about to fall over, in which case the question is bigger than ‘do we need two?’”

Once you have established the need, then looking to the bigger picture is key to enabling people to support your project, that is

“being able to tell a story that enhances the work or the DNA of what you’re doing and that wider public good.” – McGrath

Acknowledgements

Lester McGrath was the General Manager and then Chief Executive of Auckland Theatre Company between 2007 and 2019 and the Executive Director of the Royal New Zealand Ballet between 2019 and 2022. McGrath was interviewed online on 10 July 2023

Natasha Pearce is the Head of Strategy for the Auckland Theatre Company, with a broad background in arts administration having worked with some of Aotearoa’s leading cultural institutions, including Te Papa, Markham Arts, DANZ and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra. Pearce was interviewed by Melissa Laing in Auckland on 11 July 2023

Photography by Andrew Malmo

The private purchase of a town centre: Gonville Centre for Urban Research



Model:	Private investment(s) in semi-private and community spaces
Acquired:	2020
Key enabling factor(s):	Real estate price differences between urban centres. Adaptive reuse strategies.
Key stakeholders:	Frank Stark, Dr Emma Bugden, Mitchell-Anyon family
Legal protections:	Fee Simple Title
Interviewed:	Frank Stark

What we learn:

- The difference in property values between major and minor centres can be leveraged by individuals to create opportunity
- Affordability, civic infrastructure and existing creative community are integral aspects people should consider when relocating
- Taking an adaptive reuse strategy towards existing buildings offers many possibilities and can increase affordability
- Small-scale private investment in infrastructure can create opportunities for the wider community
- Any use-change of existing infrastructure in suburban neighbourhoods needs to be sensitive to its impact on the neighbourhood
- There is often flexibility in the testing and adaption phase, but eventually council regulations must be addressed
- Avoiding public funding can be freeing
- Insuring privately owned buildings that operate as public venues is difficult, and may not be worthwhile

This case study reveals how private property investment can support a wider community of creative practice and knowledge production. While the case study focuses on the actions of Frank Stark and Dr Emma Bugden, their investment was made possible by the earlier private investment strategy of Bobbi Magdalinos and Ross Mitchell-Anyon.



The people

The founders and directors of the Gonville Centre for Urban Research, Frank Stark and Emma Bugden, have a long track record in the arts in Aotearoa. Over his long career, Frank Stark has undertaken many leadership roles in the cultural sector, including NZ Craft Council Director, Chief Executive of the New Zealand Film Archive (now Ngā Taonga) and the Director of the Whanganui Museum. Since 2019 he has owned Heritage Associates, a consultancy supporting the development needs of small-to-medium museums and heritage organisations. Dr Emma Bugden's curriculum vitae is equally impressive, and includes curating for contemporary art galleries across New Zealand such as City Gallery Wellington, Te Tuhi in Pakuranga and The Dowse in Lower Hutt, as well as being the director of The Physics Room in Christchurch and Auckland's Artspace Aotearoa. Both Stark and Bugden began their careers in the arts by establishing grassroots creative spaces. Shortly after graduating university, Stark worked for the Students Arts Council in Auckland, beginning his long association with practising artists. As he recalls

"Everyone needed a space. It was a very New York kind of moment. I found a space in Federal Street in Auckland, which had been built in the 19th century as a stable. It was a brick shed. It was derelict and I walked down the lane and found the building behind. I said, 'Do you know about the building in front?' And they said, 'oh yeah, that belongs to us, but we don't really use it any more'. So I said, 'well, could I rent it off you?' And they said, 'oh yeah, \$28 a week'. So I rented this building and I, virtually on my own, gutted it, painted it with buckets and buckets of cheap white paint from Farmers and created a place called 100m², which was the first artist space, in 1979, that I set up. And really [Gonville Centre for Urban Research] is sort of full circle from that."

Bugden had a similar start, setting up an artist-run space in Dunedin with Warren Olds and Jonathan Nicol. In her PhD thesis *Testing Grounds and Launching Pads: Situating the Artist-Run Space Today* she writes:

"It was 1997, my final year studying sculpture, and I wanted something to happen. [...] So, with two friends who had already graduated, I started a gallery. Our aims were simple: somewhere to show our work and that of our friends. We had a lead on a shabby room above the Dunedin Prostitutes Collective and Needle Exchange. We called it The Honeymoon Suite, a reflection of our attitude – insouciant, humorous and hopeful."⁷

The couple moved to Whanganui in 2016 with their child Peggy – Stark to be the director of the Whanganui Regional Museum, and Bugden to write her PhD on the history of artist-run spaces in Aotearoa while being Peggy's primary caregiver. In 2020 Bugden was awarded her PhD and secured the role of Strategic Lead, Creative Industries with Whanganui & Partners, Whanganui's economic development agency. At this point Stark and Bugden swapped domestic roles, made a long-term commitment to Whanganui and with it took on the Gonville town centre.

The Gonville town centre

The Gonville town centre is a collection of buildings that formed a municipal complex for Gonville when Gonville was an independent district.⁸ Built in 1911 the town centre consisted of a town hall, a swimming pool complex and a fire station, later known as Kokohuia Hall. Changing rooms were added in the mid 20th century and a new frontage for the pool was created in 1974. The pool complex was closed in 2005 and the Town Hall in 2006.⁹ All of the buildings sat on one property title and, in 2010, potter Ross Mitchell-Anyon and his partner Bobbi Magdalinos acquired the lot. According to a 2012 Whanganui District Council built heritage survey

"The Kokohuia Hall and the Gonville Town Hall (q.v.) were advertised for sale for removal in late 2009. In mid-2010, the whole complex (two halls, pool, changing sheds, swimming club room and artesian bore) was sold for \$150,000 (+GST) to Bobbi Magdalinos and Ross Mitchell-Anyon. The couple were aiming to repair and restore the buildings."¹⁰

According to Stark it was not uncommon for Mitchell-Anyon to acquire historic buildings in Whanganui:

"[Mitchell-Anyon] fell into being a building conservationist or preserver by accident, simply through seeing what he saw as valuable heritage buildings in Whanganui coming under demolition threat in the 1990s. He was responsible for buying, somehow or other, a whole lot of buildings around Whanganui in order to save them. Then he would endeavour to sell them on to sympathetic owners, or if he couldn't, tenant them with artists. [He would] create art studios, living spaces and so on in those buildings. The very last of his purchases was the pool."

Prior to buying the town centre, Stark and Bugden had been living down the road in Gonville, passing the old swimming baths regularly and speculating about the uses it could be put to.

"Over time, we lightheartedly talked about all the things you could do with a derelict swimming pool, all the way from creating an outdoor cinema to having a wetland and so on, without really thinking much about it. [Once we decided we were staying in Whanganui] we started saying, well, if we're going to stay here, we ought to really commit and do something significant rather than just live in a house. And so the conversation about the pool came back. And we thought, well, just for a lark, let's find out more about it and how to get hold of it."

Fortuitously, they were friends with Mitchell-Anyon's son Jack and so were able to begin a conversation with the family about buying the pool. Like Mitchell-Anyon before them, they discovered it was all, or nothing, and so ended up buying the entire municipal complex, and founding a research centre.



“Looking at the scale of what we were taking on and feeling kind of wry about it, I guess, I came up with the name, the Gonville Centre for Urban Research. Which was distinctly tongue in cheek, given that what we had were some derelict buildings and no budget, in a city with no real prospect of getting public money for any of those things either. So it was braggadocio, in a way, to call it that, but aspirational as well. And I think it fitted in quite well with a changing mode in Whanganui.”

The unique context of Whanganui

Stark and Bugden are Whanganui converts, and advocates. For Stark there are strong economic, creative and urban arguments for creatives and cultural workers to move to Whanganui. Firstly, real estate in Whanganui is more affordable than that in larger urban areas. This puts owning a house within the reach of younger creatives, and also potentially allows creatives relocating from more expensive areas to own a house mortgage-free.

“I know any number of late-career artists from my generation who have houses in Ponsonby. If they work consistently through their career and they make stuff, they’ve got huge amounts of it, which they’re storing in expensive lockups in West Auckland somewhere. And so it makes compelling sense. I tell those people, ‘look, just do the maths. Sell your \$3 million villa. Pay off your \$1 million mortgage. You’ve still got \$2 million. And look at Whanganui – look at being part of an artist-led economic revival, but let’s do it with the consciousness of what goes wrong if you just allow it to be turned into a [gentrification process].’”

The affordability of Whanganui allows creatives to think more expansively about building-based activities rather than simply owning somewhere to live. The affordability opens up wider possibilities for studio spaces and storage solutions, but also allows for artist-led activities that would normally require institutional backing.

“We would sit in in Wellington particularly and talk about things like being able to run an off-the-books residency program and think ‘well it’s absurd, we can’t afford it, you know, we can barely afford a house big enough for us to live, but how can we possibly do that, you know?’ [Whanganui] is still a benign environment where you can have those kinds of ambitions”

Secondly, with a population of only 42,700, Whanganui possesses the infrastructure of a larger town.¹¹ It was built at a time when port towns were booming and there was every expectation of it continuing to be a major port and urban centre in Aotearoa. For Stark, the kind of infrastructure embedded in Whanganui’s creation – the Royal Whanganui Opera House, Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui Regional Museum and the Ward Observatory – makes it an ideal town for artists.

“And one thing about moving to Whanganui, it isn’t *SeaChange*. It’s not like going to live at Raglan. Because Whanganui is an Edwardian city in aspic. It was built to have artists live in it. It was built with public facilities, spaces and infrastructure, expecting to be urban. It’s blue collar. So you have to think

differently, you have to break out of the mindset of, 'oh, I'm going to go live on Waiheke now', or 'I'm going to go and live in the Hokianga and be blissful and rural' and so on."

Thirdly, Whanganui has a long-standing and thriving creative community. Designated a UNESCO City of Design in 2022, it is home to a wide range of creative practices with a strong emphasis on craft. Over the last ten years it has seen a number of arts workers return or relocate to its environs.¹²

All three of these elements – affordability, civic infrastructure and creative community – are integral aspects people should consider when relocating with an eye to enabling creative stability.

The Gonville Centre for Urban Research (GCUR)

As of 2023 the Gonville Centre for Urban Research site contains a house for Stark and Bugden designed for them by another son of Mitchell-Anyon – Ben – and a garden created within the main and paddling pools. They have retained the bleachers around the pool walls to allow for outdoor performances and film screenings. Stark runs his museum and heritage consultancy Heritage Associates from GCUR. The old pool reception and changing rooms now contain a residency space for visiting artists and researchers, a library, and working space for GCUR fellows and associates. In the swimming club building is a studio space for pottery and weaving. Stark plans to have the learners pool functioning in summer for the family. The residential modifications that Ross Mitchell-Anyon had made to the old Town Hall have been reversed, and the stage has been restored to its original rake, allowing it to host a range of community activities, exhibition projects and live performances. Finally, the land the fire station sits on was subdivided off, and the land and building were sold as a live-in studio to a couple in the arts.

All of this has been funded through the windfall of the price differential between Wellington and Whanganui real estate. Stark provided much of the labour for the initial adaptation of the pool spaces and hall restoration, calling on community members for volunteer support.

Stark cites American artist and urban planner Theaster Gates and his adaptive reuse of housing in Dorchester, Chicago as an inspiration for GCUR. In the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 Gates purchased a property in the South Side of Chicago and renovated it into an archive house filled with rescued art books and photographic slides and a "soul food kitchen".¹³ From there he continued to acquire and adapt buildings in the neighbourhood, developing a music records archive (the Listening Room), a venue called the Black Cinema House, an arts incubator, community gardens and a housing project. Much of the income from his artworks sold on the high-end international art market goes back into funding the network of projects under the umbrella of the Rebuild Foundation.¹⁴ Reflecting on the project's relevance for Aotearoa, Stark says:

"[The Rebuild Foundation projects] are possibly American scaled and unrealistic for Gonville, but nonetheless they're inspiring and there are ways to draw analogies from them."

The Gonville pool complex is semi-private, oriented toward supporting architectural and urban practice research with invited fellows and organisational partnerships. Partnerships that GCUR is exploring include potentially hosting a significant architectural archive and supporting research access to it.

In contrast, the town hall currently operates on an open-access, community hire basis. Various groups use the space weekly, from Tai Chi and Latin American dance groups to ladies sword fighting and line dancers. Stark explains

"We charge a nominal \$15 a session for those community groups, which is at or below the market rate for the church halls and so on around town. And pretty much on an honesty box system. They have keys, they supposedly pay once a month, sometimes they forget and so on. And the amount of money is negligible."

The hall kitchen and outbuildings are leased to a nano brewer, which provides a regular income. GCUR also hosts a limited number of live gigs each year. This is constrained by both the acoustics of the hall and general safety standards for venues.

"It's in a residential area. It pushes the boundaries for fire and safety and so on. You'd have to spend a lot of money if it was going to be a regular concert venue. You'd also then trigger quite a lot of the neighbourhood disquiet because suddenly you have late night activity and loud noise, and it's impossible to even remotely soundproof. It's a big wooden resonating box. So if you've got loud noise in there it booms out into the neighbourhood."

As Stark and Bugden work out the potential uses of the hall, Stark keeps in mind the delicate balance between being able to trial ideas and aggravating the local community and council.

"We've come up to the point where the council says, 'if you're going to do this, you need to come and see us and we'll go through a whole compliance process. It's one thing to turn a blind eye to a one-off, but if it's going to become a regular venue, then there's a lot of stuff we need to talk about'. [There is] a lot of goodwill where people say, 'well, we can make this event happen,' but you can't continuously rely on that goodwill. You don't want to find out exactly where that line falls because then you've definitely made it into an issue."

Because the town hall is detached from their living areas it can potentially be operated by an independent trust, and Stark and Bugden are interested in finding future not-for-profit self-supporting uses for it that can be led by other people. But the ownership of the building and land is likely to remain in their private hands for practical reasons. It would be very costly to separate the hall utilities from the pool and create the fire separation necessary for subdivision.

"But I think we are now, we're just testing various possibilities and what we want to do with it. So our commitment on the town hall is essentially twofold. One is to preserve the building in every reasonable respect. And the other is to find a not-for-profit (and let's extend the definition of culture as far as we can) cultural use for it."

As it currently stands the costs of having the town hall aren't burdensome, so they have time to work it out.

"The only burden on us for the town hall is the fact it occupies quite a lot of space and therefore the council rates are more. Not a lot else. It's essentially uninsured because we went through the logic of it and came out the other side thinking 'well why would we?' Basically if it started to burn, it would be gone. It's a purely wooden structure that's been drying in the sun for a hundred and something years. So it'll burn like a Roman candle. And if it did burn down, well, we'd be left with the site. We couldn't rebuild the hall anyway. And we'd just have a development site, which is what it's rated for anyway. So that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. It's extremely expensive to get insurance on a public place. When you're also a private citizen, it starts to really complicate your insurance."

There is an unlimited potential cost to refurbishing the town hall if they chose that path, but currently they are taking a zero budget approach to the work it needs and seeing how far they can get.

Why do it privately

Both Stark and Bugden have entire careers built on publicly-funded creative infrastructure, but for GCUR they have chosen to self-fund the initiative. For Stark the freedom from public funding is a benefit.

"The work I still do, the paid work I still do, no matter how it begins, seems always to come back down to advising small cultural organisations who want to get through a glass ceiling (...) – from a collection-heavy, volunteer-run museum to a very post-millennial online offering that wants to get into bricks and mortar. Quite different generations and impulses, but they're always ultimately about public funding and how to play the public funding game. For me, personally, I'm exhausted about public funding. I'm attracted, not to replacing it with grand-scale, high-net-worth individual philanthropy, but to just guerrilla-operating on zero budget away from the obligations that public funding brings."

Reflecting on how organisations respond to the obligations that public funding brings, in her thesis Bugden writes "I've come to understand that organisational behaviour might initially be 'strategically practised' in order to secure funding until 'over time it becomes passively followed' (Gray and Kendzia 2009, 165) as the organisation implements its formal self in institutional practice."¹⁴ Neither Stark nor Bugden currently want to travel this path.

This doesn't mean that the future of GCUR won't involve the formation of some kind of public institution and securing funding support, but not right now. As they explore their options they are conscious about not creating an institutional structure that then becomes dependent on high levels of public funding.

"Volunteer organisation[s] keep running out of gas because people lose energy or die. How can we progress in ways that aren't about, "Oh, here's the magic trick to get a million dollars in funding"? Because you're not going to get that million dollars in funding. How can you design your organisation,



your governance, your programmes and everything to function and be effective in a way that isn't just waiting to win the lottery? And that's the bigger issue here. [We] don't want to institutionalise, [we] don't want to collect the jackpot from lotteries to do all the buildings all at once or anything like that."

Acknowledgements

Emma Bugden is the Strategic Lead Creative Industries and Arts at Whanganui and Partners. Her curatorial career spans twenty years and includes the Physics Room, Te Tuhi, City Gallery Wellington and The Dowse Art Museum and SAPE: Public Art. She has a PhD from Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington.

Frank Stark is a former director of the Crafts Council of New Zealand and the Whanganui Regional Museum. He was the founder and Chief Executive of the New Zealand Film Archive, Nga Taonga Sound and Vision. He is currently the Executive Director of Heritage Associates and a director of the Gonville Centre for Urban Research.

Stark was interviewed by Melissa Laing online on 1 September 2023.

Photography by Melissa Laing

Getting it right, once: Hamilton Citizens Band



Model:	Leasehold land
Bought:	1993
Key enabling factors:	Money invested from prior property sale, society members who were professional tradespeople, volunteer labour, significant grant from Hamilton City Council
Key stakeholders:	Hamilton City Council, society members
Legal protections:	Incorporated Society legislation and the Hamilton Citizens Band society rules, 20 year leasehold period.
Interviewed:	Richard Edgecombe and Walter Genefaas

What we learn:

- A broad membership base is more likely to include more of the skills your project needs in order to thrive, from building skills to funding applications expertise
- Planning your modifications well and getting them right for your needs sets you up for the long term. Planning can be supported by researching what other, similar organisations have implemented and what they are missing
- It is advisable to have a standing committee item focused on buildings and maintenance, and a building supervisor, to ensure you are staying on top of the building needs
- Be willing to spend money on ongoing maintenance
- Look to similar groups for support when seeking funding and sharing your space
- Cultivating community pride in your building is important to its care
- Location stability leads to community stability



The Hamilton Citizens Band was formed in 1935 by members of the Waikato Regimental and Hamilton Municipal Bands. Its members formally incorporated it as a society in 1937. The amalgamation of two bands into one was reflective of the changing popularity of brass bands in the early 20th Century. Initially introduced to New Zealand in the 1840s as military and militia bands, they swiftly became widespread. In their heyday between 1880 and 1920 they were the mainstay of outdoor entertainment.¹⁶ Now, according to the Brass Band Association New Zealand, the numbers are much smaller, but still going strong, with 51 community brass bands across Aotearoa totalling around 1800 members.¹⁷

Currently the Hamilton Citizens Band society supports three brass bands including Hamilton City Brass, a senior band that competes in national and international competitions. Hamilton Auxiliary Brass is their intermediate band, and the Brass Factory is an all-ages development band. The musicians and society committee are all volunteers while a Musical Director and a Conductor who receive an honorarium.

