

## 2015 LGNZ EXCELLENCE Awards application form

Application for: Martin Jenkins EXCELLENCE Award for Local Economic Contribution

### Award contact information

Council(s) name: Rotorua Lakes Council

Name of person submitting application: Portia McKenzie

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### Project information

Lead council: Rotorua Lakes Council

Is there any other council involved? If so, who: No

Project name: Rotorua Inner City Revitalisation

Project team members (name, title and organisation): All of council and community approach

**Project description (20-30 words) summarising your project. This will be used in marketing material if your project is selected as a finalist.**

Rotorua Inner City Revitalisation – to create a vibrant city heart, waahi pumanawa. Our inviting and thriving inner city reflects our unique heritage and lakeside location.

**Executive summary (150-200 words) outlining your project, why it was undertaken, its objectives and what it achieved.**

With the number of vacant buildings increasing over recent years resulting from changing trends in retailing (online shopping, 'big box' stores etc), Rotorua's inner city was no longer thriving where it was once the economic powerhouse of the district. Amongst the community, revitalisation had become the hot topic of discussion. By mid-2013 the business community had banded together to say: "*it's time something was done.*" Welcoming this show of unity from the business community, Rotorua Lakes Council joined the journey with a partnership approach to bring the heart and soul back to the city and to build the local inner city economy back up to what it once was. Reflecting on the community's aspirations and forging a shared vision for the city, the revitalisation began and within one year, results were already being registered.

Who's  
putting local  
issues on  
the national  
agenda?

**We are.  
LGNZ.**

## **Project description against award criteria (maximum of ten pages including images & attachments)**

### Project Rationale

Why it was completed and what issues or problems did it address

A raft of factors had contributed to a decline in the local inner city economy and by 2012 foot traffic had decreased by 26% since 2005. Retailers were feeling a sense of hopelessness with the combination of the global financial crisis and the shift to online shopping. There was a belief that Council was the only one who could provide that leadership however it was critical that we worked together – tatau tatau – we together. To ensure there was a partnership approach, Council and the community went on a journey of discovery to create a vision, and from that Rotorua 2030 was born. This identified that the community considered the economy of the inner city as one of the top priorities and that a *vibrant city heart* was required to be achieved by 2016.

### Project Objectives

Five key objectives were defined:

- fewer empty shops
- more people on our streets
- optimistic retailers
- diverse use of our inner city
- viewed as an exciting and safe place to live, work and invest.

The anticipated outcome was the requirement for a paradigm shift from despair to hope where both the community and the Council were willing to work together for the good of the local economy.

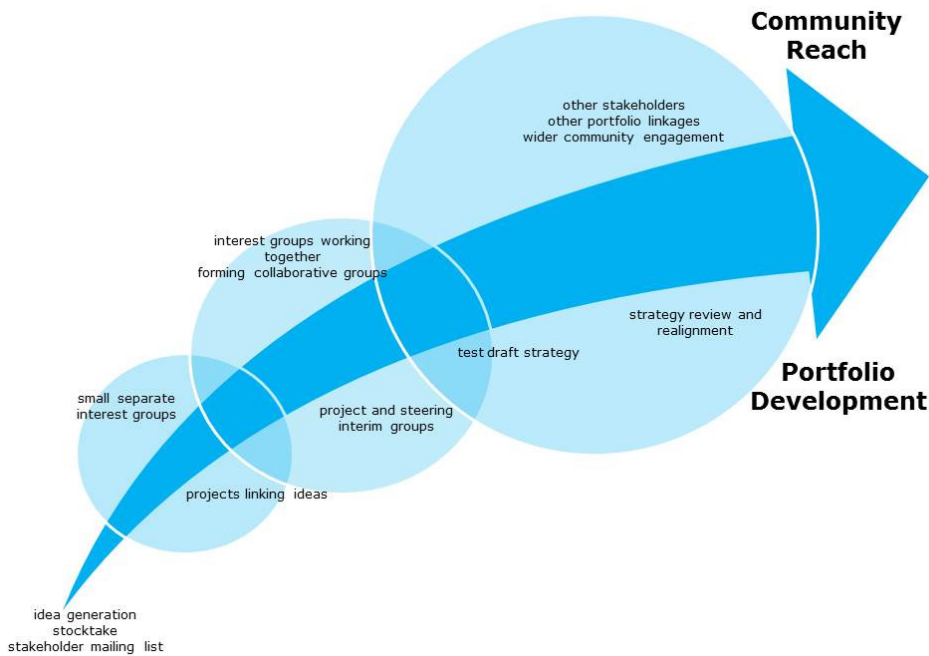
This visioning exercise coincided with the business community coming together to say “*enough is enough*” and from this the Inner City Focus Group, a large group of local business owners, was formed and empowered by Council to take control of their own destiny.

