Urban ecology and new urbanism:

Today the world, tomorrow Lincoln?

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Introduction

There is nothing particularly novel about the conscious consideration of environmental and ecological matters in the planning of new towns, additions to existing towns, or in redevelopments of existing urban areas. Concepts of “green planning” or “green subdivisions” issue from a tradition of thought and practice that has upheld the vital role of nature in people’s everyday living environment. Garden cities, green belts, eco-villages, eco-cities have been planned, and in some cases constructed over the past century, and in recent times much attention has been directed at “reinhabitation” of highly simplified urban environments, sometimes identified as the “urban ecology” movement.

This discussion focuses upon the recent architect-led movement known as “new urbanism” or “neo-traditionalist” planning. Its proponents claim that it “addresses many of the ills of our current sprawl development patterns, while returning to a cherished (American) icon: that of a compact, close knit community.” Indeed, there is something of a crusading spirit demonstrated by its advocates, lists of principles often being compiled:

1. Neighbourhood has a centre and an edge;
2. Optimal size of a neighbourhood is a quarter mile from centre to edge;
3. The neighbourhood has balanced mix of activities;
4. Neighbourhood structures, building sites and traffic on a fine network of interconnecting streets;
5. Neighbourhood gives priority to public space and to the appropriate location of civic buildings.

Yet it can be argued that in spite of any ecological or “sustainability” rhetoric that may accompany the designs and arguments put forward by figures such as Calthorpe, Katz, Duany, and others, new urbanism does little more than reflect a certain romanticism about the past, expressing a desire to reclaim some idealised “old ways of living”, and the supposedly cohesive communities that went with them, and indeed, it is this “folk mythology” that has attracted most attention to date.

This issue is relevant to New Zealand in so far as, and present economic conditions notwithstanding, the expansion of cities and towns continues apace, with the rural

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subdivision as one of the key units of change and ecological impact. We are as "sprawl-vulnerable" in this country as is the case in California, and few of us are ignorant of the fact. I am aware that there has already been debate in New Zealand, under the heading of "urban sustainability" for example, of the "sociological" versus the "bio-physical" in arguments concerning the role of nature in densely populated human settlements. Some have suggested that naïve assumptions about social realities, another kind of "folk mythology" perhaps, can distort these discussions. I am also aware that there has been explicit mention of "new urbanism" in print in this country. However, to date discussion has so far been rather minimal here, and in any case there has been little mention of the merits of new urbanism in relation to ecological considerations.

This paper aims to close that gap at least a little. I outline the main principles of new urbanism, illustrating recent urban/suburban concepts such as the "Neo-traditional Neighbourhood" (NTD) and the "Pedestrian Pocket" (PP), and their much touted antithetical relationship to Planned Unit Development (PUDs), one-way entry escapist enclaves, gated communities, and other hallmarks of postwar urban and suburban growth, in other words, the blight of "cul-de-sacs, strip centres, and developer 'pods' of the post-World-War II suburb." This will show that New urbanism indeed clearly seems more "people-friendly", neighbourly and anti-private automobile.

However, as noted above, the question remains as to whether social sustainability is being promoted over and above a broader ecological sustainability, as some suspect. Therefore, I attempt to address possible tensions between this apparent advance in urban design and biodiversity needs. Furthermore, in order to ground attempts to answer this question I discuss residential land development projects currently proposed in, or around, the township of Lincoln, the degree to which they already reflect new urbanist ideas, and how much these new developments appear to resonate with principles of ecological design.

What is "New Urbanism"?

Whilst there have been disputes about possible or superficial connections with earlier utopian schemes for "humane" housing and workplace designs, such as those of Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement of the early 20th Century, it seems reasonable to say that new urbanism is indeed "new" in canonical terms. The key texts did not appear until the early 1990s, coinciding with the initiation of the "Congress of the New Urbanism" (CNU). Despite eagerness, at

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4 See, for example, Lunday, J. "Towards a more sustainable urban form" Planning Quarterly, December 1996, pp. 20-23.


6 Cynics would have this as "architect/developer" sustainability above all other considerations.

the outset, for manifesto-style writing, if not propaganda, it was only relatively recently, at the 6th CNU in 1996, that a “charter” was produced:

“We represent a broad-based citizenry, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning design. We dedicate ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighbourhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment.”

