Ruapehu District Plan

Proposed Plan Change No. 1

Section 32 Report

The purpose of Rule CM3.3.2 requiring all buildings in certain locations to provide a verandah across the front of the building, is to ensure continuity of protection for pedestrians in commercial locations where pedestrian numbers are high. Providing verandah shelter in core commercial streets contributes to the commercial experience and encourages people to stay longer and increase interaction in the commercial location, thereby enhancing the viability and vitality of the Commercial zone. Well designed footpaths and verandahs is an integral part of successful town centres and commercial environments.

The Ruapehu District Plan became operative in 2013. The Section 32 report for this review discusses the verandah provisions in general terms of contributing to the town centre experience as discussed above, but it does not identify or assess why verandahs must be designed without posts in Taumarunui. There have been some safety issues with trucks damaging verandahs, and it is thought that safety was the reason for the provision. There does not appear to be any urban design outcomes or wider town centre objectives for restricting verandah supports. In respect to design, historically most verandahs in Taumarunui included support posts. Today, some verandahs are supported from above or have been built into the structure of more recent buildings, so that about half the verandahs along Hakiaha Street are unsupported, and about half are supported by posts located on or near the kerbline.

The Taumarunui town centre, and in particular Hakiaha Street, reflects the historic New Zealand provincial town design of locating commercial activity along a main street, usually the highway through town. Because of the relationship and proximity between State Highway 4 and the Railway Line, commercial activity only fronts the southern side of Hakiaha Street, rather than both sides of the street. This has created an environment where the footpath along the southern side of the highway in front of commercial premises is about 5m wide. Most footpaths in commercial areas are about 3.5m wide. The extra wide footpath means there is the ability to design verandahs with support posts without creating obstacles or affecting pedestrian flows, even if the verandah posts are setback from the road kerb.

It is understood that issues with large vehicles and verandah safety have come about through a combination of verandah location and the camber of the road. Most historic verandah posts are located at the kerbline. The camber of the road in front of the commercial premises along Hakiaha Street has increased over time so that parked vehicles lean towards verandah posts. This is not an issue for cars, but in the case of tall trucks, the camber of the road means that the top of the truck can come in contact with the verandah fascia, to the extent that trucks have caused damage, and even the collapse of a verandah.

This is not necessarily a verandah post issue, but rather a road formation and verandah design issue. For example, any verandah that extends to the kerb has the potential to be damaged, whether it is freestanding or supported by a pole. This would suggest that verandah safety is about designing verandahs so they are setback from the kerb, allowing more space between a parked vehicle and the verandah fascia.

In addition to the setback of verandahs, work is planned in the next few years on the formation of State Highway 4 along Hakiaha Street, which will include reducing the camber of the road. This will means that in the future, vehicles parked at the kerb will be more upright than at present, and no longer lean towards the verandah fascia. Combined with a verandah setback from the kerb, there will be no future issues with verandah safety, or the use of posts to support the outer edge of the verandah.

The current verandah provision already has standards for the physical construction of a verandah, which include a setback of 0.5m from the kerbline. This may be varied where a footpath is less than 3.5m wide to ensure adequate footpath coverage. As the main issue with verandah safety relates to fronting State Highway 4 (Hakiaha Street), where the footpath is 5m wide, verandahs will be 4.5m wide when complying with the 0.5m setback from the kerbline. This is still a wide footpath free of impediments and so setting posts back from the kerbline in this location will not affect the free flow of pedestrians.

The current verandah provision also allows verandahs to extend for 3m where the footpath is wider than 3.5m. This shows up where newer verandahs have been constructed, especially those that are free-standing. More recent free-standing verandahs along Hakiaha Street are less than the footpath width which means that continuous shelter along the footpath has not been achieved. This is partly due to the rule, but also because verandahs without posts extending the width of the footpath are difficult to design and build.

Recent legislation in respect to earthquake prone buildings, will require the upgrade of most town centre buildings. It is going to be extremely difficult to upgrade buildings and achieve verandahs without posts. Even those existing buildings with free standing verandahs may not be able to be upgraded with free standing verandahs. Requiring verandahs to be designed without posts will place a heavy burden on building owners, to the extent that it may well mean the difference between renovation or potential abandonment. The outcome of such a situation would be far more detrimental to the town centre, than any negative elements around verandahs supported by posts. However, as discussed above, verandahs with posts can be designed to ensure verandah and pedestrian safety, so that it is difficult to point to negative elements, and it is therefore concluded that removing the provision restricting supported verandahs in Taumarunui will have only positive benefits for the town centre.