Up until 1974, the Hamilton Citizens Band owned a property on the Waikato River for their band rooms. Then the Hamilton City Council decided to build the Waikato Museum on the river's bank and bought the site from the band for \$25,000. The band invested the money and began a shared occupation, with a playcentre, of a council-owned building off Peachgrove Road. It took almost 20 years from the sale of their old band rooms for the Hamilton Citizens Band to acquire a new property.

Finding the right building

In the early 1990s, the society had had enough of sharing a space and having to pack all the band equipment away after every practice. So they began the search for new band rooms they could own. Their priority was a building with good acoustic quality that was sufficiently distant from residential properties to prevent noise complaints and had decent local parking. However, even with the help of Hamilton City Council, finding the right building was challenging. Society members Richard Edgecombe and Leo Roche led the process. According to Edgecombe:

“We looked everywhere. We looked over the other side of Frankton, at an old town hall, and we looked at by the [Hamilton] Gardens. There was a building there that was a bit isolated. [The other] was too big.”

Finally they settled on a former tennis club in Clyde St opposite Clyde Park, reasonably removed from residential neighbours. They bought the building in 1992 with a 20-year ground lease from Hamilton City Council. The initial yearly lease was one dollar and has subsequently increased to \$100. To show appreciation for the peppercorn lease, the bands play community events like ANZAC Day and the city's Christmas Parade for free.

The building bought by the society was, in exterior form, a simple bungalow with a low flat ceiling. It required significant renovation to make it usable for a band.

“It was a tennis court building for the tennis club and they had services out to their courts out there. The layout is quite different now, we've changed it all around [compared] to what it was before.” – Edgecombe

The confidence to take on major changes to a building came from having a large number of experienced tradespeople in the band, including Edgecombe, who was a builder. The tradespeople could identify what could affordably be done to transform the tennis club into a fit-for-purpose band room. This included: raising the roof and removing the sub-ceiling to improve the acoustics; shifting the toilets; improving the kitchen to increase community useability; and removing all easily accessible windows, replacing them with skylights, to create secure storage spaces.

The society brought what they had learned from visiting other bandrooms during competitions to the design of the renovations. They thought through the purpose and use of each space to maximise its useability and continue to put processes in place to keep it functioning well. As the current society president Walter Genefaas points out:

“The kitchen's intentionally set up a certain way, so that people can come and go and cater without leaving any mess behind. We do little things like, we don't have rubbish bins so people can't leave rotting apple cores and stuff behind, they're forced to take them with them. It seems a little bit bizarre but it's little things like that that stop the ants and the rats and stuff. But we can cater to well over 100 people here, no problem at all and we have done. It's set up so you can do a quick mop at the end, wipe everything off the bench and move on. A lot of other [band rooms] around the country have

a kitchen from a house that's in the corner and they can make a cup of tea and that's about it. When Richard and his team set the building up, they did the hard work and the smart work in 1993.”

The estimated cost of the initial renovations was \$70,000. The Hamilton City Council contributed \$60,000, reaching out to the society to offer that support. The society then applied for additional funding from the Lotteries Commission, securing endorsement from other community organisations to demonstrate a wide need for the space. As Edgecombe puts it:

“We sucked up to a lot of other organisations like Riverlea Arts, and those sort of people, and got all their support as well. They said they'd get right behind us and come and use it.”

While not all the promised use eventuated, the bandroom is widely used by similar groups needing an orchestral or band set-up.

Community built, professionally maintained

Brass bands are one of a number of community-based arts organisations whose members often work in a wide range of professions and trades. This was to the society's advantage during the initial renovation. Over a year – between 1992 (when they bought the building) and 1993 (when it opened) – a wide range of community members volunteered their labour. As Edgecombe recalls, the society members “shared the load. We had a plumber, we had a couple of electricians, and we had a lot of labouring people. We worked. We used the group.”

This meant that a lot of the work could be done at materials cost only. The joiner installed the kitchen, the plumber relocated the pipes, the electricians brought the wiring up to scratch, and the interior and exterior were also painted by society members, leaving the heavy engineering work, such as raising the roof and installing new beams, to contractors. Genefaas attributes the success of the building renovations to the society including skilled members like Edgecombe:

“Not everybody has access to [someone like him] or the skills to make the calls or to ask the right people to get the right thing done at the [right] time.”

Since opening the building, the society has continued to make improvements to the space. Over the years this has included heating and security system upgrades such as alarms and sensor lighting to provide security for the high-value instruments they store. To manage this, the monthly society committee meeting has a standing item titled ‘Buildings and Grounds’. Currently Edgecombe acts as the building supervisor and reports to that item, keeping the committee up-to-date with “what's coming or what's needed, or if something's been fixed or something's leaking or what have you.” – Genefaas. These repairs are funded out of the operational budget. In his written notes for the interview, Edgecombe underscores how important this process is:

“[It is] critical to have an attentive building supervisor to stay on top of maintenance – and have a committee [or] management team prepared to spend money on improvements as needed.”

More recently, the society has had to undertake more serious building

maintenance and improvements.

“What we do nowadays is do the best we can, project by project, to maintain the upkeep. In the last 24 months, we've had three major projects. The first one was painting the roof. The second one was painting the exterior of the band room. And the third one was this carpet that you can see from the walls down. All of them were not cheap endeavours by any stretch. I think the roof was about \$10,000. The paint around the outside was just less than \$10,000. And the carpet was \$20,000. Those were performed by contractors.” – Genefaas

Reflecting on the three-decade shift from 1992 to 2023, both Genefaas and Edgecombe acknowledge that changes to building regulations and health and safety standards have meant more work is contracted to companies rather than undertaken on a volunteer basis by members. Genefaas says:

“We're probably becoming more aware over time of our duties to keep our people safe and not putting them up four metres onto the roof to paint it. [It] might have worked 30 years ago, but we're probably less keen to do that now.”

This approach isn't just a concern for safety, but a pragmatic reflection of the daily cost of having safety equipment on site. As Genefaas puts it:

“if you're going to have to invest the money in scaffolding anyway, you may as well invest a little bit more and get the person that's the fastest to do the job.”

Paying for it

“The regular maintenance is just operational expenditure and that costs a few thousand a year. Just for bits and bobs and pieces and taps and pipes and stuff. But the larger [tasks] that we can actually bundle into a project and make an application for funding about, we do our best to do that.” – Genefaas

The society raises the money for their ongoing operating costs and small maintenance matters through member subscriptions, donations, concert performances, competition levies, rental charges, small grants and annual fundraisers. Over the years they've developed a highly successful, endurance-style fundraiser. As Edgecombe describes it

“We call it the Brass Razoo. We have music here for 24 hours, nonstop for 24 hours. Other groups come in and they play right through. [If you] play at two o'clock in the morning, there'd be people sleeping on the floor. This goes for 24 hours, and we raise \$20,000.”



However, less regular items like the recarpeting also require submitting funding applications, and, like many organisations who own their own building, the society is grappling with the rise in insurance costs, which jumped by \$1,926.00 between 2019 and 2022. Here again the band benefits from the breadth of its membership base:

“We have some really clever people in our organisation that are keeping an eye out on grant funding applications and things like that and are constantly applying, putting together projects, putting together applications and supporting documentation and things to get that funding. [...] It’s not easy. It’s quite hard and it’s a lot of work. We’re still trying to find ways to best do that, because the people aren’t being paid to do that. It’s a lot of work for what they need to do.” – Genefaas

Over the last five years their funders have included Class 4 gambling trusts like the Lion Foundation and the Southern Foundation (now the Aotearoa Gaming Trust), the regional arts trust Creative Waikato, private philanthropic trusts, and community-owned asset trusts like WEL Energy Trust and Trust Waikato. They have also received private donations and grants from the Hamilton City Council. The society works to ensure councillors see the benefits of the band, and Genefaas and the society’s treasurer recently arranged to meet with the Mayor to discuss support. Genefaas explains:

“[It was] to see if there’s more within the Mayor’s realm of people that could help us better understand where funding could come from. [I’m] not saying that the money would need to come from the council, but they might have some people that know the arts sector better than we do. We’re quite niche as a group, so we’re always looking for ways to better spread that [support].”

In Genefaas’ and Edgecombe’s experience, the society has never received national arts funding.

Advantages of owning their own building

The Hamilton Citizens Band sought a building after 20 years of sharing a space with a completely different organisation. Having their own single-use building resolved their main frustration with that situation – having to pack all the seating, music stands and large instruments away each night. They were able to customise the building they bought to their particular uses and control its layout. It also allowed them to invest in larger instruments like the timpani. As Genefaas puts it:

“We have control over what occurs within it. That doesn’t sound like a positive thing, but it absolutely is. You’ve got a lot of people coming and going and using the space. Not having to conform to someone else’s idea of what that use needs to be is really important to us. The equipment that we’ve got takes hours to put away and get it back out again. I know there are groups like ours that share facilities just like this, say a tennis club or something like that. They have to put it all away and pack it into the store room every time they use it.”

They are also able to support other bands in Hamilton through providing access to rehearsal rooms.

“We utilise the space quite a lot. Certain times of the year, it’d be almost every night of the week there’ll be a [similar] group in here using the space. [...] There’s a school group that comes here on a Monday afternoon for a couple of hours and there’s an orchestra that comes here on a Friday night and rehearses. But they just leave it like this [like they found it].” – Genefaas

Beyond the layout of the furniture, the society is able to customise the building in other ways. For example, when they recarpeted they ran the carpet up part of the wall to soften the sound.

There is also a social element to the stability of owning their own building. The Hamilton Citizens Band has members who have been playing with the society their entire adult lives. Being able to be consistently in one place supports this longevity of participation. It also supports other user groups to gain the same stability.

“A lot of the people in these groups have been with them for a very, very, very long time. So [it’s] anecdotal, but [it gives] stability and all of that. It’s one thing to be a part of a community organisation, but you can do even better if you don’t have to stress about having a roof over your head. And that makes a difference.” – Genefaas

The sense of community ownership and pride that the society has cultivated makes a difference to the upkeep of the property. The band members take pride in their building, cleaning it regularly and maintaining a roster of tasks:

“We’ll have regular working bees where the place is stripped and cleaned top to bottom. One of the bands implemented a cleaning roster that they’ve just put up on the wall recently. Before they leave, they’re checking the toilets and the kitchen and a few other things. And every time somebody uses the space for something, whether it’s a weekend rehearsal or whatever, everything generally gets cleaned up. If you look around now, the carpet’s clean. So you don’t walk in here with your muddy boots because you can see the carpet’s clean and you don’t want to be that person. So if we can keep everything just nice and so, that gets treated with the same respect.” – Genefaas

Acknowledgements

Richard Edgecombe is a professional builder, 2nd Baritone and committee member for the Hamilton Citizens Band society

Walter Genefaas is a Civil Engineer, Principal Cornet and, when interviewed, the President of the Hamilton Citizens Band.

Walter Genefaas and Richard Edgecombe were interviewed in Hamilton by Melissa Laing on 12 September 2023

Photography by Melissa Laing

Doing it in stages: Hihiaua Cultural Centre



Model:	A staged development of an entire point of land, involving the renovation of an existing building and the construction of new buildings, supported by asset transfers and long-term leases by local government
Stage one completed:	2019
Key enabling factors:	Support from local government, establishment of the Provincial Growth Fund, building purchase for \$1, architects experienced in community projects
Key stakeholders:	Whangārei District Council, tohunga mahi toi, trustees, local community, local hapū/iwi, Kānoa, Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment
Legal protections:	Charitable trust deed, leasehold with a 33-year lease with two rights of renewal
Interviewed:	Janet Hetaraka

What we learn:

- A multistage project allows an organisation to scale over time.
- Having funding to able to invest in all the planning, assessment and compliance documents means you are ready when 'shovel ready' funding opportunities arise
- Be ambitious, or at least not too modest, in how much money you ask for when the opportunity arises
- Partial funding from government agencies can create a reporting burden while you raise the remaining money
- Raise the money as fast as possible. The line always goes up – in 2009 the estimated cost of all three stages was \$20 million. In 2024 the cost of stage two alone is \$20 million
- Contested funding environments can make it challenging to raise money, particularly if there isn't a lot of wealth in your region
- Taking on a multi-million-dollar redevelopment takes courage and persistence
- Build and maintain relationships with elected members of local and national government despite their political affiliations
- Have a range of practical skills from the legal to the cultural, and a range of approaches from the imaginative to the pragmatic on your trust board
- Be able to compromise with other trustees and maintain relationships when decisions don't go your way
- Don't make just one person carry the operational responsibility for the entire organisation and build. It can be dangerous for the health of both the organisation and the individual

The organisation discussed in this case study is midway through a multistage development project. They have completed stage one – a renovated building and waka store – and are actively working on stage two.

In the early 2000s, Te Warihi Hetaraka (Ngāti Wai, Tainui, Ngāpuhi), a tohunga whakairo based in Whangārei, was undertaking a number of civic commissions with his students and needed a place to work. Knowing this, a councillor from the Whangārei District Council identified an unused yacht building shed on the Hihiaua Peninsula as a possible workplace, and offered Hetaraka the keys to the building. Janet Hetaraka (Ngai Tahu, Waitaha, Kati Mamoe) – Hihiaua Cultural Centre Trust founding trustee, current secretary, building project manager, and Te Warihi's wife – recalls that:

“It was a dirty, filthy old building full of toxic substances from the boat-building time and it had lots of odd appendages hanging off the ceiling, stairways not to heaven, and, you know, deep dark recesses, spray booths. It was just awful. However they thought it was paradise, so they moved in. We had some whale skeletons, we had big waka that we were responsible for, and timber, and they just moved it in and started carving in here.”

The kaiwhakairo using the building quickly dubbed it “The Shed” and welcomed visitors. People would come and sit and watch while they worked, and schools and preschools would bring their classes down to look at the work in progress. In 2007, the community that had formed around The Shed realised that:

“This was a really good thing that was happening. People were very attracted to being here and [thought] that we should form a trust and try and raise some money...”

The Hihiaua Cultural Centre Trust was incorporated in October 2008 with the charitable purposes to “establish[,] support, administer, advance or promote a high quality centre of excellence to display and promote Māori culture, and arts and crafts to the Whangarei communities at large and visitors” as well as to “promote, advance and facilitate education and knowledge concerning Mātauranga Māori, Te Reo Māori, Kaupapa Māori and Toi Māori for firstly, the people of Whangarei, secondly Northland, and further the people of Aotearoa”. Their final purpose was to “facilitate and encourage cross cultural awareness and understanding through education and cross cultural experiences for the diverse communities that exist within the Whangarei District and Northland.”¹⁸

Janet Hetaraka emphasises that the Hihiaua Cultural Centre was created “not by Māori for Māori” but instead “by Māori for everyone,” with a focus on building cross-cultural understanding. Underpinning all the activity of Hihiaua is a kaupapa of reclaiming, restoring, and renewing.

“What is ours we have to reclaim. We have to restore those things that need restoration, and renew those things that we can, for everybody. Those are basic principles that we've always worked on and Mātauranga Māori is imbued in everything we do.”

With the Trust's formation the Hihiaua group was able to apply to the National Services Te Paerangi arm of Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand, for a \$10,000 development grant to undertake a scoping document and business plan for the Trust's “centre of excellence”.

“We knew that we wanted to improve things for the carvers. The initial scoping document pointed out all the endless possibilities. [Then] we engaged a contractor who could facilitate a business plan approach, which we struggled with.”

Adopting the underlying assumptions and approach of a business plan is often a challenging step for an arts organisation. Especially if it is an organisation which has emerged organically, with its members fitting their activities and expenditure within the small amounts they have. As Richard Russell, Chief Operating Officer of Arts Council England wrote in the introduction to the Arts Council's 2022 business planning guide “many organisations told us that they found the process of developing business plans challenging. While there was a lot of guidance available online, very little of this was felt appropriate for non-profit arts and cultural organisations.”¹⁹ Hetaraka recalls the struggle writing the business plan, saying:

“As you know, artistic types are not into dollars and cents, bean counting, keeping things in silos. We knew we could do something with nothing. And here we were, talking about millions of dollars, possibly! That was beyond our realms of imagination.”

However Hetaraka stepped up to the challenge:

“I did a bit of creative thinking around it and came up with the many, many experiences that people could have by coming here, the least and the best, and the potential products that we could produce. And I say that in very loose terms. That's experiences, knowledge, relationships. I'm not talking necessarily about packaged goods. I'm talking about human experiences, artistic inspiration, all of those things.”

The scoping document and business plan enabled Hihiaua to go out to tender to architects to design what they might do with The Shed to support their vision. Moller Architects put forward the winning tender with a staged vision for the redevelopment of the entire Hihiaua Peninsula.



The Hihiaua Peninsula vision

The Hihiaua Peninsula is a section of reclaimed land that forms a point where Raumanga stream and Hātea river meet.²⁰ Reclaimed in the early 1970s to provide more commercial land in Whangārei, it is currently a light industrial area. However, Whangārei District Council is shifting its use through rezoning and redevelopment.²¹ In the early 2000s, Whangārei developed a loop walkway along the Hātea river as part of the town basin redevelopment, opening up the area for public recreation. The very tip of the peninsula, where The Shed is located, is owned by the Whangārei District Council. When the Hihiaua trust undertook their initial feasibility work, they established that it was unlikely to be subject to a treaty claim, despite being owned by local government, due to being reclaimed land. This enabled the Hihiaua trust to create a vision for the full use of the land adjacent to The Shed.

The cultural centre is a large-scale vision and reflects the vision of earlier community members.

“It was the aspiration of some of the kaumatua and old mayors and people like that in the 1970s and ’80s who looked around and said we need a cultural centre. Whangārei had no Māori identity. You could drive through here and not know any Māori people lived here. And they said: ‘We want a cultural centre here on this piece of land.’ Then for the millennial project, my husband did the *Waka and Wave* with Chris Booth, and they put it there, which was a wasteland.”

Taking the first steps to turn the wasteland into a cultural centre complex has taken courage and leadership from the Hihiaua team.

Moller Architects developed a multi-stage plan for the development of the tip of the peninsula. Stage one was the redevelopment of the yacht-building shed as a workspace for whakairo and other toi Māori, as well as the addition of a waka store with a launching gantry at the back of the shed. Stage two is a proposal for a performance complex with an arrival area and outdoor and indoor spaces suitable for large-scale kapa haka events and other performances. The performance complex includes an 850 seat theatre. Stage three proposes a custom exhibition space fitted between the performance and carving spaces.²² In 2009 the total projected cost for all three stages was just under \$20 million (approximately \$28 million in 2023 dollars, adjusted for CPI inflation).

It ended up taking ten years from receiving the concept designs in 2009 to opening the renovated yacht-building shed in 2019 (stage one). To realise the project, the Hihiaua trust raised \$2.175 million to cover the build as well as the compliance, fit-out and temporary accommodation costs. The bulk of the ten years was spent raising the money. As Hetaraka recalls

“When we got the plans to do stage one, which was to renovate this building, we said ‘oh, that’s fantastic, we love it, but it might take us 18 months to raise the money’. Well, it took us 10 years. This opened as it is now in 2019. It was at Matariki. Then we went straight into the Tuia 250 kaupapa, which we were heavily involved with. Even without a building, we had put our hand up to say ‘we want to host the flotilla, we want to have a big haka powhiri

for all of our manuhiri coming into the city'. [...] The Whangārei District Council, who [owned] the building, put up \$500,000. Foundation North gave us \$675,000, which [together with the Council funding] was \$1.175 million. And we beavered away to try and raise as much as we needed, which was about \$1.7 [in 2009]. Then the Provincial Growth Fund very first round came up [in 2018] and we were ready to go. We had a resource consent, we had everything in place. We were asked, 'how much do you need to get this over the line?' And it was exactly \$1 million, which is exactly what we got."