As noted above, “new urbanism” connotes images of small-scale traditional neighbourhoods, where public space social interaction is high, traffic volumes are low, and there is a sense of communal safety and comfort. Leafy village greens are “in”. Strip malls, with their massive parking lots, multi-lane highways, which isolate further people already herded into soul-less dormitories cul-de-sacs, and private properties dominated by sealed forecourts, 3-car garages and/or tall security fences are all “out”.

Those whom have seen the film “The Truman Show” have already seen an actual executed new urbanist design: Truman’s home town is only a set, a fabrication, in the film, but it in “real life” it is the town of “Seaside”, Florida, created by the Duany and Plater-Zyberk architectural design partnership in 1981.

Fig. 1. Seaside, Florida.

While many designs still live only on drawing boards, “towns” and “communities” like Seaside have been built throughout the United States and Canada, now

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9 The film stars Jim Carrey as the protagonist, a mild-mannered, normally trusting individual, who, during the course of the movie comes to realise that his whole life has been “staged”.
numbering in their hundreds. Many of these are new residential subdivisions, involving “edge” developments to existing, often already sprawling cities. However, there have also been redevelopment schemes for inner city areas and areas where conventional land development has stalled. Advocates such as Duany look approvingly toward old town squares in the centres of large cities like Philadelphia and Washington for models of urban renewal, and are adamant that new urbanism is not simply the continuation of speculative, albeit more Disneyfied, “suburbanism”.

Reactions to “New Urbanism”

Despite the “newness” of this movement, and the lack of a requisite institutional home such as a University faculty or journal, there has been heated debate as to the merits of new urbanism, much of it transacted in the popular press in the United States. The most frequent criticisms have been in regard to its middle-class exclusiveness, the enforced “tidiness” of designs, the intransient building codes, its failure to deal with the private automobile dependency and commuting problem, and the naïve, backward-looking character of these land developments and redevelopments in general, reflecting the nostalgic longing of the designers for some non-existent American Dream. Perhaps the most severe criticism is that it reflects some imperious fantasy by its creators who are not interested in trying to integrate diverse values, images and needs.

Much of the early reaction to new urbanist design was aesthetic, or ideological to the extent that it seemed to resuscitate the concept of grand planning (albeit at a smaller scale), and its supporters have worked tirelessly to refute such apparently “knee-jerk” responses. Duany and Plater-Zyberk, for example, have been at pains to point at that designs such as Seaside involved extensive consultation with experts and lay people alike (they used the planning “charette” in this instance). Yet in spite of the relative sophistication of its proponents, most of whom seem to have a fondness for Congresses, charters and public speaking engagements, the discourse has remained trenchantly non-intellectual if not downright anti-intellectual.

Nevertheless, more recently some of the implied, if not expressed, sociological principles concerning “neighbourhood” and “community” have been scrutinised from an academic perspective. Talen (1999), for example, is concerned about the connection between the decontextualized premises of new urbanism and the now largely discredited behaviourist assumptions associated with environmental sociology. In other words, the same charge that was laid at modernist approaches to planning stands here: How sensible and legitimate is it to try to build communities from scratch and by bricks and mortar alone, ignoring social patterns of behaviour, networks, coping strategies and so forth?

Furthermore, the conveniently atheoretical character of new urbanism has recently been examined and challenged. Shibley (1999) finds strong, but unacknowledged resonances between the rhetoric of new urbanism and the “rule utilitarianism” of

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John Stuart Mill. Furthermore, and in a more American vein, Shibley sees connections between the philosophy of pragmatism and the relatively practical orientation of new urbanist enthusiasts. Shibley acknowledges the virtues of the pluralist ethos of new urbanists, who have no reluctance in inviting input from diverse disciplines, but he finds the lack of theory, particularly in relation to political theory and power relationships, limiting, if not unwise.

I will leave aside such political and sociological discussion for the purposes of this paper but would note two things. Firstly, from what I have read to date, academic responses are mixed and are by no means wholly condemnatory. The academic message, if there is one, is “to loosen up, get sociologically real and more up-to-date”, but not to give in. The other observation I would make, and I think this applies as much in New Zealand as it does to anywhere else, is the conspicuous absence of planners in the dialogues that have so far taken place. It is tempting to see this both as a reaction to a perception that architects, in concert with developers, have been “poaching” in the territory formerly, if not presently, occupied by planners, and a general wariness of being associated with anything that smacks of grand designs.