The only other amendment to CM3.3.2 relates to the width of the verandah. The rule provides design standards to ensure kerb setback, but also footpath coverage. However, as worded at present, where a footpath is wider than 3.5m, the verandah need only extend for 3m. This is inconsistent with most existing verandahs along Hakiaha Street, and the existing footpath width. It is proposed to require verandahs along Hakiaha Street to extend to within 0.5m of the kerb. This will essentially mean that all new verandahs will cover most of the footpath, and align better with existing supported verandahs. When existing buildings with verandahs extending to the road kerb are upgraded, the new verandah will then be setback 0.5m. Eventually, all verandahs will align along the footpath edge, regardless of whether they are constructed with support posts, or designed without posts.

There has been no community wide consultation undertaken in preparing this plan change. The plan change is an amendment to a specific standard applying to verandahs in Taumarunui. It is not a plan change or review of a wider environmental issue where community consultation is an important part of the plan change development. Council has received some feedback from property owners regarding the structural difficulties designing verandahs without posts, as discussed above. Plan Change No. 1 is in response to this, as well as earthquake prone building legislation.

Given that the only likely reason for the current verandah provision is safety in relation to parked vehicles, New Zealand Transport Agency where contacted for comment about the proposed change to the verandah standard. Comments received indicated that New Zealand Transport Agency had no objection, and requested a verandah post setback consistent with what has been proposed in Plan Change No. 1. The Plan Change will be notified in accordance with the requirements of the Resource Management Act 1991, and it is proposed that commercial property owners in Taumarunui will be specifically notified.

Section 32 Analysis

Amending General Condition CM3.3.2 Verandahs, as per Proposed Plan Change No. 1

Summary:

Proposed Plan Change No. 1 seeks to remove the rule requiring free-standing verandahs along Hakiaha Street, Taumarunui. If adopted, it will mean that verandahs in Taumarunui, and in particular along Hakiaha Street, can be replaced, and new verandahs constructed, using posts for support. The plan change also requires verandahs along Hakiaha Street to extend for the width of the footpath, minus the 0.5m setback from the kerb.

Alternatives

Alternatives to this plan change are to leave the rule as it is, or deal with verandahs through an alternative method. Leaving the rule as it is will create difficulties in the future for verandah replacements meeting earthquake and safety requirements, to the extent that the very outcomes intended by the verandah provision may not be achieved. Leaving the rule as it is, is not considered a viable option.

The rule in the District Plan is a standard relating to the design of verandahs where they extend over public footpaths. The footpath is part of the road reserve, and therefore space not owned by the building owner. Such standards are required to ensure verandahs are safe, provide consistency and continuity, and are fit for purpose.

Verandahs could be approved on a case by case basis by the road controlling authority through a license to occupy type of arrangement. However, given the number of verandahs and nature of the structure in terms being attached to a building on private land, and being provided for the public good, such an alternative method would be cumbersome compared with permitted activity rules in the District Plan. This alternative method will still require standards to achieve consistency, but would require every verandah to go through a process. A verandah complying with a District Plan standard is a permitted activity, and would be dealt with as part of the Building Consent for the new or upgraded building. This is an efficient and cost effective method of achieving the intended environmental outcome of continuous pedestrian shelter.

Benefits:

- All weather protection for pedestrians visiting this main street environment.
- Continuity of pedestrian shelter by requiring all verandahs on Hakiaha Street to extend over the footpath to within 0.5m of the kerb.
- Significantly more opportunity to upgrade buildings with verandahs supported by posts, compared with cantilevered unsupported verandahs.
- Consistency of design maintained with existing verandahs.

Costs:

- Less cost to design and construct a supported verandah compared with a verandah designed without posts.
- Efficient and cost effective to deal with complying verandahs as part of the Building Consent for the new building or upgraded building.

Effectiveness:

- Very effective because it allows for buildings to be upgraded without having to design verandahs without posts, which will be impracticable in most instances with existing buildings.
- Will be effective in ensuring continuous shelter along Hakiaha Street provided by verandahs that extend to within 0.5m of the kerbline.

Efficiency:

- More efficient in enabling buildings to be constructed and upgraded compared with the existing rule requiring verandahs to be designed without posts.