While stage one was being built, the kaiwhakairo moved into temporary quarters – two shipping containers with a shelter constructed between them – and Hetaraka moved her office into a little room in the front of the building. In accordance with tikanga, she didn't step foot on the building site until the dawn blessing three weeks before the formal opening.

A lot of care went into ensuring the shed renovations would support a wide range of toi activity, from wet and dry workspaces, a gallery and shop to show and sell art, a large open multi-use deck with moveable shade panels, upstairs office and meeting spaces as well as a viewing area over what was to be the open workshop. The building won three awards from the New Zealand Institute of Architecture. Describing the building in their notes to the awards, the NZIA judges write:

"This cultural centre was delivered after a comprehensive co-design process with the community, an exercise that was integral in the realisation of a building used and valued by that community. A series of spaces break off a linear loggia or porch, raised slightly off the ground so that its edge can serve as a seat when, for example, people are engaged in weaving. Every centimetre of this centre is carefully designed and constructed."²³

After the opening, a demand to use the interior open space quickly sprung up, with people wanting to use it for functions and exhibitions. The kaiwhakairo ceded that space to the community, using the enclosed back workshop and outdoor areas to work.

"Once the community came through and saw what the carving shed was, they wanted to have their events here. They want to be here. They want to work here. Today there's the Ministry of Social Development upstairs with some clients. The weavers were here on Saturday morning, opening their exhibition from around the country. It's just a constant community need being met. At a price that people can afford, with facilities that they can feel comfortable with, and a robust building that can handle crowds."

The gallery and shop have proven highly successful, and provide necessary income to the artists they work with.

"We've put over a hundred grand [in dollars] a year out into the artist community by selling their works. Artists have made that money that they never would have in Northland. [We've] met that need for them to have a place, to exhibit on a regular basis and sell their work."

The waka store behind the shed is a separate semi-open shelter with spaced boards cladding three sides. An irregular range of gaps were left in its cladding to allow people of any height to look in on the waka. A strong I-beam gantry runs

through the shed and out over the Raumanga Stream so that the waka can be transferred to the river. Leaving no space unused, the gap between the two buildings is being renovated to support stone carving activity.

Putting the blocks in place for stage two

The Hihiaua trust has received \$1 million in seed funding from the Whangārei District Council to progress stage two, with a further commitment of \$4 million over the 10 year plan. That initial money enabled the Trust to pay for the:

"developed plans, the lease, all the geotech, audio and sound reports, the fire report, you know, everything that you need to build something. We've got all that on paper. So we've got the resource consent, we've got building consent, nearly almost."

Having these plans allowed the council in 2020 to put the project forward for support from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, administered by Kānoa (the unit within the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment which also looks after the Provincial Growth Fund). They requested \$13 million from Kānoa, but only received a commitment for \$3 million. As of September 2023 none of that money has been disbursed. Like all partial funding, the Kānoa grant is a mixed blessing. Until the Hihiaua trust has raised the remaining money needed, they cannot break ground and are spending money from their operating budget to make monthly progress reports to Kānoa.

"We are reporting to Kānoa every single month on a huge big spreadsheet that MBIE has put out. We haven't seen a cent. Not one cent. And we have to pay for someone to do that report, which takes hours to show the progress you're making. So we are spending our own money from other sources to get that money, and yet they haven't given us any. And the threat was always that it's gonna be taken off us, that we won't get it. Every change of government now, we don't know if that money's secure."

With the construction price increases since 2020, the project's cost had increased by 25% to around \$20 million in late 2023.

In April 2022, the Whangārei District Council moved the whole project forward by resolving to pass the ownership of The Shed, and a second building on the peninsula, the A'Fare building, to the Hihiaua trust for the nominal sum of \$1.²⁴ They also committed to arranging a 33-year peppercorn lease, with 2 renewal terms, for the bulk of the land on the tip of the peninsula where stage two and three will be built, preserving only access pathways for general community use. In late 2023, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002, the District Council began the formal community consultation on the lease.

The Hihiaua trust have decided to renovate the A'Fare building for use as a conference centre, and restaurant and catering facility, to generate ongoing income for the Trust.

"In our original plans it was going to be demolished, it was going to be car parking. But we felt with the way the world is going we don't need to demolish something that's got really good bones and is potentially valued at a million dollars. Why would you do that?"



Reflecting on taking over the buildings from the Council, Hetaraka reflects that ownership transfers the costs of insurance and maintenance from council to the trust, which has an operational funding impact:

“You have to have contingency for [maintenance]. We were lucky that we got a new roof when we renovated and the Council paid for that. We were going to keep it but it was found to be [in bad condition]. But we’re going to have to have a fund in another 10 years probably to replace it and that will be \$100,000. We have always had a contingency [fund] for the build, to use for unexpected things, and it’s always going to be more than what you think, isn’t it?”

Securing funding in a region without great wealth

The Hihiaua trust received significant funding from the Whangārei District Council and Kānoa for stage one and stage two of the building programme, and benefit from ongoing operational support from the Whangārei District Council, Te Puna Tahua (New Zealand Lottery Grants Board), Foundation North, Te Puni Kokiri and Toi Ngāpuhi. But it is not easy to secure the rest of the significant amount of funding they need to build stage two. They are trying to raise a large amount of money in an area without the kind of wealth that supports private or corporate philanthropy.

However, Hetaraka also reflects that, in the early stages of the organisation’s fundraising journey, they may have been too modest or cautious in their funding requests and she wonders what would have happened if they’d asked for more from Kānoa the first time, when they went to the Provincial Growth Fund.

“[If we did it again,] we would get the money a lot quicker. We’d be a bit more mongrel, I think. We’ve been very, very conscious that we haven’t got any philanthropists. There’s nobody who’s going to give us the money, really, except our elected [councillors]. We would ask for more, straight up [from Kānoa]. That first million. If we’d have asked for 10 million.”

Alongside the economic constraints of the north, they’ve also had to negotiate raising funding at the same time as other large-scale local initiatives such as the Hundertwasser Art Centre in Whangārei, which required \$33 million to be completed and which opened in 2022. As Hihiaua raise money for stage two, they are facing a competing vision for a performing arts centre in Whangarei, from the Forum North Trust (2013) who are proposing a new 850-seat theatre in the city. The options were consulted on for Whangārei District Council’s 2021 – 2031 Long Term Plan and both organisations were allocated \$5 million in the plan.²⁵

It is also a politically challenging time to be raising funds. The recent Local Government and National elections demonstrated that racism directed at Māori, and Māori-led organisations, including resentment towards targeted funding for Māori, is still prevalent in parts of the local and national community. Thankfully, this negativity is not universal. Indeed the Hihiaua trust has a history of building strong relationships with councillors elected to the Whangārei District Council.

“We’ve had very, very good relationships with several councillors over the years and I think that’s been quite unique. It is our history, it’s trust. [The] reliability is there for them. We make them feel safe. We are a bridge into the Māori world for a lot of them.”

Hihiaua trust also receives a wide range of support from hapū and iwi in the Whangārei and wider Te Tai Tokerau areas. But these hapū and iwi are all at different stages of the Waitangi Tribunal claim process and/or treaty settlement negotiations to secure the return of the kind of resources that would enable them to fund a project like the Hihiaua build.

“We’ve had support from Toi Ngāpuhi, they work with us quite closely. [There are] other little trusts and organisations who want to be here and work with us. They go out and get funding and they’ll pay rent to us for doing something. They’ll pay a venue hire. They’re our customers, if you like. That is support. It’s all reciprocal. But no, there’s no money in the north, apparently.”

As well as making fundraising difficult, racism narrows the perceived margin for error for Māori organisations, and Hetaraka knows the public can be quick to judge them when they fail. She is proud of the fact that the Hihiaua Cultural Centre has always achieved a lot within tight resources and completed stage one under budget by several hundred thousand.²⁶

“I just go back to really, really tight management. We’ve never had anything luxurious. We never even had a cup of tea or biscuit at our meetings. Call it mean, but you know what I’m saying? And yet, we do value hospitality, and manaakitanga. But we’ve just always been a really lean, mean machine and we’ve got so much goodwill from people who just give and give time and energy.”

Managing the Project

Every organisation has a governance arm and an operations arm, with varying degrees of separation. The Hihiaua Cultural Centre Trust started out with a very active board, but only one contractor to manage their development – Janet Hetaraka – who also sat on the board. Looking back, Hetaraka points out the risk of having all the operations resting on one person:

“I was contracted to the Trust and I was just doing everything as a secretary of the trust and as fundraiser, report writer, you name it. Everything. I did all the catering when we had visitors, all the email. Everything. And I felt at times it was dangerous for me to be in that position doing that. Dangerous for me personally, for my health, and dangerous for the trust, and dangerous for the project. Because you burn out.”

She retired from the operations side in 2020, handing over the responsibility to a new operations manager. They’ve increased staff which now includes a dedicated curator for the gallery and shop, a finance administrator, a cleaner, and a development person to do funding applications as well as contracting a professional secretary for board meetings.

“We’ve got them on salary now, and everybody can sort of jump into each other’s roles as well. Hopefully we’re looking after them. We want to be a good employer. We’re paying a good living wage”

As a Māori-led organisation, Hihiaua Cultural Centre Trust have deliberately chosen to be independent of local hapū and iwi. Their governance team hold diverse whakapapa from across Aotearoa from Ngāi Tahu to Ngāti Kuri, and trust board members are independent, rather than delegated representatives of their respective hapū or iwi. The governance team has also included Pākehā members. In seeking to create a balanced board, Janet Hetaraka advocates for not only a range of practical skills from the legal to the cultural, but also a range of approaches from the imaginative to the pragmatic.

“Some trustees are very building-focused and will keep their eye on the nuts and bolts. [But] it’s good having a diversity of skills and knowledge on your trust. If we just focused on [the nuts and bolts] this would be a very boring shed. A bloke’s shed, quite frankly. It would be painted green like a shearing shed. So, allowing each to have their opinion and bring the depth of their knowledge is important. But you’ve also then got to have someone like a very funky, cool architect who might come over the top. Because you’ve asked questions – why can’t we do this and why can’t we do that? – and they will give you the good common sense [about] why you can’t. Either it’s because it’s not allowed legally, or it’s found to have been faulty in the past, or their experience shows that it’s going to be too expensive, or you don’t need that. You know, it’s that absolute layers and layers of experience.”

Alongside a good spread of approaches and skills, Hetaraka emphasises the importance of being able to compromise and work together despite disagreements on how best to achieve a goal.

“Not everybody wins everything that they think [should happen], you know. But it’s keeping united and moving forward. [...] For God’s sake, if anybody ever let a project or a build be the cause of dissension and disintegration of a good idea, that would be bloody stupid, wouldn’t it? But I’m sure it happens for sports organisations. You know, where the old egos grab hold of something.”

This emphasis on compromise, being able to work together, and retaining forward motion extends into the political realm, where the values and approaches of elected officials can change every three years. For Hetaraka this kind of change is just part of the landscape. Her advice:

“Keep your eye on the goal, don’t get stuck in what could have been or the past. You know, like, bring all that with you, but keep moving forward. Keep creating good relationships. Even when they’re hard, when political colours change. Politicians come and go.”

Acknowledgements

Janet Hetaraka is Secretary of the Hihiaua Cultural Centre Trust and a founding trustee. She has had a long career in journalism, mediation and management in both the private and public sectors and served on various committees and boards. Hetaraka was interviewed in Whangārei by Melissa Laing on 24 October 2023. Photography by Melissa Laing.

The two Waitākere City Council acquisitions: McCahon House and Shadbolt House



Model:	A strategic acquisition by local government of culturally significant buildings with the intention they be developed into new arts infrastructure by independent trusts
Acquired between:	1997 and 2006
Key enabling factors:	A supportive council and staff leadership
Key stakeholders:	Elected members, council staff, trustees, and the family of the artist/writer (other stakeholders include neighbouring residents)
Legal protections:	Charitable trust deed and Memorandum of Encumbrance
Interviewed:	Naomi McCleary

What we learn:

- Local government can use its financial capacity to secure property for the arts, seizing fast-moving opportunities and allowing the time for a use vision to emerge from the possibilities of site
- Gifting a building divests local government of the responsibility to maintain it
- Asset transfer from local government to a trust strengthens the independent arts ecology
- There are appropriate and successful legal mechanisms to safeguard public money when gifting buildings
- When seeking an outcome from local government there are both political and bureaucratic pathways to the outcome
- A heritage building needs to be evaluated by a heritage architect, any old architect won't do
- A person's cultural legacy can be leveraged to enable new opportunities
- A building's use needs to be considered in relationship to the neighbourhood it sits within
- Local government is sensitive to community feedback and vocal local resident objection will prevent them from proceeding
- You need a clear vision of what you want to achieve when raising money, but leave space for the funders to work out how with you

At the heart of this case study is a story about how an arts-supporting council and a strategic arts manager can be responsive to opportunity. It's about the possibility of innovative council-supported property transfer and development in the arts. And finally it's a tale that demonstrates both the value and risk of taking your time to develop a project.

In 1993 Naomi McCleary (MNZM) stepped into the role of Manager of Arts for Waitākere City Council and held that role until the council's amalgamation into the new Auckland Council in 2010. During this time she oversaw the acquisition of two domestic buildings of significance to the cultural history of Aotearoa: Colin and Anne McCahon's residence in French Bay and Maurice Shadbolt's house in Titirangi. While both buildings were acquired by council with the intention of being held and run by independent organisations, only one of the buildings – McCahon House – was successfully transferred to a trust. Shadbolt House remains in Auckland Council hands and only recommenced its arts-enabling journey under an agreement to lease to an independent arts trust in 2022.

McCahon House

Colin and Anne McCahon and their children lived at 67 Otitori Bay Road from 1953-1960. During this time Colin McCahon was working at the Auckland Art Gallery and painting in response to the bush-filled landscapes of Waitākere. In his conservation plan, the conservation architect Graeme Burgess describes this period as: "one of significant transition in McCahon's art, its style and subject matter. The house was a gathering place for many of New Zealand's leading artists and literary figures during the time the McCahons lived there."²⁷ A tiny and basic dwelling by today's standards, the house remained mostly untouched after the McCahons sold it to their friends Jacqueline and Tairongo Amoamo. In 1990 the cottage was entered into the New Zealand Historic Places list as a Category 2 Historic Place.²⁸

By the late 1990s, Jacqueline was the sole owner of the property and interested in selling it to a purchaser that would preserve its heritage. McCleary began the slow process of developing a use case for the property and negotiating its purchase on behalf of Waitākere City Council. This involved liaising with Amoamo, the McCahon family and elected council members. The sale negotiations were delicate as Amoamo did not want to proceed without McCahon family support, or at least acceptance, and the family were uncomfortable with any future use that valorised Colin McCahon, the man with whom they had a complex relationship coloured by financial hardship and his alcoholism.²⁹

Even before Amoamo began to discuss a sale with McCleary the empty lot adjacent to 67 Otitori Bay Road came on the market and McCleary proposed its acquisition to the Waitākere City Council. She argued that the purchase would preserve the famous McCahon House views, and while she recalls that the councillors did not understand McCahon's work, they did understand the cultural heritage significance of the proposition. The council purchased the empty lot in July 1997. Almost two years later, after much dialogue, the acquisition of the McCahon House from Amoamo took place in May 1999.



Direction

The process McCleary described in her interview with Stable Spaces was not quick. From the initial action to preserve the view, to purchasing the McCahon property, to establishing an independent trust to own the building, to developing the vision for the trust's future activities and transferring the two properties to the trust took six years, from 1997 to July 2003.

The opportunity was made possible by Waitākere City Council's willingness to take a speculative risk on the purchase of the properties, trusting their staff to develop an outcome for the benefit of their residents. The opportunity to treat McCahon House as a heritage site was defined by the almost-untouched building, but the final shape of the McCahon House activities was an outcome of discussions with the McCahon family and the trustees. According to McCleary, the starting point was: "we're preserving the heritage, we're preserving the house as some sort of public amenity, probably a museum." The proposition of the residency emerged from conversations with William McCahon, who McCleary paraphrases as saying "My father as a teacher and a supporter of other artists and young artists is something that I can live with. Memorialising him in a museum is not something I'm comfortable with."

These starting points – McCahon as an educator and McCahon as supporter of other artists – led to the creation of interpretative panels for the restored heritage house which focused on the work McCahon created while living there, and the parallel construction of a new residence and studio to support guest artists.

Legal safeguards

Waitākere City Council did not unconditionally hand over the two properties to the McCahon House Trust. McCleary first established the trust deed with law firm Hesketh Henry in December 1999. Its charitable purposes were "to inform and educate the people in New Zealand about the life and work of Colin McCahon through his former residence at French Bay, Titirangi", with an additional clause allowing "such other charitable purposes as the Trustees may decide."³⁰ Later, in 2002, the deed was amended to add the residency, and establish the residency's operating conditions.

Once the trust had been established and its purposes clarified, the Waitākere City Council lawyers drew up a Memorandum of Encumbrance to accompany the land transfer.³¹ The memorandum required that the Trust undertake the restoration of the McCahon House and the erection of a two-bedroom dwelling and artist studio on the neighbouring empty lot – including raising the funds and securing the consents for this work. Its ongoing provisions require the maintenance of the property and prevent the sale, mortgage or disposition of the land without the written consent of Council (then Waitākere City Council, now Auckland Council). Finally, the memorandum binds the McCahon House Trust to the terms of its trust deed as set out in 1999 and amended in 2002. If the terms of the memorandum are breached and the breach not remedied then the Trust is required to transfer the land back to Council for \$1 plus the market value of studio and residency buildings on it.

Both the legal structure of the Trust and the Memorandum of Encumbrance serve to ensure that the public money invested in the purchase of the site is not diverted for private gain and that the activity supported by the properties is to the public benefit.

Restoration and the role of a heritage architect

Acquiring the McCahon House meant both stabilising the building and restoring it to as close to 1960 as possible. McCleary advocates for the early involvement of a heritage architect in any project that takes on a building with a heritage value. Where a general architect might focus on what needs to be done to make a building fit for the current purpose and be willing to make sweeping changes to a building, a heritage architect's focus is to convert a heritage building to contemporary use while preserving the nature and intrinsic heritage of the original building. Such buildings have a fabric which is often very old, fragile and unstable.

The heritage architect used for the McCahon House restoration was Graeme Burgess, and the first step was drawing up a conservation plan. Burgess's conservation plan provided a narrative about the historic significance of the building. It described changes to the building over time and assigned heritage value to each element of the building based on when changes were made and by whom, recommending that "the building should be repaired and restored as closely as practicable to its condition during the McCahon years".³² It identified the remedial work needed to stabilise the foundations and to repair the building to watertight status, and made recommendations on fire safety, security and consideration of accessibility for disabled visitors.

According to McCleary the bulk of the money spent on the restoration of the cottage went into unseen foundations:

"There's a huge retaining wall that goes under the middle of the house that holds the house and then below that there's two more huge retaining walls and there's one above the house. Think about it, at that stage, and we're talking late, early 2000s, we spent in excess of half a million just on unseen groundworks."

McCleary recalls that the restoration of the building and establishment of the education centre took another half a million.

"which was not a huge amount of work because it was pretty well untouched (...) So it's not a memorial in the sense that there's not an armchair with his slippers and his dressing gown. It really is a museum about the work."