New urbanism and ecological considerations

My interest, as stated at the start of this paper, is in the more ecological or environmental dimensions of new urbanism. Reflecting upon the more encouraging shifts in thinking in urban design during the 90s, Ellin notes in her foreword to Postmodern Urbanism that

"the most overarching of the current metaphors is ecology. In the words of Sim van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan, 'It is time to stop designing in the image of the machine and start designing in a way that honors the complexity of life itself... we must mirror nature's deep interconnections in our own epistemology of design."

Van der Ryn, whilst not explicitly connected with the movement known as "new urbanism", has nevertheless co-published with one of its arch-advocates, Peter Calthorpe.

Calthorpe, characteristic of most new urbanists, is a firm believer in the return to "human-scale" neighbourhoods, "pedestrian pockets" (PP), as he terms them. Yet, perhaps more so than any other new urbanist supporter, he also argues very strongly for urban and suburban design that confronts transportation problems and the ubiquitousness of the private automobile. Recognising the present irreversibility of commuter living, he has championed “transit-oriented development” (TOD),

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13 I suspect the latter is particularly the case in New Zealand, where the renaissance of laissez-faire liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s, together with the inherent ambiguities of our main planning statute, the Resource Management Act (1991), have helped to make planners, it would seem, rather “gun-shy.”
where residential development is linked to mass-transportation nodes which connect to work centres.

Fig. 2. Calthorpe's Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) vs. Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Note that the conventional design is a subset of the Planned Unit Development referred to at the start of the discussion, the bete noire of new urbanists. What will strike many as odd is the apparent return to gridblocks and rectilinear hard-edged layout, compared to the curved PUD. This may have partly to do with the fondness that new urbanists have for "traditional" neighbourhoods, i.e., blocks in towns and cities, but in any case, what new urbanists stress is not so much the geometry as the permeability. At least the gridblocks interconnect easily and can be broken up by details of layout and design. Avoidance of dead-ends, for both humans and other organisms, is paramount.

Fig. 3. Gold Country Ranch.
This helps to show that there is more of an organic and asymmetrical character than may be assumed from looking at the gridblock image.

Fig. 4. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

A Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a mixed-use community within an average 2,000-foot walking distance of a transit stop and core commercial area. TODs mix residential, retail, office, open space, and public uses in a walkable environment, making it convenient for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle, foot, or car.

Urban TOD

Urban TODs are located directly on the trunk line transit network: at light rail, heavy rail, or express bus stops. They should be developed with high commercial intensities, job clusters, and moderate to high residential densities.

Neighborhood TOD

Neighborhood TODs are located on a local or feeder bus line within 10 minutes transit travel time (no more than 3 miles) from a trunk line transit stop. They should place an emphasis on moderate density residential, service, retail, entertainment, civic, and recreational uses.
These are the relatively standardised and transport-sensitive units of design created and promoted by Calthorpe, and they show an almost classical kind of asymmetry, if not “organicism”. They feature in the aforementioned Gold Country Ranch design.

Calthorpe has also been quick to include “sustainability” and “ecology” in his vision of the new “American Dream”. In his programmatic text from 1993, under a “Guidelines” subheading entitled “Ecology and Habitat”, he has sections devoted to “open space resource protection”, “wastewater treatment and water reclamation”, energy conservation, the use of indigenous species in landscaping, and working within topographical, catchment, drainage or other “natural” parameters.

However, the evidence on the “environmental friendliness” of those new urbanist designs which have moved through to execution is relatively slim, nor has anyone, to my present knowledge, attempted to index the design criteria used for new urbanist developments to any set of rigorous “green” design principles. This is partly due, one suspects, and bearing in mind the earlier comments about the anti-intellectual tone of debates so far, to the largely rhetorical domain in which discussion has taken place, where polemic has been more important than evaluation and cross-referencing.

Evaluating the ecological dimensions of new urbanism

If one is to begin to compare ecological principles with new urbanism, there is no convenient, universally agreed checklist upon which to rely. However, some possible criteria are nested within the mission statement of “Urban Ecology”, an incorporated society that has been in existence since 1975, and which publishes a periodical of that name:16

- revise land use priorities to create compact, diverse, green, safe, pleasant, and vital mixed-use communities near transit nodes and other transportation facilities;
- revise transportation priorities to favor foot, bicycle, cart, and transit over autos, and to emphasize “access by proximity”;
- restore damaged urban environments, especially creeks, shore lines, ridgelines, and wetlands;
- create decent, affordable, safe, convenient, and racially and economically mixed housing;
- nurture social justice and create improved opportunities for women, people of color, and the disabled;
- support local agriculture, urban greening projects, and community gardening;
- promote recycling, innovative appropriate technology, and resource conservation while reducing pollution and hazardous wastes;
- work with businesses to support ecologically sound economic activity while discouraging pollution, waste, and the use and production of hazardous materials;

