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Te Ngākau Project Team, c/- Property Team WCC, Box 2199.

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## New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Inc.

### Submission to the Te Ngākau Precinct Public Consultation

Submitter: Wayne Newman FRNSNZ, President of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Incorporated on behalf of the NZAFA Council and members

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The submitter requests that he may speak to this submission.

#### **1.0 About the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Incorporated**

1.1 The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Incorporated (NZAFA) has been a part of the cultural and artistic community of the capital for more than 140 years. It was formed on 8 February 2007 from The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Limited (a company registered on 2 April 1889 by the Fine Arts Association of New Zealand, which was itself established in Wellington in 1882).

1.2 NZAFA is a registered charity and has always combined a national and civic objective: *“To promote the study, practice, and cultivation of fine arts in New Zealand, and to encourage the production of works of art by periodical exhibitions in Wellington”*.

1.3 NZAFA had its gallery in Whitmore Street until 1936, when that gallery was sold and the proceeds given to the Trustees of the National Art Gallery under an agreement for the construction of a gallery within the building of the Dominion Museum. The Academy Galleries formed an integral part of the Dominion (later National) Museum and National Art Gallery until 1998, when it was closed. The Academy Galleries were subsequently at 1 Queens Wharf from February 2000 until 31 October this year.

1.4 With some 450 practising artists in its membership, NZAFA recognises that it has a responsibility to advocate for the aesthetic and economic development of the arts throughout New Zealand. NZAFA also recognises the important role of the arts to the economic and social well-being of the capital. It is with this recognition of the vital contribution of the arts to Wellington that NZAFA makes this submission on a specific proposal within the Precinct Wide Draft Development Plan that it believes cannot avoid being deleterious to the economic and social well-being of the city.

## **2.0 Precinct Wide Draft Development Plan Proposals**

2.1 The Council has opened consultations on extensive proposals developed by Warren and Mahony, Ti Hei, Place Collective, and Ripple Resilience for Council for development of the Civic Square precinct (Te Ngākau). NZAFA welcomes this consultation and thanks Council for provision of access to the full planning document on its website.

2.2 NZAFA wishes to submit on the proposals for the City Gallery contained in Section 5 of the Draft Development Plan. It is regrettable that these proposals were not more clearly summarised in the Consultations Documents as they pose a significant threat to the continued operation of an important civic asset.

2.3 The Draft Development Plan presents two options for redevelopment of City Gallery, together with a “No Action Alternative”. The “No Action Alternative” is to do nothing further following the upgrade to the air-conditioning (HVAC) system and earthquake strengthening of some internal walls currently underway. This would retain an upgraded internationally competitive City Gallery with no further major capital investment needs for the foreseeable future.

2.4 The “Small Extension Option” for City Gallery would involve opening an entrance to the gallery from Harris Street and converting the gallery’s ground floor to a food-hall and lane through the building to Civic Square. Additional space for City Gallery would be made available in a new building to be built on Jack Ilott Green. Overall, the size of the Gallery is reduced in return for major disruption, ruinous delay and unjustifiable expense.

2.5 The “Maximum Extension Option” proposal does not actually offer any extension at all, but removes City Gallery entirely from its present building to a new building to be built behind the present City Gallery building but facing onto Harris Street. The whole of the existing building would be converted to retail and commercial offices, retaining the food hall and laneway to Civic Square on the ground floor. Again, the size of the City Gallery is reduced in its new building in return for major disruption and ruinous delay. Again, it is an unjustifiable expense to deliver an unnecessary change.

## **3.0 Comment on Proposals**

3.1 NZAFA Council members are surprised and disappointed by inclusion of these options in the main Precinct Wide Draft Development Plan. The present City Gallery building is currently being renovated, upgraded and strengthened specifically to provide an excellent exhibition space with large galleries, weight-bearing walls, and new air conditioning designed to meet international gallery standards.

3.2 City Gallery has struggled since the disestablishment of the Gallery Director role in 2021 and the abrupt current closure for necessary renovations. The recent appointment of Charlotte Davy as the Director and having a supportive new Chief Executive in Diana Marsh has renewed confidence in the direction of City Gallery.

3.3 That direction appears to involve more adventurous exhibition programming to appeal to broader groups of society and with a return to bringing major international exhibitions to our city. Charlotte Davy's appointment appears to make this possible.

3.4 Such a programme will require the continued support of sponsors and donors here and of major collection holders overseas. To introduce uncertainty around the future of City Gallery now, following the appointment of a new Director and while the building is being upgraded to international standards as an art gallery, is at best maladroit and at worst ruinous.

3.5 More than that, however, it displays a fundamental contempt for art and the role of art in the well-being of our community. To propose that spaces used for exhibitions, artist functions and publication launches, as well as a wide variety of cultural events, might be better employed as a walkway and food-hall is deeply troubling.

3.6 The implication that a civic space should be best ringed by food-halls, retail stores and offices, in which an art gallery has no place, speaks of inherent philistinism at the base of the Draft Development Plan. The present City Gallery façade forms the northern edge of Civic Square. It is a prominent architectural feature that properly fronts onto the civic heart that Te Ngākau is intended to achieve.

3.7 It has been our understanding that the inspiration behind the designs with the Draft Development Plan was to bring together and balance the important elements of the precinct – te ao Māori, green space, heritage buildings, arts and culture, and a thriving hospitality sector, rather than to place hospitality at the forefront and displace arts and culture to the periphery.

3.8 To commence the work needed to deliver a world-class gallery for the city, only to propose that almost all of this work would be wasted by removing the Gallery partially or wholly from the building cannot be described as other than a questionable use of the city's resources.

3.9 A clear indication that any new building for the City Gallery will possess the scale and functionality already in the present building as a result of this current investment and the earlier investment in 2008-09 is conspicuously lacking.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

4.1 We ask Councillors to immediately instruct the Project Team for Te Ngākau that removing City Gallery from its present building is not an acceptable option. If removing City Gallery from its building were to remain an option, City Gallery will be faced with a long period of uncertainty that cannot avoid impinging on engagement both with major international collections' holders and local sponsors and donors. City Gallery is at an important juncture with a new Director, a forward-looking Chief Executive and supportive board of Experience Wellington, and is currently being upgraded to be fit for purpose for at least the next decade. All of this is put at risk if Councillors do not categorically rule out the "Small Extension" and "Maximum Extension" options for City Gallery from the Draft Development Plan for Te Ngākau.