New build

The trust chose to construct a new building for the residency, sending out a call for architects' proposals. Benefiting from the expert guidance of the trustee and former University of Auckland Dean of Architecture Professor Emeritus Allan Wild, the Trust appointed Pete Bosley from Bosley Architects to design the building. The cost of that build was also increased by the unstable ground of the Titirangi area. They had to pin it into the ground using steel poles to reach the Cornwallis bedrock. McCleary recalls:

"We raised extra money to make it a two-bedroom apartment because in actual fact I remember exactly where the advice came from. We were going out talking to a lot of different people about you know what makes good residencies, what do people want and it was Dame Jenny Gibbs who said:

"don't stint on the accommodation because residencies can be very lonely and it's sometimes important that they can have visitors or can have family with them' [...] and that has proved to be a really good move and quite a lot of artists who have come in there, have come with partners and in some cases with children."

Raising the money

The trust employed a project manager, Penny Denver, who proceeded to raise \$2.5 million over four years to restore the cottage, build the residency and establish the initial programs. While raising the money is a significant piece of work, in McCleary's experience it is possible:

"My primary advice would be to make sure that you have a strong able trust with people who are at one with the intent. And that there are people either on the trust or someone that is employed by the trust that has the capacity to manage a purchase project and to raise the money to do that. And it's not easy. It probably is harder now that it's ever been. So whether that's done through private patronage or whether it's done through the main funding bodies, you've got to have a plan and a process to get you from here to there. But if that's the intention, if that's the best way to go forward, then, if you can achieve that, then you have autonomy."

"There are major funding partners. Foundation North: if what you want to do fits with their vision and if you partner with them at the point of concept, not when you've got a plan [then that works for them]. If you allow them to walk alongside you and what you're doing fits with their policies and processes and visions then you can [secure support]. I know that Lotteries Heritage [Lottery Environment and Heritage Fund] feels the same way. A lot of these funding organisations now have a very clear, but quite a slow process, so you've got to be able to envision a two-year process to get that big capital fund."

In addition to the funders McCleary mentions - Waitākere City Council, New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and ASB Community Trust (now Foundation North) - the McCahon House Trust website lists Sky City Auckland Community Trust, The Trusts Community Foundation and The Burnett Charitable Trust as founding



sponsors.³³ Adding to this, in her 2006 address to celebrate the opening of the restored McCahon House in French Bay and the accompanying exhibition at Lopdell House, Colin McCahon – the Titirangi Years – 1953-59 the Prime Minister, Helen Clark, mentioned the support from the Auckland Regional Services Trust and the Ministry of Tourism – who funded the interpretive panels.³⁴

Since the build was completed, small unexpected financial challenges to do with the buildings have come up, such as changed insurance costs, as well as the cost of ongoing maintenance. On a monthly basis, the McCahon House Director is reporting on the buildings and identifying that “this needs maintenance, that needs rethinking. We’ve either got the money or we will get the money from there.” However, as McCleary puts it: “when you’re sitting literally and figuratively on a firm foundation, you’ve got a base to go out and find resources to do those things”

The McCahon House museum and residency opened in 2006. The residency program is now in its 16th year, the initial strategy of property purchase and gift having enabled the formation of a stable and nationally renowned program that benefits the visual arts in practical ways.

Shadbolt House

Shadbolt House was the lifelong residence of journalist and writer Maurice Shadbolt. According to the conservation report prepared by Graeme Burgess “Shadbolt and his family lived on this property from 1964 until 2004. Shadbolt worked from home, and this was the place where, in various rooms and places, he wrote his work during the greater part of his career.”³⁵ At the time of Shadbolt’s death in October 2004, Waitākere City Council had recently completed the transfer of the McCahon properties to the McCahon House Trust and the restoration and build process was underway. With the McCahon House model already showing success, McCleary, on behalf of the Waitākere City Council, began discussions with the Shadbolt family about acquiring the house for a similar purpose.

The final purchase of the house took place in December 2006. McCleary recalls the councillors supporting the purchase on the strength of the success of the McCahon House project

“Our councillors, in a political sense, were saying ‘oh, this is the jewel in the crown’, as were some of the big events like the Going West Festival. They had a national reputation for being innovative and proactive and supportive of the arts and a lot of that was in response to work I had initiated. So they were happy about [buying Shadbolt’s house] and they knew I could do it.”

As with McCahon House, McCleary was willing to propose a speculative purchase of the property and take the time to develop the appropriate use case for Shadbolt House. However, before McCleary could get substantively into that work, staff at AUT put forward a proposition to take over the property to run a school of creative writing. They secured political support from the Mayor of Waitākere and the idea progressed over a period of two years. Unfortunately, the idea, good as it was, was not a great match for the property. Shadbolt’s house was on a very quiet, no exit, residential street with very little parking, and AUT’s

proposal would have led to a significant increase in traffic. Identifying this as an issue, McCleary instructed AUT to undertake a community consultation process. The immediate response was negative, with local residents indicating they would contest the proposed use in the Environment Court if necessary. Once senior management at AUT realised the extent of community opposition, the idea was shelved.

In the meantime the “super city” amalgamation process had begun. Instead of seven city and district councils, most of the Auckland region is now governed under one elected city council, supported by elected local boards, which each look after a relatively small geographical area and have relatively limited resources. For some organisations, the super city amalgamation created opportunities but for the Shadbolt House project it was less positive. Where Waitākere City Council had been willing to secure an opportunity by buying a property and allowing its use and ownership body to develop alongside the purchase, the transitional authority would not approve an asset transfer outside of council. McCleary recalls that

“I tried to get the Shadbolt House handed over as being gifted to the Going West Trust under a Memorandum of Encumbrance like the McCahon House, but that got turned down by the transition office. And so it was sort of floating free as an asset and it went into the Auckland [Council] property holdings and they rented it out [as a private dwelling].”

As the manager of the Waitākere City Council Arts team, McCleary’s approach had always been responsive to opportunity. For her, ideas like McCahon House “come out of the community in the sense of they’ve become available, or sometimes they’ve come as an idea. And the sensible thing to do is grab the idea and run with it.” However the new Auckland Council process required a business case and a needs assessment and McCleary, who left council employment with the amalgamation, found little support for the idea in the new super city arts team.

Over a period of twelve years, McCleary lobbied for the resources and an appropriate lease to the building to the Going West Trust, so that Shadbolt House could be restored and used for arts purposes rather than leased as a private dwelling.³⁶ Without the backing of council staff, she relied on the support of elected members to achieve her goals.

“The fact that the agreement to lease has been granted [to Going West] is more a political thing. Waitākere Ranges Local Board, and [board members] Sandra Coney and Greg Presland in particular, supported and advocated for the project. I have sat down at the local board where council staff have produced reports which advise them not to approve this project outright, and they [Coney and Presland] rejected that advice. So then you’d have reports coming through saying ‘you know we just wish to remind you that this is a project that you have decided to support. It doesn’t come with our blessing’, basically words to that effect.

In 2022 McCleary, representing the Going West Trust, and Saffron Toms and Sandra Coney from the Waitākere Ranges Local Board, took a formal proposal to the August Auckland Council Governing Body meeting and secured an Agreement to Lease which promised a ten-year lease with two renewal terms if they succeeded in completing the initial restoration work.³⁷



“It’s not a lease, and we’ve got two years to raise the money to replace the foundations and back deck, and two years [after that] to get the work done. And we’re fighting for that in a very difficult economic environment.”

The work to design the use of the property is still underway.

“What is interesting is that for me, the writer’s residency that I might have perceived in 2006 when we bought the property, and continued through the years, remained quite a stable concept. You would work with the Michael King Centre [which offers writers residencies on the North Shore], you would have partnerships and you would try to make the residencies fill gaps so that over the region there was a good spread of types of residencies. And then COVID came. During that time, I suppose when we all had a lot of time for reflection, the rise of disinformation and misinformation became more and more evident. In response, I began to think of Maurice’s legacy in terms of long-form journalism. I started talking to people like [journalist] Simon Wilson, and the head of the Journalism School at AUT. The thought was that you could have a residency where a journalist would be given a significant body of time to research and produce work, which was really exciting. So that’s where we sit at the moment with that project.”

Work on Shadbolt House currently awaits the outcome of a range of funding applications.

To own or lease

For McCleary the advantage of owning a building is the autonomy that the organisation then has to make decisions about program development, building use and maintenance as well as security of tenure. If you don’t own the building, you are dependent on the ongoing investment of another body. To illustrate, she uses the example of Corban Estate Arts Centre (CEAC), a third arts organisation she was instrumental in establishing during her period at the Waitākere City Council. McCleary is currently the chair of the trust that holds the lease at Corban Estate – the Waitākere Arts and Cultural Development Trust.

CEAC occupies the former Corban Estate Winery buildings on 6.7 hectares of grounds in Henderson, Auckland, on a lease from Auckland Council which is up for renewal in 2025. Henderson Town Centre is currently undergoing planned intensification, and the Auckland Council has undertaken a number of master planning processes for Henderson including an investigation of potential future use for Corban Estate by Tātaki Auckland Unlimited, the council-controlled organisation which serves as Auckland Council’s economic and cultural agency.³⁸ The CEAC trust was not initially invited to these conversations despite being the primary lease holder on the site. However, that has now changed, and currently CEAC is fully engaged in the consultation process.

McCleary sees many opportunities in the development that Tātaki Auckland Unlimited has explored but regrets the slow start to CEAC’s involvement in the conversation. To her mind:

“If the alternative to autonomy is to work with a council, then it not only depends on the quality of your trust, it depends on the quality of your council. You’ve got to have two decent bodies of thinking around a project.”

On a day-to-day basis, different council departments impact on CEAC operations. As staff come and go, ideas around what level of control the council landlord should exert over the grounds and interior use of the buildings change.

“You’ve got different actors in council all with a different understanding of what Corban Estate is about and how it should function and they don’t always communicate with each other. [...] CEAC’s delivery is sometimes impacted by [council] process. And the processes that cause the most trouble now do not come from the arts departments of council. They come from the leasing, maintenance, grunty, ground work. [...] The leasing team can be intrusive about all the simple things we might do just to make a space better.”

Six months after the interview, McCleary reports that the CEAC Director and Facilities Manager have forged a much better relationship with the current Maintenance Team at council, but it has taken time and effort.

The vulnerability of a lease whose renewal is occurring at a time when land use in the town centre is being reviewed is offset by not having responsibility for the structural integrity of the heritage buildings. These are being incrementally restored by Council. Through the Local Board, Council have just spent two million dollars seismically strengthening the CEAC big dry store building. CEAC did not have to manage this process. Indeed, the burden of large-scale building restoration projects on small organisations is something to be seriously considered before committing to ownership.

McCleary’s final words on developing a major building-based project like McCahon House and Shadbolt House:

“You have to know where you want to go, you have to know who your community is, you’ve got to have some sort of governance structure that’s viable and then you talk to your big capital funders right at that point. Don’t wait until you’ve got an architectural plan. That would be how I would view the way to go. Because it does seem incredibly intimidating for a small organisation to look at a million or more. Even half a million is vast.”

Acknowledgements

Naomi McCleary (MNZM), has worked in the arts and cultural arena for over thirty years. As Arts Manager for Waitākere Council, McCleary developed a significant arts portfolio for the city.

Naomi was the founding chair of the McCahon House Trust and Chair for 18 years. She is currently Chair of the Waitākere Arts and Cultural Development Trust (trading as Corban Estate Arts Centre) and a Trustee of Going West.

McCleary was interviewed in Auckland by Melissa Laing on 21 March 2023.

Photography: Parehuia (p 59): Patrick Reynolds
McCahon House: courtesy McCahon House Trust
Shadbolt House: Melissa Laing



Trust through service over time: Auckland Old Folks Association Coronation Hall



Model:	Society membership transfer
Handover:	2012
Key enabling factors:	Trust built over time
Key stakeholders:	Society membership, performing arts community
Legal protections:	Incorporated Society legislation and Society rules
Interviewed:	Stephen Bain, Christina Houghton and Sean Curham

What we learn:

- Opportunities emerge out of relationships. Allow the time and space for these to emerge
- There are a wide range of community organisations with legacy buildings who can support a diverse range of uses
- Don't take on a building for the sake of it without serious consideration
- Don't undertake a renovation project without a support team of mates
- Don't choose the cheapest quote without checking the probity of the contractor
- Match the building renovation level to the intentions/needs of the community
- Each financial model of operation has its own limitations, such as potentially not being able to build a maintenance fund

The Auckland Old Folks Association Coronation Hall sits on the corner of Gundry and Abbey streets, a few metres away from where Karangahape Road turns into Great North Road. It is a modest post-war modernist building built by Fletcher Construction Company and designed by their in-house architect Henri Kulka, a Jewish-Czech refugee who arrived in New Zealand in 1940. The Coronation Hall was built with a Coronation Grant – such grants were issued by the New Zealand Government to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 – specifically for the Auckland Old Folks Association, an Incorporated Society who, till then, had been housed in a hall across the road.

The hall was built to serve the thriving inner-city residential community that lived in what is now known as Eden Terrace and Newton Gully. But, as current board member Stephen Bain describes:

“The first part that’s important [to its history] I think is that the motorway went in in the '50s and was ongoing to the '70s. So the old people that this hall was designed for weren’t in the neighbourhood for long. Up until the '60s, it was a lively 400-member hall that had events going on seven days a week. So it was quite well used. But that crowd were already leaving because 14,000 homes were displaced in the building of that motorway.”

He also attributes some of the membership decline to changing economic paradigms in New Zealand society since the 1990s.

“When you read what the group was doing in the '60s, '70s, '80s, it was basically a meeting place to play games – bowls and cards were really big, those kind of participative big games – and to have dances and lots of cups of tea. So people gathering. And as we know now, our changing economic environment meant that those spaces have been taken over by cafes and different activities that we now associate with private enterprise. So I think that the main function of the hall started to crumble and [the later community might] not have [had] the same need for that. Which is why we’ve still got chairs from 1959 really. Because if it had been used as well as it had been at the beginning, you know everything would really have fallen apart by now.” – Bain

By the early 2000s, the Old Folks Association community was much diminished yet still active. Around this time, performance artist Sean Curham was looking for affordable space to rent to rehearse and develop works, and so began hiring the hall by the hour. Over time his relationship with the Society grew, until he became the younger person they went to to solve problems.

“McLeod, the president, was the one that I first met. They took very seriously their responsibilities so the membership process and the fees paying and the use and the keys and all of the management of the hall was deadly. I would rent space there to rehearse and have time to practise. And then I got the odd call going, “Oh, we’ve got a broken window” or “We’ve got a broken lock” or “What do we do with this?” And they were all quite senior. Like, um... 70 plus, 75 plus maybe. So that just went on and I became their go-to.” – Curham

He became involved in the regular social activities of the committee, their rituals and activities influencing how he saw his creative practice and how it might engage with the world.

“I would sweep, clean, set the tables. They had a certain way to set up – really the rituals were great – where the coins went, where the tea was. I started to think about them in an art context or just how I was viewing the world. It was really helpful to start to think about what art might be really and in what context that I wanted to be practising. But all of that wasn’t really relevant to them. They just wanted their problems solved and to have their meetings and their social gatherings.” – Curham

In 2006 Curham was co-opted onto the Society committee as a trustee. The Auckland Old Folks Association activities and committee were continuing due to a few strong voices still guiding it but they were feeling the burden of being responsible for an ageing building. “There were always problems, leaks and windows and... It was all very, you know, it had never been upgraded” – Curham. They had collectively reached a point where they were ready to let go, and Curham’s longstanding involvement with the Society created the trust necessary for them to hand over the Society’s responsibilities and assets to him. This was a conscious choice by the committee as there was concurrent interest in acquiring the hall for development from a real estate agent who also rented space in the building. As Curham describes it, the committee didn’t want to lose the legacy of the Society and the building, so the easiest option was to pass the responsibility of the Society to the new membership that Curham represented. This included a transitional committee that he brought together to help conceive how the Society’s legacy might be carried forward.

A rules change was lodged in December 2011 that removed the age restriction on membership, which to that date had been reserved for people aged over 60 and their partners. The 2011 rules change also simplified many of the rules from the 1960s, and extended the purposes of the Society. Along with the standard purposes that allow societies to raise and borrow money and undertake activities in pursuit of their objectives, the original purposes written into the constitution had been:

- To provide Club Rooms where members, irrespective of status or creed, may meet for social reunion and entertainment and games and the like.
- To provide games, library and furniture and other facilities for the entertainment and recreation of members³⁹

The expanded objectives introduced the following purposes to the society:

- Provide club rooms where the community at large can use, especially for the furthering of arts and culture
- Acknowledge the history of the Society and objects by providing intergenerational community exchanges
- To protect the society club rooms at 8 Gundry St in a way that ensures its heritage is secure and it remains available to the community at large.⁴⁰

For Curham, the key pivot was “adding the words ‘culture’ and ‘art’, to the purposes of the Incorporated Society.” This strategically introduced an arts focus to the Society while the other new provisions acknowledged and, to a certain extent, retained the establishing intention of the club rooms. The latter two additions served to provide surety for the former members that their legacy would not be erased.

In March 2012, the new committee was formally appointed and the then chairperson of the old ‘Auckland Old Folks Association’, Jeanette Joblere, resigned, marking the Society’s formal transition into the new model of operation. Once the previous committee relinquished control, they withdrew from the Society pretty swiftly, occasionally dropping by to watch rehearsals or showings, but not remaining involved in the running of the Society.

The Old Folks Association as an arts society

The Auckland Old Folks Association as an arts organisation is deliberately restrained, functioning as a support structure for a wide range of practices but not operating or marketing itself as a presenting or curating organisation. This approach emerged from the possibilities of a membership-driven incorporated society that gathered to socialise and play, and Curham’s interest in ways of supporting arts practices which are not entangled in value creation and the forms of professionalisation, brand identity and quality assurance that presenting organisations and creatives leverage to build audiences and income.

For current trustee Stephen Bain, the Old Folks approach is about creating alternatives:

“Indirectly we are trying to resist the dominant arts industry approach of building brand identity, [we are] rejecting the systemic leveraging of trusted brands for the purpose of building your own name as an arts brand. I think that we need alternatives to that approach because it’s leaving artists poor and giving venues the power of reputation. So it’s really [a] conscious [choice] that Old Folks is not branding itself as an arts house.”

Like Vogelmorn Community Group in Wellington, the Auckland Old Folks Association deliberately explores community building, alternative economies and the myriad possibilities for the operation of the arts alongside and outside the professionalised presentation structures of the arts economy.

This builds on Curham’s establishing intentions:

“I was all about the incorporated society and what it stood for. I don’t have any great claims for that, it’s just that I could see the value in it. And it really offered an alternative to those other avenues in terms of considering art. So immediately, for me, this situation emerged where you could think about how money goes round, who got access, how it was being used, if it was programmed or not.”

The current users include: legacy people who’ve been using the space for over 40 years like a bagpipes & drumming group; groups practising martial arts, Capoeira, experimental breathing techniques, meditation, and sometimes yoga; art classes; special interest groups who only meet now and again; youth music groups who want to put on all ages gigs; and the Green Party for the odd event. On top of that

are the experimental arts users: choreographers, musicians, theatre makers, and visual artists who use the hall for short exhibitions and events. Often the user is an individual artist who wants to explore something or work with a small group to develop something outside of an official rehearsal. The nature of the space attracts users for a range of reasons, Bain reports:

“There are events people who approach us, who have heard about it and think that it’s got cool value. There are people doing something that makes them not want to use council facilities, the letters-to-prisoners network or anarchist-style groups that don’t want to use council facilities for some reason, and then there are people who can’t afford anything else. The base rate is seven dollars an hour for individuals or groups that don’t have any form of funding. At the other end of the scale we charge 25 dollars an hour for more commercial users, who are groups that are presenting paid workshops or charging entry prices.”