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16 This version of Urban Ecology ought not to be confused with an earlier journal of that name, which was merged with Landscape Planning in the 1980s, and which had a more empirical or scientific focus.
promote voluntary simplicity and discourage excessive consumption of material goods;

increase awareness of the local environment and bioregion through activist and educational projects that increase public awareness of ecological sustainability issues.\(^\text{17}\)

There are some clear overlaps and some notable silences here. The clearest overlaps are in the area of transportation and amenity. Furthermore, although it is not stated as a design principle per se, “frugality” is a much-vaunted ideal amongst new urbanists:

> "Certain traditional values - diversity, community, frugality, and human scale - should be the foundation of a new direction..."\(^\text{18}\)

However, overall it does seem fair to say that the “ecology” as represented in the classical texts on new urbanism has so far been that with a small “e.” The omissions are significant, and include things like appropriate technology, native or indigenous world-views, community economic development, the specifics of waste reduction and recycling, and explicit ecological restoration components i.e., not just “treading lightly” upon the soil, but pro-actively working to mitigate effects and rehabilitate modified landscapes.

There are other “tell-tale” signs of omission. One of the terms now most commonly associated with urban ecology is “biodiversity”. “Biological diversity” provisions are not made explicit in most new urbanist discussions or plans. The ratios of “green” space to private or developed seems to be based upon human amenity needs, rather than other species minimum critical habitat needs. There is no real discussion of the ecological carrying capacity of areas targeted for development or redevelopment. Similarly, the notion of the “bioregion” does not tend to figure highly. Parks and lawns seem to be givens, irrespective of their hydrological and ecological impacts. Furthermore, and as noted in relation to the Calthorpe example of the neo-traditional neighbourhood block, the grid-block pattern itself, hallmark of the Roman garrison town, is anathema to many; both from an aesthetic and ecological point of view. In other words, if there are “no straight lines in Nature” why impose them?

Nevertheless, new urbanism does seem to embrace the “small is beautiful” principle, and where it is addressed, the rethinking or redirecting of commuter behaviour (creating more combined home/work spaces or substituting public for private transportation wherever possible). Bikeways and park-and-ride facilities are to a certain extent givens. It is also often explicitly “regional” in outlook, if not bioregional.

Furthermore, some of the most recent projects have been promoted on the basis of their in-built resource conservation standards. The housing development of Civano in Tucson, Arizona, designed by Moule and Polyzoides Architects and Planners, boasts the following requirements:

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\(^\text{17}\) http://www.urbaneconomy.org

"Civano's 2,600 eventual households must use 50% less energy than specified in the 1995 Model Energy Code; use 54% less potable water than Tucson's baseline 1990 residential average; generate 30% less solid waste than the local average; and generate 40% fewer trip miles than the local average."19

Critics have been quick to rail against the heavy taxpayer subsidisation, and transport externalities (Civano is some 30 kilometres out of downtown Tucson). For hard-line environmentalists, any increments to the invasion of the Sonoran Desert would be untenable in any case, and it stills seems very much like artificial life-support warfare against the elements. Still, innovations such as RASTRA, 85% recycled polystyrene foam construction blocks, straw-bale wall infill, solar water heating, and roof-runoff rain barrels for backyard watering are used for some of the new houses, albeit only a few. The author of the article laments the fact that what has been created so far in terms of streetscape looks very much like conventional designs and he notes the predilection for order that seems to limit the thinking of new urbanists.

This example at least goes to show that some concrete attempts to answer accusations of ecological insensitivity are being made, and it is perhaps revealing that in a very recent address Andres Duany deliberately invoked a term well-entrenched in the lexicon of ecology:

"Duany presented an alternative anti-sprawl device he calls a ‘transect’... which he defined as ‘an ideal progression from wilderness to a dense urban center.’"20

New urbanism, ecology, and Lincoln’s future

In this latter section discussion is mainly in schematic terms. My use of Lincoln as a specific locality stems partly from my involvement in a Lincoln University/Selwyn District Council community consultation project known informally as the "Lincoln Vision Project".21