Since then, many sub-groups have formed, some project driven and some focussed on service. One of the biggest risks to the revitalisation of the inner city was that nothing would change and that the public would focus on only the perceived problems and not the potential for partnership solutions. A figurative and literal change in vision was required by both the community and Council. A second risk was that Council and community would not trust each other and that old habits would disrupt progress. Therefore, a conscious decision was made to undertake some work (quick, tangible wins that were planned together) while workshops and discussions were taking place.

### Project Approach

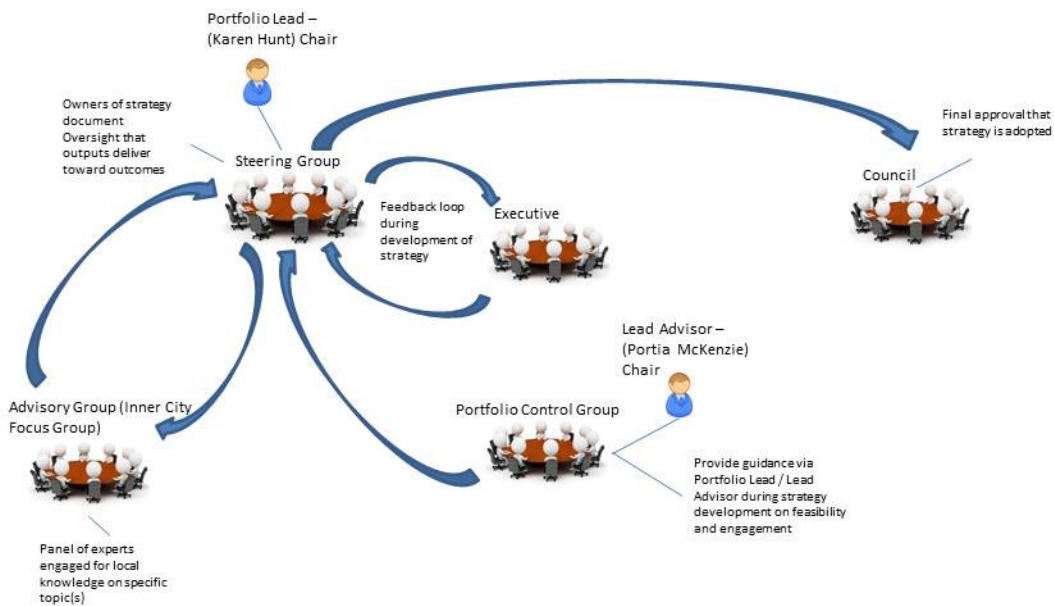
#### **Governance**

Relationship building takes time and trust needed to be rebuilt. With council support, the Inner City Focus Group held their first get-together with more than 110 business owners and other members of the public attending. The Focus Group had the business community's backing – the members became their peers who were leading the charge. They had no desire in the first instance to get loaded down with strategy development or governance. They wanted to see instant, tangible results. The first 12 months saw this group championing the community's aspirations and acting as the vital link with the council as an informal steering group. Many of the initial projects identified were able to be accommodated from within existing budgets and simply needed some refinement or redirection from the community. Low-cost and no-cost projects with strong volunteer support were able to make high impact. An online Ideas Bank was established where the public were encouraged to submit any idea, small or large, that could contribute to the city's revitalisation. Simple 'just-do-its' arose from this initiative, demonstrating to the local community that the council was committed to being flexible and responsive. This was one of the significant changes and successes of the relationship building. When enquiries came from inner city business owners, council staff made arrangements to visit them and talk face-to-face to discuss issues and find solutions.