As part of the community-building approach, users are inducted into the space in such a way that they understand they are part of a collectively-managed space, with all its foibles and imperfections. In becoming a user, they also become part of the network of people caring for the space. This deliberately constructed sense of shared use and responsibility derives from the history of the Society, and contributes to a sense of obligation to leave the space in good condition after use.

For Bain, this approach allows users creative licence: “you create your own identity here. There’s no sense of a cultural threshold that you have to meet in order to participate. You can be anything you want here.” For Curham, what the Auckland Old Folks Association Coronation Hall gave him and later members is a structure and time to think about how the infrastructure of the art world operates.

“So really what is it? I think it’s time. Eh? And I think that that is reflected in the nature of the building that it’s still there. I think having time and a willingness to stick with these really awkward strands that emerge in the conversation. That’s what I would hope that the hall would enable.”

Looking after the building

The Society’s low-cost, minimal-gatekeeping approach is made possible by their low overheads which include paying for a modest number of administrator hours, rates, water, insurance and power. However, this low-income approach means they are not well-positioned to build up a maintenance fund, instead relying on securing capital improvement grants for urgently needed work.

The building came with the issues that any ageing community venue has. A declining asbestos-ridden roof, old toilets, minimal accessibility provisions, rotting window frames, and old wiring, which all needed addressing. Much of the remedial work of reroofing, repairing the window frames and rewiring has been achieved through grants, but doing the work has brought its own stressors with it, from unexpected consenting costs to dodgy contractors.

The biggest cautionary tale for other building owners is the reroofing project. This was managed by Curham, as his first major renovation. In a nutshell, the contractors hired to handle the asbestos removal and reroofing had a history



of problematic compliance with health and safety protocols around asbestos removal. Curham recalls that on the first day he had doubts “What they were doing with the asbestos they’re just throwing it around all under the road so it was just amazing. It was absolutely no... there were no procedures in place.” But he did not have the experience to call a stop to the work or ask for the necessary support and advice from his committee.

“What it needed was some transparency, not me going about it on my own thinking I was doing the right thing. As soon as the problems emerged with the roofing, as soon as we realised it was a problem in terms of the whole asbestos removal and [that a] plan for the roofing process was not in place, instead of just doubling down with the contractors, which is what I did, it needed to be all put on hold and all the committee on deck to help. I sort of flagged it, but not in a way that was desperate enough.” – Curham

Compounding the problem, the contractors did not properly protect the roof during the work so, when Auckland experienced a major rainstorm, the building was inundated with water, which got into the walls and on the floor. The job ended up tied-up in WorkSafe asbestos certification processes and in mediation, which took two years to resolve and repair.

The whole process didn’t just damage the integrity of the building, it had a negative impact on Curham, causing significant emotional stress. As a result of this, Curham realised he needed to step back from the day-to-day management and rethink the role of the committee, so it was more strongly involved in the operation of the building. Curham’s experience demonstrates the importance of a strong committee behind a project manager to mitigate inexperience and provide support in what is a highly stressful undertaking.

Despite the trials of the roof replacement, the Auckland Old Folks Association has achieved many of the immediately necessary building upgrades including the window repair, rewiring and heating improvements. Along the way, the Society has negotiated the consenting requirements of that work. But as any old building owner knows, there is always more maintenance needed. The Society’s next steps are to improve the toilets in the building to allow disabled access, and explore minor interior changes to improve the utility of the building. They are working with an architect interested in the legacy of Kalka to plan these changes.

Strategically, the current committee is not undertaking a full renovation process, balancing the licence which a building in modest condition gives its users against its maintenance needs and restoration possibilities. They point to the consequences of the restoration of buildings like Hopetoun Alpha – in nearby Beresford Square – as a reason why they are taking this different approach.

“[Hopetoun Alpha] was a well-used venue in the nineties and then they did it up to mint condition, including the gold leaf on the wooden ornaments. And now it’s an unaffordable space for most performing arts. It still gets used for weddings and big events, but you could never rent it for doing your yoga on your own or your writing skills.” – Bain

This reveals an important balance any organisation owning a building needs to find to ensure their space is fit-for-purpose: how much investment and improvement is required to ensure the building meets the needs of their

(desired) community of users and complies with building codes; and how much improvement is too much, in that it brings with it costs or requirements which change practice? From the Auckland Old Folks Association committee's perspective, a building should support their community's aspirations, but not alienate them from the resources they need through cost or by changing their perception of access to the space.

Curham's final advice to creative practitioners, reflecting on what a building enabled, but also cost him, is to exercise caution and consideration, advising that "people should follow their own practice interests, and see what is already out there," rather than assume they need to acquire a particular structure, like a building, because of the default expectations of the art world.

Acknowledgements

Stephen Bain has directed and designed many original plays and performances since the early 1990s. He lives in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland where he works on community projects and public space performances. He holds a PhD from the University of Tasmania based on his research into public space through performance. Bain is a committee member of the Auckland Old Folks Association.

Sean Curham is the former Chair of the Old Folks Association and a choreographer whose performances occur inside and outside the artworld. He received his PhD in 2010 from AUT University. He has worked extensively in design, technical, production and lighting for theatre, dance and film.

Sean Curham was interviewed in Auckland by Melissa Laing on 29 June 2023

Christina Houghton is an artist and choreographer with a PhD from Auckland University of Technology. She lives in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland where she works in community and education settings and with the disability sector. Houghton is a committee member of the Auckland Old Folks Association.

Stephen Bain and Christina Houghton were interviewed in Auckland by Melissa Laing on 4 April 2023.

Photography by Melissa Laing



Rebuilt twice: Te Matatiki Toi Ora The Arts Centre, Christchurch



Model:	Gift of land and heritage building to a trust which rents to arts, creative and hospitality organisations, creating an arts complex
Acquired:	1979
Key enabling factors:	An original land gift by government for education purposes, later re-gifted by University of Canterbury to a trust. A high-skill steering committee with a vision for an arts centre. Adequate insurance cover
Key stakeholders:	University of Canterbury, people of Christchurch, national and local government, charitable funders
Legal protections:	Incorporated Society, followed by Charitable Trust; Trust deed amended by act of Parliament. Fee simple (freehold) land
Interviewed:	Phillip Aldridge (ONZM)

What we learn

- A staged transition from occupation to ownership can enable an organisation to demonstrate viability and grow its economic base
- Anchor tenants with multi-year commitments will help with long-term financial stability
- Owning a campus of buildings places a heavy burden on the organisation and takes up a lot of its staff time and financial resources
- Heritage buildings are particularly expensive to operate and maintain, and it is challenging to cover those costs through rental income alone
- While disaster should not be sought, if it happens the rebuilding process presents opportunities to comprehensively renew and modernise facilities and processes
- Our current arts funding models do not provide adequate options for organisations whose primary business is providing arts infrastructure
- There is often a tension between location affordability and location accessibility
- Having a dedicated maintenance fund, or reserves to cover planned and unexpected maintenance, is important if you don't want to lurch from crisis to crisis. But having a maintenance fund can disadvantage you with some funders
- Accurate valuation and full insurance coverage is important, particularly if you are unable to demolish buildings due to their heritage listing
- Investing your insurance payout can make it go further
- A strong, skills-based board is an advantage with complex (re)build projects
- Significantly changing the deed of an older trust can be difficult and require either taking the trust deed to court or an act of Parliament



This is an account of restoring and populating an independent, arts-led community centre – twice.

Version One

Te Matatiki Toi Ora in Christchurch is a 23-building campus on a 2.5 hectare site in the centre of Christchurch. For around half a century, it has provided essential infrastructure for the Christchurch arts community inside heritage-listed, Gothic Revival architecture. According to its current director, Phillip Aldridge (ONZM), it is a “a community centre in a very grand setting”:

“We lease spaces to tenants. We provide venues for events. We have our own programmes, artistic programmes, which we do both in collaboration with others, as joint ventures with others and occasionally independently. [...] On the one hand [The Arts Centre is] not a performing arts company. We’re not an art gallery, we’re not a museum. But, we are aspects of all of those. And the emphasis we put on it is to do it with community and as a community centre.”

The campus was built by Canterbury College and Christchurch Boys’ and Christchurch Girls’ High Schools between 1877 and 1929, on land bought in 1873 by the provincial government for Canterbury College (now the University of Canterbury). The university outgrew the site in the 1940s and began working on its Ilam campus in 1949. Between 1957 and 1974, the University slowly relocated its departments to the new campus. As the campus emptied out the Christchurch arts community began to actively discuss the proposition that the campus could become a centre for cultural activity.

The discussion had its roots in a 1970 study by the Christchurch Civic Music Council to explore the “possibility of an arts centre or conservatorium, either nationally or locally.”⁴¹ In 1971, a meeting “of representatives of the Christchurch Civic Music Council, the Christchurch School of Instrumental Music, the Canterbury Regional Arts Federation, societies interested in the formation of a folk museum, and persons associated with the performing and visual arts”⁴² led to the formation of a steering committee to consider the proposition.

During its centenary celebrations in 1973, the University announced its plan to gift half of the site to the city of Christchurch and to raise the money for the city to restore and maintain the buildings by selling the other half. According to The Press

“The scheme, wisely and generously inspired by the university, and announced by the Prime Minister (Mr [Norman] Kirk) on Saturday is excellent, as far as it goes. At this stage, no more could be expected than the general outline and Government approval of the scheme. The western half of the university block may now be retained as a cultural centre for the use of the whole community, and restored and maintained with money from the sale of the eastern half of the block which contains, for the most part, temporary and unattractive buildings. But the use of the whole block west of Montreal Street should not be lost to the city. A board of trustees—perhaps a board composed of representatives of the Government, Christchurch

regional local bodies, educational and cultural interests, and of professional groups—would administer the western half, which by deed or by act of Parliament would be assigned to a specific purpose approved by the Minister of Education. The most fruitful way of disposing of the eastern half of the block would be to sell it to the Christchurch City Council.”⁴³

The same article reports that the steering committee for The Arts Centre preferred to retain all of the site. The steering committee convened a sub-committee to develop a feasibility study for the future arts centre. According to historian Glyn Strange:

“The sub-committee was like a pageant of Christchurch’s professional talents. Led by Malcolm Douglass, it was made up of architects Don Donnithorne, Peter Beaven and Peter Kent, consulting engineers Brian Wood and Bill Lovell-Smith, quantity surveyor Jim Smith, real estate agent Colin Robertson, solicitor Tony Hearn and artist Tom Taylor”⁴⁴

In 1974 the steering committee presented “The Old University Future Use Precinct Study” to the university and proposed that the university gift all the land to a future Arts Centre Trust.⁴⁵ In 2024, we cannot know if the initial proposal by the University of Canterbury – to sell the eastern half of the campus to raise money for future building maintenance – would have netted enough money to create an endowment fund for the future. The people of Christchurch were definitely not in favour of breaking up the campus. But it is worth asking if that option could have provided future stability. Certainly, the investment of the insurance payout in 2011 provided additional income for The Arts Centre over the course of its restoration.

In the same 1973 news article The Press reported that the university was considering a lease to the Christchurch Technical Institute (CTI, now Ara Institute of Canterbury).⁴⁶ In December 1974 the steering committee assembled the requisite 14 members to create an incorporated society – Christchurch Arts Centre Association Incorporated – lodging the paperwork with the Societies registrar in March 1975. Earlier that year (1975) both the Christchurch Technical Institute (CTI) and the Christchurch Arts Centre Association had moved onto the vacant campus. CTI only needed half the available buildings and so sublet the remainder to the new Association. By April, The Press reported that

“Ten organisations have already been placed in the complex, negotiations are under way to accommodate another 10, and 30 more are seeking space, which will progressively become available as the University of Canterbury, now in the last stages of exodus, vacates the buildings [... The centre’s] sole source of income will be from rentals. The centre will be run as a pilot scheme for two years. If it is successful, an act of Parliament will decide how a trust will be set up to administer the site.”⁴⁷

CTI was only ever temporarily on the site as it was constructing a new campus on Moorhouse Avenue. In late 1976 the University announced that

“The lease on the old University of Canterbury site will pass from the Christchurch Technical Institute to the Christchurch Arts Centre under an agreement to be signed before the beginning of next year. The two-year

lease will be for a peppercorn rental. By the time it expires the Christchurch Technical Institute will have no further use for the 51/2-acre site as new buildings now under construction in Moorhouse Avenue will have been completed. A trust to administer the site will be formed when the lease expires.”⁴⁸

At this point it appears that an act of Parliament was no longer required to enable the gift. However, the University introduced the condition that the Christchurch Arts Centre Association secure a financial guarantee for \$250,000 over a five period for capital works such as earthquake strengthening, fire safety and egress and other restoration that the buildings required. The Christchurch City Council committed to \$33,000 per annum and looked to the other county councils to provide the remainder. Waimairi County Council, and Riccarton Borough Council provided support.⁵⁰ But the Heathcote County Council was suspicious and unwilling to engage, and an elected member of the Paparua County Council accused The Arts Centre of sitting on their chuffs “asking the ratepayer to do their work for them”.⁵¹ The then-General Manager, Brett Riley, rebuffed this accusation:

“The Arts Centre has, in two years and a half, taken empty and doomed buildings and filled every single room with life,’ he said. ‘It has entered into leases with 85 rent-paying tenants, spent many thousands of dollars on maintenance, is bringing between 4000 and 5000 people each week to the centre, and is paying its own way.”⁵²

The Arts Centre began restoration work in 1975 with a match-grant from the Lottery Board of Control, a dollar-for-dollar subsidy that matched Christchurch local government funding.⁵³ It also secured a \$15,000 grant from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and an additional loan of \$10,000 from the Arts Council to cover a shortfall caused by renovation and conversion costs.⁵⁴ The grants were directed at restoring the buildings. The Press reported:

“Brett Riley points out that the centre has only asked for public money for ‘major capital works’, a big item in a group of old and largely neglected buildings. Major works has meant bringing the buildings up to scratch so that University of Canterbury stipulations may be met, with regard to ownership transference.”⁵⁵

The Arts Centre’s operational income continued to be erratic as it slowly tenanted the campus. In 1976 it reported a \$7,000 deficit, and was \$9,000 in rent arrears.⁵⁶ However, by the end of 1977 it had doubled its income and paid off the arrears. The departure of CTI at the end of 1977 threw it back into financial stress as The Arts Centre lost one third of its rental income. It scrambled to replace the CTI with new tenants. In February 1978 it announced in The Press that it would either need to reduce services or raise the rents, and called for any interested tenants to contact them.⁵⁷ The Arts Centre also sought to keep the rents affordable for its arts tenants by leasing commercial space to various restaurant and bar spaces, and constructing five rental apartments in the Hight Building facing onto Rolleston Ave. In the late 1980s it added more privately-managed serviced apartments in a bid to raise ongoing revenue and compensate for the lack of a maintenance fund.⁵⁸

Not all the support The Arts Centre received was financial. In 1977 it benefited from the government's temporary employment programme, securing four full-time workers to undertake the simpler manual labour.⁵⁹ In 1978 that allocation increased to seven workers.⁶⁰ A 1978 article in *The Press* also reports that the nascent organisation received much support from the community: "Voluntary workers have saved the centre an estimated \$200,000, says Mr Riley. These include a town planner, architects, engineers and a lawyer."⁶¹ The Arts Centre also benefited from the weekend labour of people serving Periodic Detention in Christchurch.⁶²

The operating and maintenance costs of the campus were significant. According to *The Press*:

"The cost of keeping The Arts Centre functioning is considerable. (The boilerhouse alone consumes \$35,000 per year, and recent work on damaged and missing roof tiles cost \$3,000)."⁶³

In 1978 The Arts Centre was also employing staff: the Director Riley and "a small permanent staff of one receptionist, two custodians, a caretaker, two cleaners, two boilermen and a groundsman."⁶⁴ It was also paying for an earthquake-strengthening specialist and a plumber.⁶⁵ Separately from The Arts Centre's maintenance programme, individual tenants were also investing in the space, building specialised spaces within its environs, including the Southern Ballet Theatre, The Court Theatre (estimated at \$26,000), a cinema conversion (estimated at \$30,000) and later the Free Theatre.⁶⁶

On 31 December 1978, the Christchurch Arts Centre Association formed a new trust: The Arts Centre of Christchurch Trust Board with dual purposes:

"to provide a cultural centre for the people of Christchurch and elsewhere in New Zealand and for the preservation of the architectural character and integrity of the historic stone buildings on the site."⁶⁷

Recognising the range of stakeholders in the site, the Trust Deed made provision for the trustees to be nominated by the Christchurch City Council, the University of Canterbury, the tenants and a range of other parties who were added or removed over the years. In 2014, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage described the board's appointment process as a "mixed member' representative model whereby stakeholder organisations and the Trust Board appoint members."⁶⁸ The incorporated society was left in place and variously acted as a support mechanism for the Trust, an advocacy body for the tenants, and a community led fundraising mechanism. Reflecting this, it changed its name to Friends Of The Arts Centre Incorporated in 1993, and dissolved in 2004.⁶⁹ Finally, on 7 December 1979, the University formally transferred ownership of the six fee simple (freehold) titles making up the campus by Deed.⁷⁰ In the 2015 second reading of The Arts Centre Of Christchurch Trust Bill, Dr Megan Woods, MP for Wigram stated that:

"According to [Norman Kirk's] family folklore—I spoke to members of the Kirk family today—actually, it was a deal done for a dollar because the university could not simply gift that land to the city; it needed to be sold to the city."⁷¹



Version 2.0

On Tuesday 22 February 2011, a magnitude 6.3 earthquake caused severe damage in Christchurch and Lyttelton, killing 185 people and injuring several thousand. It occurred nearly six months after a magnitude 7.1 earthquake on 4 September 2010, which did not cause loss of life but which also caused damage in the billions of dollars.⁷² Despite ongoing earthquake strengthening, both when the Trust took over the buildings in the 1970s, and in 1989, 2004 and 2008, 22 out of The Arts Centre's 23 buildings were badly damaged in the two earthquakes. The only saving grace of the earthquakes was the recent revaluation and increased insurance cover arranged by the director at the time – Ken Franklin. According to current Director Philip Aldridge (ONZM)

“Fortunately, [a] previous director to me came from a property background. He came in and recognised that the centre was underinsured. And only just before the earthquake [he] took out full insurance. The insurer went bust but [before that] we managed to secure a very early settlement of \$168 million.”

An article published shortly after the 2011 earthquake reported that The Arts Centre had increased its insurance cover from from \$95 million to \$120 million in January that year.⁷³ Franklin didn't stay on to manage the rebuild. Instead, in 2012, The Arts Centre appointed Christchurch-raised André Lovatt, an engineer who had worked in property development internationally, as new Director. Lovatt and the trustees chose to invest a proportion of the insurance payout to generate ongoing income to fund operations and restoration. In 2018 he left the role, having completed stage one of the rebuild, or 15 of the 23 buildings. Philip Aldridge took on the job of finishing the rebuild and repopulating the centre.