Lincoln is a small rural New Zealand town, dating back to 1862. Unlike many other small rural centres, it is not decaying in the wake of continued flight toward the cities. The 1996 census shows the population at approximately 2,300, distributed amongst some 582 dwellings.22 The town has been growing at a rapid pace over the past five years, mostly through relatively small incremental residential subdivisions. While this is to some extent a function of its close proximity to the city of Christchurch, which on some views seems to be sending out its tentacles out to

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21 The Lincoln Visions project report is due for release in early 2001. Some of the graphic material in this section was made available thanks to the generosity of Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, Lincoln, particularly Strategic Planning Group leader Ian Whitehouse, who has asked me to acknowledge "Common Ground" Consultancy as the principal drafters of the concept plan presented here on their behalf.
ensnare and eventually enclose the community within its sprawling suburbs, for the
time being it must deal with its growth issues as a relatively discreet township, in an
entirely separate, and more rurally-focused territorial authority area, the Selwyn
District Council. Lincoln has become something of a desirable “rural lifestyle”
location, where even if you don’t want to “hobby farm” on a “lifestyle block” you can
buy and build in a locality where you can “wake up and smell the pasture”, even if,
increasingly, you can’t actually see it. It should be noted that there are at least six
substantial residential developments, either recently carried out or in-process
relating to Lincoln. It is not difficult to see why longer-standing residents are feeling
a little besieged, if not thoroughly paranoid.

Fig. 5. Terralink Area Map of Lincoln.
Leaving aside such issues for a moment, let us look at a Terralink map of the area, which allows us to see the form and boundaries of the old township (the area within the recti-linear and triangular blocks). From a new urbanist perspective at least, so far so good: an interconnecting grid of streets, but with a nice natural feature, a stream, breaking the symmetry in an acceptable way. From there, however, one can imagine faces starting to lengthen, as it becomes apparent (and here I switch to a different map) that their area has been “cul-de-sacked”, as I will term it.

The more recent increments, the cul-de-sacs, as they have been constructed in Lincoln, are redolent of the tidy, but very private, high-fenced, big-house-relative-to-garden-area suburbs to be found throughout New Zealand. Few of these areas have congregating spaces or pedestrian-oriented channels into the town centre/CBD. One can easily imagine visiting American new urbanists railing against what they would encounter here. In fairness to these “mandarin” commentators, as detractors have labelled new urbanists, I have to report from my own conversations that older residents of Lincoln have frequently commented scornfully upon the height of fences in these new areas, pointing to the seemingly perfunctory, but quite satisfactory, styles of boundary-marking in the older parts of the town i.e., low wire-netting fences or hedges. Indeed, much of the talk within the township about what is to be cherished about Lincoln could come straight from a new urbanist tract: neighbourhood feel, pedestrian-friendly, child-friendly, relaxed, slow, focussed on the village green and so forth. In that respect I do not think that new urbanism is that far removed from human needs and aspirations, even if there is some naïve idealism at large all round.

However, I want to turn now to the question of ecological considerations in what is being planned for Lincoln, and I will do so by way of two extreme, but related examples, involving the largest landowners in the area: one is a modest proposal for what can be termed a “green subdivision” by the Crown Research Institutes (CRI) cluster adjoining the township aka. “Landcare”; the other is what can accurately be described as a “mega-development” planned by Lincoln University.

Now, private landowners everywhere are subdividing large lots for residential purposes, and despite the provisions contained within the RMA relating to ecology and bio-physical matters, one can be forgiven for being sceptical that this has had any positive environmental effects whatsoever. Nevertheless, even private developers are starting to include “natural” features in such things as water discharge engineering e.g., native plantings in swales, and one can point to this in at least one major private application underway at present.

**Landcare proposal**

Other contributors to the workshop in which this paper has first been presented will have been better able to comment on the details of the proposal by the CRI, but in essence, the Landcare “Green Subdivision” proposal, as I will call it, is for low-density privately owned housing on land retained in ownership by the CRIs.
In terms of conventional new urbanist imagery this does not look very familiar. It seems fair to say that the design appears more "grass-roots" in the literal sense i.e., that natural features have taken first priority. Layout is relatively asymmetrical. However, in common with new urbanist principles, there is a very strong focus on shared, congregating spaces, "clusters" rather "squares", but communally-oriented nevertheless. There is also provision for different types of housing, "co-housing" and "apartments", for example, something which new urbanists regard as fundamental to their norm of "diversity". In my own view, the differences are greater than the similarities, but there is good potential for merging the ideas of new urbanism with the ecological design principles illustrated here. I should point out that this is a concept plan and not a notified district plan change or resource consent application. Nevertheless, some consultation has already been carried out in the community, albeit in a low-key manner. Recall that consultation is a touchstone in new urbanist design, in spite of what critics have said.