*Project Methodology and Planning*

After over a year of projects and strategy development, trust had been built up between all parties that we were all moving in the same direction for the greater good of the economy. Once trust was established, a steering group was formed to provide the leadership and to advise Council on the direction of the strategy.



## *Governance Set up*

### **Engagement and Consultation**

Prior to the development of the district's Rotorua 2030 vision more traditional consultation and engagement processes had been employed. The new framework allowed the council to employ more innovative ways of encouraging feedback. The principle was one of the council reaching out to the community rather than expecting the community to come to the council. A series of innovative initiatives over the course of the last two years has successfully explored and identified what the community actually wanted, instead of the council proceeding with what it thought was needed.

The community started to recognise that they had as much responsibility as Council did to revitalise their city. Scrub Day was a good example. This was a day held by the retailers. It was a day of cleaning, scrubbing and tidying up verandahs, shop fronts, service lanes and alleyways. Council supported the event by putting on entertainment in the middle of the town square and encouraging the public to participate in planting gardens. Two large sculptures were installed at a central intersection on the same day. A one day pop up gallery was held in an empty shop which displayed historic photos of the city. People were seen all over the city, shining, water blasting and chatting to their neighbours about what else they could do. This idea was so successful that it has become an annual event.

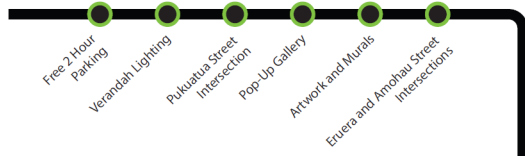
A pop up gallery was opened for six weeks over Christmas in a shop that had been empty for a long time and located in a very prominent location. This brought the art community together and talking to each other. This became a "bumping space" for locals to interact with Council staff and volunteers who helped operate the shop and people were encouraged to sit, knit, stay and discuss how the city could be revitalised.

Meetings required active participation from attendees and provided a safe environment to share ideas. Instead of a meeting, meet and greet sessions were held. To encourage attendance, one group of business owners printed a large image of the city of Rotorua and cut it up into hundreds of puzzle pieces. Those pieces were hand delivered to business owners and they were asked to come and recognise their role in the bigger puzzle of Rotorua. Over 220 people attended that meet and greet session. The Council chamber was so full that people were sitting on the stairs and on the carpet at the front. White boards with information about different groups and their objectives lined the hallways to encourage people to sign up to be part of different working groups. From that sprouted the Tulip Festival Group who is now holding an annual Tulip Festival in September and the Light Rotorua Campaign, a group who sought their own funding to light large trees and landmarks for Christmas and intend on being bigger and brighter this year.

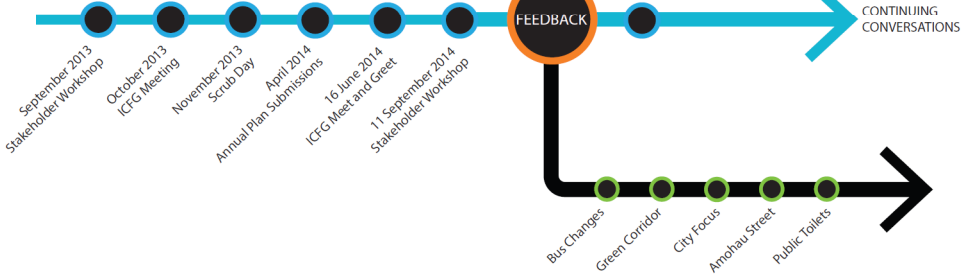
Over a year of workshops, meet and greet sessions, pop up galleries, feedback sessions and conversations, the Revitalisation Strategy was written, reviewed by the Focus Group and edited where they saw fit and presented to Council for release to the public – titled a Community View. Once this was done, we now had to tackle the hard to reach groups. The traditional delivery mechanisms of consultation were simply not going to provide the sort of impact and feedback we needed to gain from the community.