In many respects, the 2011 Christchurch earthquake put The Arts Centre back into the position it was in in the 1970s: having to raise the money to restore the buildings back to full use; redefine its purpose; reimagine its governance structure; and rebuild its rental base. Almost all of its previous tenants had found alternative accommodation after the 2011 earthquake.

The rebuild was forecast to cost \$290 million. Among the major donors which supported the rebuild were the Ministry for Culture and Heritage; Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment; Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust; Christchurch City Council; New Zealand Lottery Grants Board; and Creative New Zealand. Support from charitable foundations came from the Aotearoa Foundation, Rātā Foundation, the Mainland Foundation, and the Southern Trust.⁷⁴ Other funding came from small and large private donations. In 2018 The Arts Centre announced that overall costs had been managed down to \$250 million with a further \$35 million needed to complete full restoration.⁷⁵ Unfortunately this estimate changed in 2020 due to the rapid increase in construction costs during the early years of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result The Arts Centre decided to temporarily prop and mothball two Engineering buildings – Hydraulics and Mechanical Engineering – on Worcester Boulevard, for restoration at a later date.

As Riley signalled back in 1978, the cost of running a campus the size of The Arts Centre is significant, let alone heating it. According to Aldridge, to manage a campus of buildings:

“You need people with specialist skills in facilities management on this sort of scale. We have a maintenance team of five headed by an operations director who also manages leasing and operations on the site.”

The rebuild enabled The Arts Centre to replace and centralise all its utilities with a new plant, introduce recirculated water heating across the buildings and undertake other significant renovations that have brought the heritage buildings into very good condition. But that does not remove the ongoing property costs, which the 2022 annual report places at \$398,886. In 2022 The Arts Centre's reported operating deficit was \$874,530.⁷⁶ This shortfall was covered by interest from the capital fund investments. However, with most of the principle of that investment now spent on capital works, that income is significantly reduced.

Currently The Arts Centre is at full occupancy at market rents. However, according to Aldridge, market rents do not cover the operating costs of a heritage-listed campus. Passing on the full cost of the centre's operations to the tenants would render the rents unaffordable.

“There are 60 different organisations that are either based here, or have their home here, or lease space from us here, as well as all the organisations that use it for performance and presentations.”

The 2022 financial report shows almost half of the \$2.5 million it earned from leasing is spent on tenancy operating costs, and the remainder does not cover the cost of running the organisation.⁷⁷ In a 2020 article in Artbeat, Aldridge discusses the financial pressure of running a campus:

“There are two big costs. One is the buildings themselves. The costs associated with them have risen exponentially. Insurance has gone up and the value of the buildings has gone up. That has made our insurance bill 400% more [than] what it was. With half the floor space on the site open, it is half a million dollars a year in insurance alone. Then you have got the compliance of the building, warrants of fitness and of course building maintenance. The buildings are contemporary and usable but expensive.”⁷⁸

In the four years since that interview, insurance costs have doubled again, bringing its current insurance bill to \$1.2 million per annum.

Since its inception The Arts Centre has had to build its operating model on income from its tenants, and many of these tenants are at the mercy of annual funding outcomes. It has struggled to secure sufficient separate and stable support for its venue operations from local or national government. At one point, The Arts Centre did receive an annual operational grant from the Christchurch City Council, but that was cut as part of a council cost reduction process in 2018, leaving it without a core funder. Its 2021 - 2023 funding from the Christchurch City Council, raised through a Special Heritage (Arts Centre) Targeted Rate, was specifically to support the capital works.

As Aldridge puts it, in New Zealand, and the wider Commonwealth:

“We came to an understanding in the mid 20th century that arts organisations need to be subsidised by the state, as has happened in the rest of the world. Sometimes 50 years earlier, [like] in Ireland. [...] [The Arts Centre is] an anomaly in that we've just been missed out.”



Aldridge has been publicly advocating for ongoing national or local government support since he stepped into the role.

“I have been trotting down [Lambton] Quay in Wellington for the last two years and central government had shut the door in our face, stating that this is a local issue. That is a justifiable position because there is no established funding stream for The Arts Centre to apply to. Predominantly we are viewed as a venue or series of venues and the responsibilities for venues fall on local councils.”⁷⁹

The current funding models prioritise project funding above operational. This has been signalled as an issue by other organisations who operate venues. Aldridge describes how having no money in the bank compounds this problem:

“The precarious nature of our funding makes companies lurch from crisis to crisis. So if you’ve got an air-conditioning system or something, that big piece of kit that falls over, suddenly the organisation is in crisis. Usually without the funds to fall back on. A maintenance fund. And when you do build reserves for those rainy days, you tend to get punished by the funders who say ‘why should we give you money for x when you’ve got that amount in the bank’. [...] The more responsible funders like Creative New Zealand have, for years, encouraged organisations to form foundations or to build up reserves on the understanding that those companies will not be punished for their prudence. And yet, you get big community organisations who are almost as significant as the arts council, in funding terms, who then turn around and say, ‘no, we’re not funding it.’ Their problem is that they’re faced with a whole slate of diverse organisations and individuals applying for funds and they’re having to choose. And some of [the organisations] have got money in the bank and some of them haven’t.”

The kinds of maintenance crises Aldridge describes can mean the difference between success and failure for an organisation. If The Arts Centre fails, a new owner has to be found for the heritage-listed buildings. One who is willing to operate a centre for the arts. One of the initial proposals of The Arts Centre Of Christchurch Trust Bill, which modernised The Arts Centre’s trust governance arrangements in 2015, was a clause that transferred the trust property back to the Crown in the event of the winding up of the trust. That clause was removed in committee. As National List MP Paul Foster-Bell pointed out:

“As laudable as that goal in itself may sound, it carried the unfortunate consequence of a debt incurred by the trust also falling to the Crown.”⁸⁰

According to Aldridge, with the removal of that clause:

“If The Arts Centre Trust fails, the assets or buildings will be assigned by the High Court to a new owner. That new owner, under the act of Parliament, can only continue to serve the objectives of the current Trust. It must continue to be a centre for the arts. The most likely recipient would be the Christchurch City Council and if that happened, at that point there [would be] a lot of legal bills and re-establishment costs. So they might as well just fund it now.”⁸¹

If this was to occur, Aldridge doubts the council would be able to run the buildings at a lower cost to the rate payer than the trust currently does. This is both because local government staff salaries are higher than in the independent arts sector, and because the Christchurch City Council is not eligible for the range of grants The Arts Centre draws on to support their operations.

In June 2024, after a concerted campaign by The Arts Centre, the Christchurch City Council resolved to fund its operations for a further ten years. According to Radio New Zealand:

“It was decided the historic attraction will receive \$1.5 million of funding from the Christchurch City Council across the next two years, with a further annual allocation of \$500,000 for the eight years after that. This is on top of a further \$220,000 across the next two years from one of the council’s community funds.”⁸²

Changes in operation after the earthquake

In the 1970s, a range of operational parameters were put in place through both the Trust Deed and the Christchurch City Council’s cultural zone restrictions. By 2009 the Council had modified the zoning restrictions to allow for a wider range of activities on the site including:

“A range of cultural, educational, spiritual, recreational and business activities, enhancing both the urban fabric and the city’s cultural development.”⁸³

In 2014, when The Arts Centre began repopulating after the earthquake, it also tweaked its focus, from a reasonably strict definition of the arts to a focus on creativity – with its wider associations with technology, research and innovation, and commercialisation. Its redefined mission was:

“To create a hub of creative entrepreneurs in the heart of Christchurch that is undeniably 21st Century: capacity building, content-rich and digitally enabled.”⁸⁴

This enabled leasing to commercial operations outside the arts, and the creation of the co-working space – the Health Technology Centre. It also allowed a wider housing of tourism-associated activities. In 1987, when The Arts Centre first introduced the idea of converting space to serviced apartments, many of the 120 people who submitted objections to Council pointed to the zoning restrictions and argued that temporary accommodation for tourists would not fit within them.⁸⁵ In the new post-earthquake rebuild, an entire hotel has been constructed within the physics building. Like the 1980s explorations of accommodation options, the hotel is intended to diversify income. Reflecting on The Arts Centre’s current approach, which focuses on leases to organisations at market rates, Aldridge points out that

“Before the earthquake we had a financial model where we had many small tenants – individual artists and craftsmen. They were precariously based. They also received discounted rents to encourage them. But the financial model was terrible for The Arts Centre. After the earthquakes, the trustees

settled on a new financial model where we try and seek two or three anchor tenants – quite large institutions. So we’ve now got the Music Department of the University. So that institution, with a big balance sheet, gives us security. It’s a 30-year relationship. Similarly, the hotel is the second big anchor. So we’ve got the security of a large rental income over a 30-year period. That helps to stabilise things. But we don’t want to do too much of that, because we also want to be able to service smaller organisations.”

The geographic location and heritage nature of the site is both a benefit and a constraint:

“We’ve got half a billion dollars worth of assets that we can’t leverage. It is just a drain. It just costs us. So as well as running a heritage site, we’re also trying to be an art centre and that’s hugely difficult. I’ve used this analogy before – if you were to build an art centre, or a theatre, or some sort of arts facility, you would not do it on prime real estate in the middle of a city, you would do it on less expensive land in a distant unloved suburb. Then you could probably afford to be there. But, to be democratic about access, we position ourselves at the centres of communities, which tends to be the most expensive real estate. So then it needs to be supported by government – local or national.” – Aldridge

Governance

The Arts Centre is one of a small number of cultural organisations who have a private act of Parliament defining its form, yet it remains a Charitable Trust under the Charitable Trusts Act of 1957. Limited changes to the Trust Deed can be effected by the trustees under the Charitable Trusts Act. The Arts Centre Of Christchurch Trust Act 2015 was a private members Bill brought by Christchurch MP Nicky Wagner. On its third reading she described the Bill’s purpose as to:

“Modernise the trust governance arrangement; second, set out the objects of the trust in legislation to reflect the cultural and heritage significance of The Arts Centre; third, provide legal foundations for the trust board to continue to recover from the earthquakes; fourth, provide for a skills-based board appointed by an appointment committee; and, fifth, ensure that there is a safe pair of hands in the short term if the circumstance ever arose that the board could not perform.”⁸⁶

The trust’s constitution ended up as a matter for parliament as it was the most cost effective way to change how Trustees were appointed to the board, shifting it from a member representational board to smaller, skills-based board. As Green List MP Eugenie Sage described:

“The original Arts Centre trust deed provided for a mix of trustees appointed by both the board and by nominating bodies. As Historic Places Canterbury noted in its submission, over the years this split model had become quite a source of contention because successive boards altered the bodies that could appoint members, and those changes tended to reduce the community appointees. That led to a perception that the board had become quite unresponsive to the beneficiaries of the trust—the public—and,

also, that it did not result in the most appropriately skilled trustees being appointed.”⁸⁷

To achieve a ten-year rebuild project of the scale of The Arts Centre required a specialised board. As Aldridge points out:

“It wasn’t an art centre, it was a building project and was going to be for a decade. So the people who came in and joined the board in 2015 were very much taking on that restoration project.”

The other option was to take the Trust Deed to the High Court to establish if the Trustees had the power to make these changes. This option would have had significant costs for The Arts Centre.

Reflecting generally on the role of governance in arts organisations Aldridge argues that:

“One of the big challenges for all our arts organisations is governance and finding people with sufficient business knowledge to be able to help run these organisations. But, at the same time, a lot of these organisations have no representation from the arts on the [board], and that seems to be sometimes an uncomfortable balance, or lack of it.”

Over his career he has been fortunate to work with effective boards, but points out that smaller organisations are not always able to secure effective trustees.

“You could afford to have a supportive but less effective board as long as you’ve got strong management. You need an effective and strong board if you’ve got weak management. As soon as you get the weakness on both sides you’ve hit real problems. We do see that a lot, because management in the arts is underpaid and the trustees are not paid at all. You get a lot of good people who are happy to donate their time and their skills to organisations. But, the organisations that benefit most are the high-profile ones and the ones with great kudos. The smaller organisations are, as in the whole community sector, much more of a challenge.”

Reflecting on the question of whether to be an independent building owner

Despite, or perhaps because of, being the Director of the largest independently-owned arts complex in Aotearoa, Aldridge does not advocate for independent ownership as a default. While the independence of The Arts Centre is valuable, the maintenance places a heavy burden on the organisation and takes up a lot of staff time and financial resources. The costs of the buildings cannot be recouped within the resources of its core tenants – arts organisations. According to Aldridge:

“I don’t think there’s a model that’s inherently wrong. There’s a huge advantage when you’ve got big facilities, theatres or concerts or all sorts. Do not own them. Lease them from the council. Leave the responsibility with another entity. I think that is very sensible. There’s not a lot of point in having the huge burden of owning multi-million dollar facilities from which you can extract very little money because you’re using it for the artistic purpose it was built for.”

This leads to the question: is there a sweet spot for organisations where they own a building that is big enough for their needs, and enables their financial stability and creative independence, yet not so large or old that it becomes a burden?

Acknowledgements

Philip Aldridge, ONZM is a British-born actor and arts leader who has been the chief executive of New Zealand’s Arts Centre te Matatiki Toi Ora in Christchurch since mid-2018. Prior to this he was the chief executive of New Zealand’s largest theatre company, the Court Theatre in Christchurch, and chairman of the Bank of New Zealand in Canterbury.

Aldridge was interviewed in Christchurch by Melissa Laing on 28 August 2023.

Photography by Melissa Laing

Community responsive growth: The Incubator Creative Hub Tauranga



Ownership Model:	Growth enabled by affordable rental spaces leading to the opportunity to purchase a leasehold building on the same site
Acquisition:	2023
Key enabling factors:	Incremental growth, underutilised area, trust over time, generous previous owner, Lottery grant
Key stakeholders:	Artist community, Tauranga City Council, private business owner
Legal protections:	Charitable trust, separate company to hold building, 10-year ground lease with right of renewal, rent-to-own model
Interviewed:	Simone Anderson

What we learn:

- With a fast-growing population, demand outpaces available civic infrastructure. Organisations taking a community-responsive approach can grow with the population
- Artist-led economic development can be highly successful in revitalising an area, but can also run the risk of gentrification-driven rent increases
- The operating purpose of a local government department can impact how leases are treated - community development will treat a lease as a lever to enable community, whereas a commercial arm will treat a lease as an income generator
- If the council owns a building then they are responsible for its maintenance, but they may raise the rent after the improvements
- Leaving room in your long-term planning and processes to be agile allows you to be responsive to opportunity
- Ensure potential trustees understand and support the way your organisation operates, and ensure guidance documents and trustee induction processes reaffirm that understanding
- Operating with a “circular economy” kaupapa builds community support, connection, and skill sharing
- Rent-to-own is an option for arts organisations to meet the one-third external funding requirement of many community facility grants

The Incubator Creative Hub in Tauranga emerged in 2013 out of the desire of a collective of artists to secure studio space outside their homes. In ten years, it has grown from occupying a single barn partitioned with pallets to a 16-building-strong creative confederation, and has bought its first building. In December 2013, a few months after they'd taken on their first lease, The Incubator established a trust – “The Incubator” Growing Art and Culture Charitable Trust Board. Most of their growth has been driven by need and opportunity, with the organisation developing an agile working approach to seize opportunities as they emerge. Reflecting this, their annual returns show a steady growth, from a modest turnover of \$54,000 in 2015 to just under a million dollars in 2023 when they raised the money to acquire the building. On average, around half the organisation’s income derives from event income, commissions and rent and half from grants, donations and sponsorship.

All of The Incubator’s buildings are situated in The Historic Village on 17th Street in Tauranga. The Historic Village was constructed in the 1970s to depict Tauranga between 1880 and 1920 with an emphasis on colonial history.⁸⁸ It opened in December 1976 and functioned as Tauranga’s museum, displaying artefacts in the buildings. Some genuinely historic buildings were transferred onto site, others were fabricated to emulate early building styles, completing the village. Its collection of buildings include local shops and domestic cottages as well as a bank, blacksmith, fire station, cinema and church. In the 1990s, visitorship declined and, in 1998, the village ceased to be a museum and began to be leased to community organisations. The artefact collection was moved to storage and is still awaiting the construction of a museum to house it. In 2022, a museum of some form was incorporated into the Tauranga Civic Centre plan Te Manawataki O Te Papa.⁸⁹



Origin story

For The Incubator's founder and director Simone Anderson, that first step – renting the barn – was a response to the politics and the problematics of sustaining an art career as a parent.

“The inspiration was to get myself and a few others who were all working in our homes [into a studio]. I still had small children, but I was really working hard on my independent arts practice and [showing in] galleries in Auckland. I just needed to take it more seriously and get it out of the house where you empty the dishwasher and put the washing out. It's that thing of being a mum and a woman as well. But I wanted it to be my day job where I had boundaries for my work practice. [...] What we decided we could do is we could find a space [and], between X amount of artists, we could pitch in to cover the rent so it was going to be really really doable and affordable for everybody.”

They found an unused barn in the rundown Historic Village, previously used by a petting zoo. It was still filled with the old feed and zoo paraphernalia. Anderson recalls that

“when we took it over it was like something out of a Charles Dickens novel with rats everywhere.”

This building was the original artist incubator and is still referred to as the ‘incubator’ space. The collective cleaned the barn, partitioned off studio spaces using pallets, and created a central gallery area to show their work. Like the studios, the gallery was a response to the need to create professional pathways for artists.

“Just getting into galleries in Auckland, they always want to see your first solo on your CV. So we thought that if we were going to create studios, we should also have a premises for a gallery so that we could give opportunity to artists.”

From there, the group began to host gigs, filling a gaping hole in small venue provision in Tauranga. The next gap they stepped into was adult education, supporting courses that, prior to the 2009 government budget cuts in adult education, would have been delivered through funded programmes.⁹⁰ As demand for activities, and spaces to do them in, grew they took over more and more buildings in the village. They created a dedicated education space in the blacksmithing building in 2016; launched the People's Gallery in 2017; and renovated a relocated school art room into a music venue called the Jam Factory in 2018.⁹¹ As buildings have become vacant, The Incubator has continued to secure leases for them, acting as an umbrella lessee for artists and arts organisations. Eleven of the 16 buildings house artist studios which are open to the public, taking advantage of the museum-style construction of the village. The Incubator has structured their sub-leases – from subsidised rent to full independence – to allow for professional growth:

“We call them three levels of incubation. So the ‘incubator’ one I would call the first [level] because they don't have to be open and it's just a place that

[the artists] go, and they're \$50 a week so they're really affordable. [...] And then there's the places where people come and watch [the artists], and then the third level is we've got four spaces including the fire station. That is a totally independent creative in there and they pay the full rent for the whole building themselves”

Despite their operational autonomy, the independent artists are still involved in The Incubator community. This is all part of a circular-economy kaupapa where The Incubator residents give back to the organisation to help it operate and help their fellow artists thrive. As Anderson says:

“They are encouraged to come to all of our team meetings, they're part of our social events and people help them out if they need a hand, if they can't come, they're running late or the child is sick or something. There's a connection, it's a massive ecosystem that's made up of little tiny ecosystems.”

The strategy of securing the leases allows The Incubator to ensure that there is always arts activity in the spaces they control, keeping a critical mass of creativity and community in the village. Currently they umbrella the leases of: the Purple Lab and Phreaze Factory, a youth music initiative; Nape, a local fashion studio; and Light Lab, a community photography studio, as well as the studio of tohunga whakairo Whare Thompson. Most recently The Incubator has supported Melanie Mills to take on the Village Cinema as a community social enterprise.