**Lincoln University proposal**

I turn now to the Lincoln University project, imaginatively entitled "Plan Change 55". This is a notified plan change application to "facilitate" the building of some 500 new dwellings, adding another 2000 people to the town's population over an unspecified period, which if realised would increase the town's population by some 86%.

It is a very large-scale proposal, but to date has been very short on conceptual detail. This is due, apparently, to the University's reluctance to dictate consumer preferences in a market-led economy, and is perhaps understandable when such a large initiative is being undertaken. It is envisaged that it will be carried out in "stages", and will reflect, in terms of housing style and layout, prevailing buyer preferences in those given periods.

The other reason given for the lack of detail has been the need to wait for a more or less formal public consultation process under the RMA, particularly the opportunity afforded by the public submissions process, allowing the residents of Lincoln to help shape the final details. It is interesting to note that, as a tertiary institution boasting much expertise in natural resource engineering, landscape design and environmental management, no internal consultation or feedback has been solicited to date. This has not been the case with regard to the Landcare proposal.

In any case, for our purposes, the only substantive detail to be rendered in graphic form, although not formally attributed to any particular public consultation event, has come in the wake of one of a meeting with local residents, facilitated by the University's contracted consultants for the application.23

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23 I should add that despite claims of broad notification and consultation I had to retrieve a copy of the map from the local Fish and Chip shop window. The only other one that I could find in the town was on a town noticeboard.
Some initial observations can be made at least. Although it is not exactly clear whose idea it is (negative resident-feedback to the initial ideas mooted, in all probability) one can see that connected streets have made a modest comeback, mixed section sizes are included, a green corridor is proposed, and there is some designing around natural features. I should point out that the water table in this area is very high, something which has not really been addressed as a "natural feature" in any of the plan change application materials to date, except in so far as "drainage" issues are covered.

Still, from a new urbanist and ecological point of view, one could say that points are scored here on both counts. I reiterate the point, however, that the waters are a little muddy here as to the status of this rendering. It is not, to my knowledge, part of the formally lodged application, and hence has very ambiguous standing in regard to public submissions. In other words, these are still non-committal ideas, derived from community reaction to the absence of detail in the original application.
The original application was so non-specific as to defy any kind of conceptual analysis, although ideologically, perhaps, there is room for inference.

Cynics could be forgiven for thinking that this is the worst of all possible worlds. At least new urbanists have a coherent vision and a principled agenda; even if one does not agree with it there is something to disagree with. In ecological engineering and environmental management terms, and for all its academic and research horsepower in those dimensions, it is difficult to avoid the gloomy conclusion that when it comes to a choice between fiscal expedience on the one hand, and a proactive sense of environmental responsibility on the other, Lincoln University is prepared to run with the hounds, trumpeting organic farm business initiatives with corporate exporters at the same time it is preparing to liquidate other assets in an ad hoc, albeit hard-nosed, manner without much concern for the environmental and social ethics and impacts.

Conclusion

In the context of such a brief discussion I could not hope to present an unequivocal argument for or against the ecological robustness of new urbanism. I do hope, however, that I gave you some indication of where things have come from and where things are headed. Even with the limited and cursory look at Lincoln township one can see a certain degree of convergence. In the more international context, it is perhaps a positive indicator in itself to see that in a recent issue of Urban Ecology, one author approvingly cites Peter Calthorpe’s new urbanist transportation ethos, his desired residential density formula compared to post-War urban, and suburban averages: aim for 80 to 250 dwelling units per acre rather than the urban norm of 18 or the suburban average of 5 or 6 units per acre. While new urbanism may still have Disney-esque trappings, it also appears to have sufficient common-sense links to social and ecological concerns which, in my view, warrants taking it more seriously now than has routinely been the case in the past. With regard to the performance of government institutions in this country that have an environmental management responsibility if not, credo, I have to say that the local examples cited here are a cause for both optimism, in the case of the Crown Research Institutes, or Landcare, and puzzlement, if not outright exasperation, with regard to Lincoln University, eager as it is, at least in terms of its publicity and marketing, to be seen as a good environmental citizen.

Further references


Sources