An "Ideas Store" was opened in a vacant shop in the city. Rotorua 2030 was displayed and an interactive space was created with a central park bench, rowing machines for competitions with friends and a wall dedicated to "Why I love Rotorua". A weekly competition recognised the ideas flowing in. Most heartening was the average time spent in the store was 20-30 minutes. From this, we knew we had truly connected with the community. More than 1400 people visited the store and over 1000 ideas were received during that time.

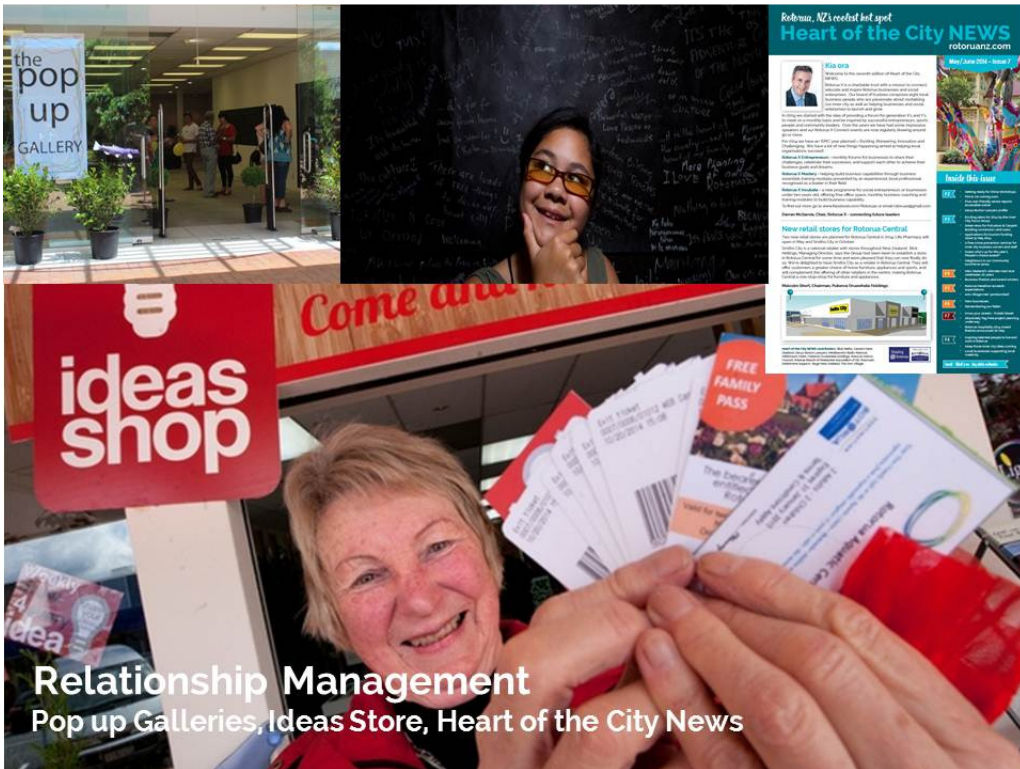
## Projects



## Engagement



Stakeholder Engagement



*Ideas Store, Newsletter and Pop up Gallery*

Target Audience

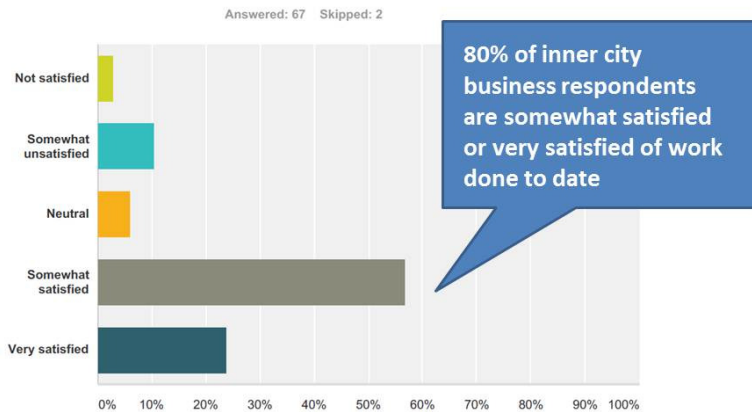
The whole community benefits from the revitalisation of the city. By empowering the community to be united, other organisations came on board. New Zealand Transport Agency have supported the strategy by funding 57% of the Green Corridor (a cycleway linking Government Gardens to Kuirau Park), they are also undertaking an exercise to determine what state highway changes can be done to encourage the revitalisation including a review of Amohau Street (a state highway that currently severs the city in two halves).

Success Measures

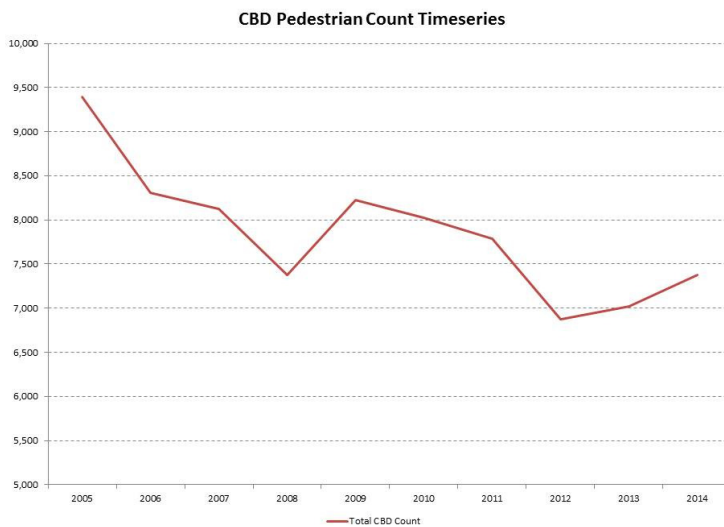
The key success measure is more people on our streets and this is measured through our pedestrian count each year. Between 2005 and 2013 pedestrian traffic had dropped in the city by 26%. Since 2012, foot traffic has increased 2.2% in the first year, 5.2 % in the second year and 8% on the main street spine of the inner city where the efforts have been focussed. This indicates that the initiatives that are being undertaken are having an effect on the number of people living, working and visiting the inner city and that contributes to growing the local economy.