“When we first came here, because it was so desolate, they had frozen all of the CapEx expenditure for the village and it hadn't been invested in for seven years. So everything was derelict. Everything had been run so far down that it ended up a false economy because of the cost to restore [the buildings]. And there was the potential for a divestment of the whole village. It had been a working museum back in the day, a '70s, '80s theme park type museum, when it was trendy. [...] Colonial theme park we call it.”

The village is surrounded by other arts and education infrastructure including Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, the Tauranga Musical Theatre Westside Theatre, 16th Avenue Repertory Theatre, and a large co-working space - The Kollektive - established by the TECT, Tauranga's community energy trust. The village itself houses other arts and community organisations.

As The Incubator grew and attracted people to the village, the business case for divestment of the village changed and Tauranga City Council decided to keep the complex and invest to bring the buildings up to a higher standard. However, alongside the renovations, the Tauranga City Council shifted the village from its community development arm to the Venues and Events team, who took a commercial approach to leasing.

“There are organisations here that have got historic, unbreakable leases that are peppercorn rents. Ours with, for example, The Incubator, when we first moved in was \$600 a month, now it's \$3,000 [for the barn]. So, you know, that whole story about gentrification – you can become a victim of your own success. In a small way, compared with other massive arts districts and precincts around the world, we've done that to the village. We've added value and now it's actually a destination for the city.”

The rent increases impact more than just The Incubator. In a December 2023 article on the SunLive website, other organisations in the village, such as Grey Power, Tauranga Men's Shed, Detour Theatre, and Te Taiope Huringanui – Turning Point Trust, are all cited as facing unaffordable rent increases in 2024.⁹² Looking back, Anderson recalls the impact of the first rent increase:

“That was a really big curveball for us when they said, ‘Right, it’s all looking really mint and lovely now, we’re going to put your rents up.’ I think they went up 200 and something percent. It was under a new council department and team. It used to be [under the] Community Development umbrella and we were so supported then. Then it went into [Venues and Events], which is unemotive, objective, it’s just a bottom line, ‘what can we get for this?’ But they don’t have any investment in programming”

In response to the latest rent increases, signalled in the Tauranga City Council draft Long-term Plan 2024-34, The Incubator mobilised its artists and supporter base to make submissions. According to an article on The Big Idea, 15% of all submissions regarding the entire Long-term Plan were made by creatives and their supporters. On the day of their in-person hearing, they filled the room with placards and songs to “urge the Commissioners to maintain their funding of the arts organisation and to cancel the planned rental and OpEx increases at the Historic Village.”⁹³

Tauranga’s demand is outstripping its provision

Tauranga, and the Western Bay of Plenty as a whole, is one of the fastest growing areas of Aotearoa.⁹⁴ Tauranga has outgrown both Dunedin and Napier-Hastings to become the fifth-largest city in the country. The area boasts a civic art gallery that opened in 2007; a 500-seat performing arts venue; a bi-annual arts festival; and a wide range of tertiary arts education. However, the local community has identified a lack of affordable and fit-for-purpose small and medium venues. Those which exist are over-subscribed causing inter-community competition for space. Or in the words of the draft Tauranga City Council Art, Culture and Heritage Action and Investment Plan

“Sector feedback has indicated that Council’s current provision of spaces and places for arts, culture and heritage don’t adequately deliver on community need.”⁹⁵

The same draft plan acknowledges that all the development work that the Tauranga City Council is undertaking in the city centre has reduced access to cultural infrastructure in the short term:

“This includes both actual and perceived barriers to the community attending arts, culture and heritage events in the central city; as well key venues such as Baycourt and the Tauranga Art Gallery being unavailable for periods of time.”⁹⁶

The community’s need for cultural infrastructure has driven the growth of The Incubator. For example, The Jam Factory arose out of a lack of small music venues and the changing urban landscape. According to Anderson:



“There’s nowhere in Tauranga that musicians can play that isn’t like a 600-seat theatre or venue and, because it’s so built-up now residentially, [no one has] the acre section, half-acre section or quarter acre with the garage for the band practices”

This need changed Anderson’s job from being a practising artist renting a building with other artists to leading a 10-person organisation.

“It’s quite amazing to think that we went from doing our own thing and doing all the admin – which included booking gigs and working out Health Safety Plans and trying to do things properly – to actually having 10 staff in 16 buildings. And the whole thing was driven by the response and the hunger of the community. When I look back now, I think we didn’t do anything that was just superfluous or, ‘oh, that sounds like a cool thing’. People want a place with gigs, people want a place to rehearse. Okay, well, here’s a place, Let’s see if we can rent it. People want art. We just listened. And the whole organisation has been driven by that kind of appetite, which has been amazing. It’s like a tsunami, always surfing this big wave.”

In addition to population growth driving demand for creative infrastructure, Anderson sees their rapid growth as a response to an appetite for community connection and an increase of interest in creative activity coming out of the Covid19 pandemic.

“We’re not stopping growing and that’s nothing we’ve got any control over. Because the city’s growing but also since COVID I think there’s been an amazing enthusiasm for getting involved in arts and cultural things. Our whole team is totally kept maxed out.”

A governance structure that can cope with constant change

Although The Incubator started out as an informal leasing collective, it quickly formalised its structure into a charitable trust – “The Incubator” Growing Art and Culture Charitable Trust Board. Reflecting its origins as a solution for getting the studio out of the artist’s home, the trust’s purposes include: encouraging connectivity and cohesion within the arts community; providing a space for community-based arts events and projects to be organised and assembled; and promoting the arts within the Bay of Plenty for public benefit, as well as working to provide artists work space and training facilities, and to aid the establishment and support of a sponsored workspace for visiting or emerging artists.⁹⁷

While the intention behind forming a trust was to insulate the founding artists from risk, it was still a challenging step for Anderson. It meant forming a trust board with the risk it might push for different things than she envisioned or constrain the organisation’s ability to be responsive. Fortunately, the trustees have been a significant support to the operations team she leads, enabling them to be agile and seize opportunities as they emerge. To keep the trust safe from what can be unpredictable changes in board dynamics, the trustees have created an enduring document describing who they are as an organisation and what the organisation’s approach to governance is. They also take special care when

selecting and inducting new trustees (and staff), ensuring they know that it is not a corporate or ‘high-brow’ arts board, but rather a support mechanism for a team of community-embedded creative people.

“If we ever get new trustees, they are always told, ‘be prepared because it’s a bit of a wave that you’re surfing’. If someone’s into five-year, 10-year plans, and operational actions that come out of each, it’s not the organisation for them. And even our operational team, whenever we interview, [we say] ‘you’ve got to be able to pivot here, because this might be at the forefront of your mind now, because you’re doing the strategy for something, but tomorrow it might be: this opportunity’s come up and it’s all hands on deck, because we’re gonna make this happen.’”

While The Incubator does engage in long-term planning and strategy, they recognise that being demand-driven means having to pivot to the opportunity and adjust the plan as they go.

“Some examples of [unplanned opportunities emerging] have been because we’ve got buildings that have come available that we didn’t know were going to be available. And we didn’t really have a plan for them. But, because we [now] know it’s available, we think of something that we know there’s a need for. But we haven’t been able to plan for it because it’s not been [an available] premises.”

A core reason The Incubator can pursue unplanned opportunities is because they have a strong strategic prioritisation: increasing umbrella lessee-ship for artists and arts organisations. When a building unexpectedly becomes available the opportunity is unseen but not unforeseen, and they can apply their tried-and-tested modus operandi to it.

Thinking about the kinds of trustees The Incubator board looks for Anderson says:

“We need really community-minded trustees too. It’s not a corporate type of board. It’s quite hands-on in terms of being supportive and being at events and helping. Because it’s still quite a young organisation. [...] It’s good when you see the trustees sitting there pouring wine in an event or helping do the dishes or whatever.”

They also discourage new trustees from coming in thinking they are going to change how the organisation operates, telling them: “This is what we’re doing, don’t let anything that’s not broken be fixed because it’s all good.”

For Anderson, the deliberate looseness also allows space for community to see opportunity within the structure and lead their own activities:

“They then spark their own ideas and we’ve had so many different amazing groups of things that have happened that we will go ‘amazing!’ and support it.”

Groups that have grown and thrived in this environment include Ninja Knitters, a yarn bombing collective, and the local chapter of Rainbow Youth.



Buying their first building

In 2023 The Incubator was presented with the opportunity to buy a building in the village. Responding to the success of The Incubator, the Tauranga City Council had rezoned The Historic Village, wanting it to be an arts and culture precinct. One of the privately-owned buildings in the village was a Montessori preschool which did not fit with the new approach. According to Anderson, the Tauranga City Council told the owner of Liberty Montessori

“That they would not be renewing the ground lease and indicated they would want the building removed as [the council] didn’t really want the building. [The Incubator] got a bit of an idea that [moving out] was on the cards, so we stuck [the building] in our plan for expansion.”

The Incubator and the Council staff thought that the preschool would take some time to relocate, but the business owner had already bought a new facility. Within three months of being advised of the change-of-use, he had relocated his business, leaving the building empty while he continued to pay the ground lease.

The Incubator first borrowed the covered outdoor area of the newly-vacated preschool for their Matariki events. The owner quickly offered to rent them the whole building. As Anderson recalls

“That was an absolute whirlwind of how quick it happened. [...] We hit the guy up and he came down and met us. [We] said ‘it’s really cheeky, but can we use this outdoor area for Matariki because it would be such an amazing game changer for us to have an outdoor waterproof area?’ and he said ‘oh, you’re more than welcome to. Why don’t you rent the whole building off me?’ We said ‘don’t you have to sort out what’s happening with council?’ and he went ‘no, I’m not talking to them as they do not respond to my emails’. However the sublease [to The Incubator] was done with the council approval until the end of the ground lease.”

The owner planned to relocate the building to a new site and establish a new business in it that he could later sell as a going concern. In response The Incubator made him a proposal, offering to buy it if they could raise a grant.

They negotiated a sale price, and The Incubator raised \$300,000 through a grant from the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) Lottery Community Facilities Fund. The conditions of the grant required The Incubator to raise the final third of the purchase price from other sources. The owner enabled the purchase to go ahead by keeping a stake in the building, to be paid off over time.

“It happened so quickly, because we immediately saw that [the grant round] was open. So we put the proposal together, and he said, ‘I’ll leave that stake in it for you as an investment. You can just pay it up as a rent situation!’” – Anderson

Anderson acknowledges that the owner’s generosity was a key enabling factor.

“Without having that amazing opportunity from that really generous guy, we wouldn’t have been able to rustle up that much money in such a short amount of time. We did apply to TECT, which is our local energy consumer trust for the third, because you could apply for a split grant, but it was declined. So, we wouldn’t have had the building if it wasn’t for him.”

Before they could secure the grant they had to negotiate an acceptable ground lease with the council. Council's standard leasing practice in The Historic Village was to offer one plus one – a one year lease, plus the option to renew for another year – which was insufficient security for a lottery grant. The Incubator negotiated a ten-year lease term, with a right to renew with an undertaking to either remove the building or gift it to council (for community use only) if The Incubator ever left the village or dissolved the trust.

The impact of owning a building

Even in the short time The Incubator has owned the building, now named The Creative Community Campus, they have noticed a positive change:

“It's really firmed up a little bit of stability for us having a little bit of a stake here as an asset in the village. [It's] one of the most stable things that we have.”

In the face of rapidly rising rents, owning the building gives The Incubator the ability to manage accommodation costs, and buffer their users against this market.

“Once it's paid off, we've got the ability to keep that cost [down] and for us that's the cost barrier that we don't want to introduce. We'd never want this to be a user-pays situation.”

The rent increases mentioned above are an illustration of the risks of depending on council leasing for arts infrastructure. Across the country there is a tendency for the property development and commercial leasing arms of local government to take a more commercial approach to property - charging market-indexed rents. With leases to council-funded community organisations, this can lead to money distributed by one council department going directly back into the budget of another council department, with associated admin costs. While rates increases can also impact arts organisations, political pressure from ratepayers means that they don't rise as fast as market-based rent.

“I think there's always that risk [of rent increases] and, by buying the building, we've got so much more control about what we want to do with it. We could just completely flip and change it into something else if we wanted to – not that we would. I think it's having that security. But it also gives you a little bit more credibility in terms of other funders.”

Like the Auckland Theatre Company, The Incubator established a separate company – The Incubator Charitable Trust Company Limited – to hold the building. The company has three equal shareholders, who are all trustees of “The Incubator” Growing Art and Culture Charitable Trust Board. Simone Anderson and Phil Hayhoe, the chair of The Incubator trust, are the company directors. One reason for doing this was a concern that funders might assess The Incubator's assets, including its future building maintenance fund, and decline funding on that basis. At the moment, The Incubator has not established that maintenance

fund. However, once the final rent-to-buy payment goes through to the previous owner, they will continue to make regular payments, only to their maintenance fund.

“I think, well let's keep that put away because that's the re-roofing, that's the painting, that's the new walls, because, oh my gosh, now we own a building and forgot about what it's like to maintain.”

Anderson acknowledges that while the rent increases have been difficult, operating out of council-owned buildings has meant that, once they decided to invest in the village, the council has covered all the maintenance and building insurance costs. Reflecting on the implications of this for The Incubator now that they own a building, Anderson says:

“That's kind of a double-edged sword too, because if there's a massive thing that goes wrong in one of [their] buildings it's not our responsibility. And it's covered by their insurance, not ours. So [now we've] got all the added costs of insurance and security and modifications because [the preschool building] hadn't probably had much money spent on it over the years.”

Modifications to date have included removing the boundary fence and converting the toilet areas from tiny childrens loos and basins to adult-sized facilities. They have added kitchenettes for the four independent hireable creative workshop venues, and fully fitted out a ‘Social Fabric’ community sewing and textile hub, and a ceramics and pottery room.

Acknowledgements

Simone Anderson is the director and founder of The Incubator Creative Hub. She has worked internationally as a curator, painter, muralist, and picture framer as well as in human resources.

Anderson was interviewed in Tauranga by Melissa Laing on 13 September 2023

Photography by Melissa Laing

A community vision: Vogelmorn Community Group



Model:	Asset transfer with receiving group covering the subdivision and transfer costs.
Acquired:	2016
Key enabling factors:	Council closure of bowling green, emerging active community group, a trial period of running to build confidence, support from individual bowling club committee members.
Key stakeholders:	Vogelmorn community members, Vogelmorn Bowling Club, Wellington City Council.
Legal protections:	Ten-year enduring clause in the sale agreement which requires the transfer of the property to the Vogelmorn Foundation if the Vogelmorn Community Group failed within the first 10 years. Vogelmorn Community Group Charitable Trust deed. A trust wind-up clause requiring any assets be distributed for charitable purposes within the same geographic area as the Vogelmorn Foundation currently covers.
Interviewed:	Jo Randerson (ONZM) and Paul Burgess

What we learn

- Building use change is an emotional as well as practical process
- Yours might not be the only vision on the table for the use of the space or its financial value
- Community organising involves negotiating complicated relationships and historic conflicts, and hanging on in there despite them
- Being a mixed-use arts and community organisation expands the range of grants available to an organisation
- Being mixed-use becomes imperative when communities struggle for space for activities
- Opportunities don't come along often so have the confidence to seize them when they do
- Artists and community members have immense capacity to run their own spaces
- When negotiating a transfer of a building, transparently discuss the building's chattels and your expectations around them
- A trial period of operation before full ownership can enable you to understand what you are taking on
- Building maintenance and repair can be overwhelming, but you just do it bit by bit and manage the hazards in the interim

The background

The former Vogelmorn Bowling Club is nestled into the hills of Wellington in the suburb of Brooklyn near the boundary to the suburbs of Mornington and Vogelstown. While its green was on council land (hand-dug out of the hill in the 1940s), the bowling club had acquired the adjacent land on its own, for clubrooms and a greenkeeper's cottage, enlarging the clubrooms as the club grew. A neighbouring council-owned community hall had been built in 1932.

Between 2008 and 2012 Wellington City Council undertook a facilities evaluation, including reviewing the number of greens and bowling clubs in Wellington, in dialogue with Bowls New Zealand. The City Council made the decision not to renew the lease on the Vogelmorn green on the basis of the club's declining membership. This forced the closure of the Vogelmorn Bowling Club in 2014.

The bowling club members were not pleased by what they saw as a forced closure of the club, and so amended their rules in 2013 to ensure that any monies generated as a result of the winding up of the society would go to a new charitable foundation rather than devolving to Bowls New Zealand. In 2014, the Vogelmorn Foundation was formally established by the bowling club, with the intent to sell the bowling club assets and use the funds to disburse grants for community purposes in Brooklyn, Mornington, Vogelstown and Kingston. Once all the foundation's capital had been granted, the foundation would then itself cease to operate.

During the period of the slow decline of the bowling club, Jo Randerson was living down the road and looking for space for her theatre company Barbarian Productions. She got curious about the bowling club, with its locked gate and green that she never saw host any activity.

“There was an old sign hanging over by the gate which had a phone number on it and I started ringing that number and left messages for about six months. Probably every month I'd call again and leave another message and leave my number and never got anyone. Finally, after about six months, I got a return call. “Oh, we've got your message. Why don't you come to our bar meeting?” So I showed up here on a Friday night to meet five elderly gents who were all having their beers and wines and cokes and one woman, Leigh [Brown], and talked to them about the possibility of using the space. I was like, ‘we're a theatre company, Barbarian Productions, we really need space, everyone we know really needs space. Seems like there's space here. Could we potentially hire some of it out?’”

While the club wasn't keen on allowing rehearsals, they were more open to storing Barbarian Productions' costumes. Brown immediately suggested that the men's changing rooms were available, and dismissed any objections from the other committee members, arranging for a lease on the spot. “I feel very much that it was right place, right time, lucky, you know. Just lucky that person was there,” says Randerson. Brown left the bowling club committee shortly after the lease was arranged, but the opportunity that she enabled laid the groundwork for what was to come. Despite the initial reluctance of the other bowling club committee members, they continued to allow Barbarian Productions access.

“[As Wellington community arts facilitator] Helen Kirlew Smith said, ‘Once you're in, you're in.’ And that really stayed in my head and has proven to be true. ‘Cause I kept being like, ‘they're gonna kick us out’, but we were here and then we were more, and it just etched out and out and out, they let us use that room and then they finally one day opened even the bar for us to rehearse in.” – Randerson

Around the same time as the bowling club was being considered for closure, there were intimations that the Wellington City Council might sell the neighbouring community hall site for a community housing development. A coalition of community members and community organisations formed in resistance to this, undertaking the broader Kaka Project: Brooklyn Area Community Planning consultation between 2013 and 2015. A sub-group (that later became the Vogelmorn Community Group) focussed on the green and community hall. As part of their 2015 submission to the council Long-term Plan, the Kaka Project group successfully advocated for the hall and green to remain in community hands.⁹⁸ As Sophie Jerram describes in her auto-ethnography of the Vogelmorn Community Group (VCG) undertaken for her PhD thesis *Spatial Commoning in Aotearoa New Zealand: Curating inclusive spaces*.

“There was a sense of possibility with the green – the flat lawn, and access from the street; the kitchen facilities and toilets made it obvious for hosting and feeding groups of people. Flat access and wide sunny spaces were rare, the residents understood. The [Kaka Project] group was given permission to host an afternoon tea in the kitchen to consider the possibilities for the space from a wider community – and suggestions were collected by paper [...]. These included film screenings, meetings, lectures, a co-working space, café and community gardens, as well as some commercial suggestions.”⁹⁹

This process of forming a community collective and learning to negotiate the differing priorities and historic disagreements of a community laid the foundation for the VCG and its capacity to take on the opportunity of the bowling club when it emerged. For Randerson:

“[The community advocacy] was a big learning curve for me. It's like you just have to spend so much time trying to broker relationships and it's a very slow kind of Game-of-Thrones style experience. So I feel like we, certainly me, were like naive little children going, ‘hey, let's sort of do this thing?’ And then being like, ‘okay, there's lots of other forces at play and how do we learn to work with that?’ So I feel like that also was a chance to make some new connections and networks that strengthen the cause.”



Negotiating the takeover

The bowling club had already put the property on the market when the VCG approached the lawyer and former bowling club member, Justice Tony Ford, who had written up the future Vogelmorn Foundation's trust deed. VCG had a proposal to put to him: that the VCG form a trust and take over the property for use as a mixed community facility. VCG's ideal scenario was for the Vogelmorn Bowling Club (later the Vogelmorn Foundation) to gift them the whole property which encompassed the clubrooms and greenkeeper's cottage. In their pitch to the bowling club trustees, VCG argued that

“retaining the site will be in the long-term interests of residents as the local area becomes more densely populated, increasing the need for community facilities and networks and for meeting places to promote social cohesion.”¹⁰⁰

Some committee members supported this option. However, other members felt the community would be better served by the club selling everything to maximise their foundation's grant-giving capacity.

By the end of 2014 the bowling club had already tried and failed to sell the land, and proceeded to transfer all its assets to the Vogelmorn Foundation. This failure to sell opened the way for a compromise solution which involved subdividing the Greenkeeper's Cottage from the clubrooms, with VCG taking on the cost of subdivision. Once the property was subdivided, the Vogelmorn Foundation would sell the cottage on the open market and the newly formed Vogelmorn Community Group Charitable Trust would buy the clubrooms for a sum of \$1000. As Randerson puts it:

“We had some really cool, clever people who hatched up with that and our [VCG] trust invested and people who had money could invest to make that happen.”

Recognising the culture shift between the bowling club and the VCG, the Vogelmorn Community Group Charitable Trust was strategic in who they sent to negotiate with the Vogelmorn Foundation.

“Phil Clatworthy, who lives across the road, who was a bowler, and then heard of this and was right into the whole community effort, was someone that we would often send forward as a spokesperson rather than me as a young, female artist. He would be like, ‘well, I've been a bowler with this community for 20 years, but I think this is great, this new version!’” – Randerson

The final arrangement that VCG came to with the Vogelmorn Foundation was not without its acrimony, resistance and resentment. The bowling club committee were already deeply unhappy about what they saw as a forced closure of the club by external forces and suspicious of the VCG's capacity to run the space. Randerson recalls that, over the negotiation time, a history of the club's decline emerged that explained much of the unhappiness.

“There was a bitterness and there was a history that slowly became uncovered to us. They had pokie machines here, and one president had embezzled some of the funds, and there was a kind of a sourness that had

taken hold. In the 90s they were booming and they had so many people and then this thing had gone on so it felt like the club got splintered. Then they told the women they couldn't bowl on the weekends, they could only bowl on the weekdays so the women all went to Island Bay. So it was slowly crumbling, I think, and they could feel that and there was a pain, which I really understand: 'that the beautiful thing we had is lost'. And then here's this group of artsy people who are a bit different and left wing being like: 'we wanna do this mixed community usage and grow mushrooms!'"

This pain is reflected in the words of Paul Burgess, former Vogelmorn Bowling Club Committee member who now sits on the trust of the Vogelmorn Foundation, when he lists off the bowling clubs on council land that have shuttered as bowling culture in New Zealand declined.

"Behamphore Bowling Club closed down. There was a working men's up by the zoo that has closed down. They were all on council land. There was a bowling club at Kilburnie. Gone. That was on council land. There was one at Tanera which is just off Aro Street. That was on council land. That's gone. So basically a lot of them have gone."

The Vogelmorn Foundation protected against the failure of the VCG by writing a clause into the agreement that required that the building be returned to the foundation if the VCG ceased operating within the first ten years. Phil Clatworthy who led the negotiations recalls that:

"The old bowlers didn't think we could do it actually. They were really sceptical. They thought we were a bunch of dreamers and in two years time it would all be folded. And in fact they put a clause into the deal that if we did fail we had to give everything back, the building, and it had to return into their trust. That [clause] had a ten-year enduring clause which we're happy to say next year we will be celebrating."¹⁰¹

Even after the ten-year period expires, the Vogelmorn Community Group Charitable Trust Deed requires that if they wind up, the assets be distributed for charitable purposes within the same geographic area as the Vogelmorn Foundation – Brooklyn, Mornington, Vogelstown and Kingston – with a later amendment designating the Ridgeway School as the preferred beneficiary.¹⁰²

Achieving the takeover

It took two years to finalise the subdivision and purchase the bowling club in 2016. However, the VCG took over the management of the building immediately, with Barbarian Productions acting as head tenant and building manager. Speaking from Barbarian's point of view, Randerson remembers:

"We said 'we need the space, we'll run it for free, we'll take all the bookings' and that was quite hard, we had to get X amount of income to pay the bills and pay the power and everything like that. [...] But they said, 'You're dreaming, you could never do that.' And then it was like, 'Well, give us six months.' And then in that six months, we at Barbarian managed that, got the life going."

They achieved this by renting the space out for theatre groups, parties and co-working spaces.¹⁰³

For the VCG the slow process of negotiation and subdivision was a net positive, giving them time to establish their charitable trust, find their feet and demonstrate the viability of their concept. However, Vogelmorn Foundation's Burgess recalls being frustrated by the delay:

"We said, 'Right, you've got to separate the title, split the title, do this, this, this.' So they went around the community, one of the people in the community group, as a surveyor, and he worked it all out. But the frustrating thing was they had to put another set of drains in and they were doing everything on swap and barter: 'You do this for us and we'll do that.' So there's a heck of a lot of swap, and it took ages, it took nearly two years before they had sorted it out and we had a title to the cottage."

According to trustee Sophie Jerram, even with community discounts the cost of the subdivision process came in at around \$24,000.¹⁰⁴ This was paid for by individuals within the community who loaned money to the VCG's Trust to cover these costs.

Throughout the slow transfer process there was a baseline conflict between the mission of the Vogelmorn Foundation – to realise as much money as possible to distribute via grants – and the goal of the VCG – to take over a viable space for mixed community use. This conflict played out through the fixtures and fittings of the building. The Vogelmorn Foundation sought to sell as much as possible, from the pool tables to the glassware and the VCG were shocked by the removal of items they had assumed would remain. As you can see from the two quotes below, Burgess at the foundation saw it as the VCG being naive and greedy on top of what they'd already received, whereas Randerson saw it as needless and resentful destruction.

Burgess:

"They were unrealistic to start, they thought they could just open it on a Friday and run a bar. They didn't realise that we'd closed the bar down and whatever and we had to tell them quite strongly that the bar was gone. [...] They just automatically thought they would get the pool tables, when the pool tables were already arranged and going to a couple of other bowling clubs. So they just expected everything."

Randerson:

"As they left and we took it over, they were trying to sell everything and just give everything away. Even though we were like saying, 'please, could we keep the glasses? Could we buy the glasses? Like we'll use these for the community.' But there was a kind of a burn-it-down mentality. And sometimes things were just like ripped out, doors ripped out of locks. Like, why would you want to do that apart from to hurt it?"

However, Randerson does believe that having to fight to demonstrate the viability of their proposal, and having to refine it in the face of disbelief, resulted in a stronger bedrock for the project.

VOGELMORN BOWLING CLUB



“If the bowling club hadn’t done what they had done we would never be able to be here now. So I’m grateful for all of those histories. In fact, the fact that they were so hard on us probably made us try harder and be able to come up with something and we may have muffed it if they didn’t push us that much.”

The conflict in mission, and the lingering negativity from some former bowling club members demonstrates that while a change in a building’s use can be a positive thing for a community, the part of the community that loses or gives up the building can be hurt by the process. Giving up the building represents the loss of a particular activity or community association that was important to the members’ sense of self and community belonging. As Randerson pointed out, the new community of users was significantly different to the old and not all bowlers saw a place for themselves in it. This does not present an argument against property transfer or change in use, but shows that such change is an emotional as well as practical process.

Operation

In 2023, after nine years of operation, the Vogelmorn Community Group supports itself through a range of grants, long-term leases, both for office space and hospitality offerings, temporary space hire and the operation of a bar. It has also secured the contract to manage both the green and the community hall that brought the group together in the first place, forming a precinct. Building the trust within the community to reach this point has taken time, says Randerson:

“In terms of the community, for a while they were like, ‘What is this thing? What are you trying to do that can convince us?’ In the last few years it’s been more like, ‘Oh, can we run our event here?’ So watching that grow has been beautiful.”

The VCG has also successfully supported the incubation of the restaurant Damascus which shared the ‘cafe space’ with the daytime community cafe between 2019 and 2022. When Damascus’ success outran the capacity of the space, it moved to its own dedicated space in Te Aro, and a new restaurant venture made the leap from food cart to building – Smoked and Pickled. The VCG also houses a soft drink nano-brewery and a toy library. The green has become a key community site, one of the few flat and sunny public spaces in a hilly suburb.

Finding a way to support a mix of use has taken time, but Randerson believes it is key to their success

“it takes more time, but then it can be a really beautiful thing that has multiple [uses], it’s more than any one [use]. It’s hard for people to understand that because people are used to the single use model, you know, like the swords club. They’re like ‘we only want to do swords there’. Or like the tennis club. ‘We only want to do tennis’. They haven’t wanted to engage and that’s fine, but I think that we don’t have space for the whole single-use model anymore. I grew up in churches and watched them go ‘Okay, we have to open our doors to way more things that are happening because we’re prime real estate.”

The breadth of the community involvement in the VCG also enables them to look widely for funding.

“A big strand of making this an arts and community venue is that arts are integrated with everything in life. I’ve never felt comfortable in an ‘only’ arts space. I just love that you come in here and you’re working and someone’s here running a ‘how to identify mushroom’s workshop and then yoga’s coming in and rōpu waiata is coming in and that cross intersection of all these different activities, that’s what makes it really live. I think that is a real advantage on a funding level because if you try to go for arts funding for this place we wouldn’t get it. We might get it for little strands of it but it’s that thing where often things are too artsy for community funding or too community for arts funding but this place has so many strands. We can go for environmental eco-resilience to get better insulation in the roof. We can go for strengthening food through communities grants. There are so many strings to the bow that this place has so we’re very lucky like that.” – Randerson

Governance

On a day-to-day basis the VCG spaces are co-ordinated by a community manager with a trust board behind them. The trust has evolved from the early days and now is made up of a combination of founding members and new trustees. Like the Auckland Old Folks Association, an underlying ethic of the Vogelmorn project for some trustees is the establishment of a commons for community.¹⁰⁵ This is written into the charity’s purposes: “to ensure public commons, including outdoor spaces, buildings and other shared places are secured, used and enhanced for this purpose.”¹⁰⁶ The community-led ethic was also put into practice over the establishment period using what Jerram describes as deliberately open governance processes:

“When the community meets in person to make decisions, the practice of the group is to meet in a shared circle. The practice of working in a circle is familiar to some from Occupy or Green politics; for others, from meeting on marae at hui (meetings). Monthly or quarterly operations meetings for the community group were open for anyone to attend from late 2015 - until early 2019. These were held to suggest new uses and developments for the club. The openness of this offer was unusual and attracted new participants every month.”¹⁰⁷

As VCG grows, how the openness plays out on a day-to-day basis is still being negotiated. Reflecting on where the VCG is at in 2023 Randerson thinks that:

“Right now we’re kind of undergoing a situation where there’s some tension between the trust who are the governance body and the kind of day-to-day running of it which is the actual management of it, and that’s a growth issue I think. It’s quite hard because the trust are all voluntary. One of the core tensions [...] is between structure and anarchy, or something. There’s definitely often been a voice [that says] ‘we don’t need rules. Leave the key out, everyone can do what they want, we’ll all share’ and it’s like ‘no’. I was talking to [planning engagement specialist Anne Cunningham] about this. People say they want this to be [like] a DOC hut and she said, ‘Well, DOC huts are very strictly controlled. They have very clear rules that everyone

knows. They're simple rules. But they exist' – so, actually, to have something be kind of seemingly open like that, you need really clear rules. And I feel this, as someone who's been here, who's been the one saying, 'OK, we just came in, and there's beer on the floor, and the chairs aren't put away', and then has been putting up the notice, 'tidy your space at the end'. And other people are like, 'Why do they do that? It's a community space?'"

Settling on the right balance between structure and freedom of use is a problem that many community organisations face.

Owning an old building (with a yellow sticker)

When the VCG took on the clubrooms building they did it in the full knowledge that it was an old building in Wellington. In 2017 part of it was subject to a yellow sticker from Wellington Council.¹⁰⁸ This means that the building had been designated as earthquake-prone, having been assessed as meeting less than 34 percent of the current building standard. Therefore the building must be strengthened within a set period.¹⁰⁹ The yellow stickering is one of the many issues with the building, from imperfect disabled access to its ageing kitchen, but the VCG has found a balance between work that needs to be addressed immediately and issues that can be managed in the short term before being repaired later.

"I know, like in the early days when we were like, 'Oh my God, this building needs so much work and so much isn't [being done], it needs fixing.' But then I read one book about a community group who had started up and they were supposed to have metal pipes and they spray painted their plastic pipes with silver spray as the inspectors came in. That just made me feel happy because, I really believe in the standards and keeping buildings safe and all those sorts of things, but sometimes, well in theatre, sometimes the hazard can be worked around and you just go like 'hey everyone, never turn this switch on'. [...] There's always a list of so much stuff that has to happen and sometimes it's overwhelming. But you just do it bit by bit." – Randerson

As with the initial surveying and subdivision, managing and securing funding for the maintenance is enabled by the strong community around the initiative. According to Randerson:

"Building costs are crazy and I think we're lucky to have a lot of people in our community who help out with low rates [for services and goods sold to VCG]. If we were paying full market price I don't think we would be able to afford all of those things."

The costs are complicated by asbestos in the fabric of the building. While the asbestos is contained, it has to be professionally removed from each section as the building is renovated. In regards to the yellow sticker, the VCG has until 2032 to undertake the necessary repairs and are working with local architects to develop a plan to address it.

The parallel vision – the Vogelmorn Foundation

The Vogelmorn Bowling Club's vision of a community foundation providing grants to a defined geographic area has been realised with the money raised from the



sale of the greenkeeper's cottage. They lodged the incorporation documents in December 2014 and began operations in 2016. The Foundation's objectives are

“To promote and assist causes and organisations within the Brooklyn, Mornington, Vogeltown, and Kingston areas of Wellington in such manner as the trustees think fit for the good of the local community.” and “To assist and encourage individuals in the said locations in education, training and advancement in such manner as the trustees think fit for the good of such individuals.”¹¹⁰

While Burgess does feel the subdivision process took too long, he does acknowledge that it also allowed the Vogelhorn Foundation time to develop its processes and rules so that they could make consistent decisions across applications. One of their initial trustees had experience with grant-making organisations, having sat on the board of the Wellington Community Trust. Burgess' advice to new foundations is

“if you're going to do something like this, get somebody that's already had experience with a trust where they give out grants, and they can get you down the straight and narrow, and guide you and keep you straight.”

He also recommends selecting your grants assessors to ensure the granting group includes a balance of experience relevant to grant criteria. The Vogelhorn Foundation has had teachers, doctors and local business people amongst its trustees, as it receives grant applications which benefit from being assessed from education, health and/or commercial points of view. The Vogelhorn Foundation makes its grants out of the initial capital rather than investing and using the income from the capital to make grants. The intention is to eventually disperse all the funds and close the foundation.

While Burgess still holds that the community would have benefited more from a sale of all the assets, he does acknowledge that the Vogelhorn Community Group has successfully brought life into the building with festivals and shows. He is concerned that, with all the repairs and maintenance needed, the building will become a millstone to the organisation. Reflecting on this his final advice for organisations seeking to take over a building is:

“to look at the state of the buildings and check all of that with the council before pushing your barrow hard.”

Having the confidence to do it as an artist

Many of VCG's early trustees were creatives who were working part-time or flexibly. They both gave time to the project to keep it moving forward and brought a strong arts focus to the collective. These trustees included musician Simon McLellan, creative technologist Douglas Bagnall, filmmaker Jeremy Macey, designer Turi Park, and curator Sophie Jerram.

For Randerson, her personal journey to having the confidence to work with a collective of people to take on a project of the scale of the Vogelhorn Community Group was built over time. Her experience included participating in the Wellington Artists Charitable Trust, a studio collective occupying a building opposite Te Papa in the early 2000s, and working on a (unsuccessful) tender to take over the

Fever Hospital building on Alexandra Road, Newtown in 2004. These experiences taught her the value of collective community-based creative spaces. When the Vogelhorn Bowling Club opportunity presented itself Randerson was conscious that “opportunities like this do not come up very often.”

Like Sean Curham of the Auckland Old Folks Association Randerson sees the Vogelhorn project as a creative endeavour in itself.

“[The] whole thing is like a creative project [where you are] going” ‘who's already here? What are the connections? Who cares? Who do we have to -?’ you know. The whole act of trying to recover or reoccupy a building is a beautiful piece of creative work in itself.”

Reflecting on the difference between collaboratively running a community space and working on a short-term project basis, which is the dominant model for independent artists, Randerson says:

“It's definitely been hard. But there have been beautiful magical moments and we've kind of grown, you know, our kids have grown together. I think just like that thing of not walking away has been an amazing learning curve. Like when you do an art project you're like, ‘oh, I'm not going to work with that person again’. But when you're in a trust, you just have to keep on. So I'm proud that we have worked through quite complicated differences and communication breakdowns and angers and all of the things, and that we've stayed hanging in with each other in that beautiful way that any group can do where they're like, ‘those two people cannot be [alone] in a room together or on a subcommittee together!’”

She is a firm advocate for arts spaces to be run by artists, or with the strong involvement of artists, rejecting the idea that artists are not practical.

“I really wish that artists were in control of more spaces. So on one hand [I'm making] a statement to funders or others – let artists run their own spaces. I'm on a 50/50 policy at the moment. Even if it's only 50% of the governing trust or governing body, that's enough. Not one artist, but at least 50%. I think that we are way more capable than we give ourselves credit for. [...] Artists are the most practical people I know. You have to be making things work on the real meagre resources that there are.”

Acknowledgements

Paul Burgess is a registered dental technician, former Vogelhorn Bowling Club Committee member and current Vogelhorn Foundation trustee. Burgess was interviewed in Wellington by Melissa Laing on 17 July 2023.

Sophie Jerram works with artists in community, government and academic roles. Following the Letting Space and Urban Dream projects she completed a PhD in spatial commoning at the University of Copenhagen and Victoria University of Wellington. She is a founding trustee of the Vogelhorn Community Group in Wellington.

Jo Randerson (ONZM) is an award winning writer, director and performer. They are the founder and artistic director of Barbarian Productions and founding trustee of the Vogelhorn Community Group. Randerson was interviewed in Wellington by Melissa Laing on 18 July 2023. Photography by Meslissa Laing.

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