In January 2015, Council staff walked the inner city streets and met with every single business operator, it took five staff over five days. Email addresses were collected and a survey undertaken, one question was asked with regard to satisfaction. The results were that 80% of inner city business operators are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied of the work done to date.

**Q1 How satisfied are you with the projects that have been implemented in the last year for increasing foot traffic in the inner city? (intersection upgrades, sculptures, garden upgrades, free parking, murals etc).**



### Results of the Online Survey



### Pedestrian Count Results

Early on, many projects included simple clean up jobs. A hedge in the centre of town that had grown over time with no one really thinking about it had grown to approximately 1.5m and was blocking the view up and down the main street. Its removal encouraged people to walk further because they could see stores they had not visited. Garden makeovers were part of typical renewal budgets and added colour and vibrancy. The public were encouraged to plant the annuals as they walked by. A mural was painted on the side of a building that was very prominent in terms of location. Sculptures were installed on loan and available for sale like a public art gallery. Building walls were painted with bright colours by community groups to reduce tagging and positive slogans were installed overtop, these walls have not been tagged since.

The largest project that had been building over time was Eat Street. This created an eating precinct out of like-minded businesses clusters. This showcases the power of precinct clustering or what is termed “co-opitition” at Eat Street. Eat Street is now a destination for Rotorua and a flagship for the possibilities for change and community partnerships.

**Comment [MAG1]:** Is this the right term?

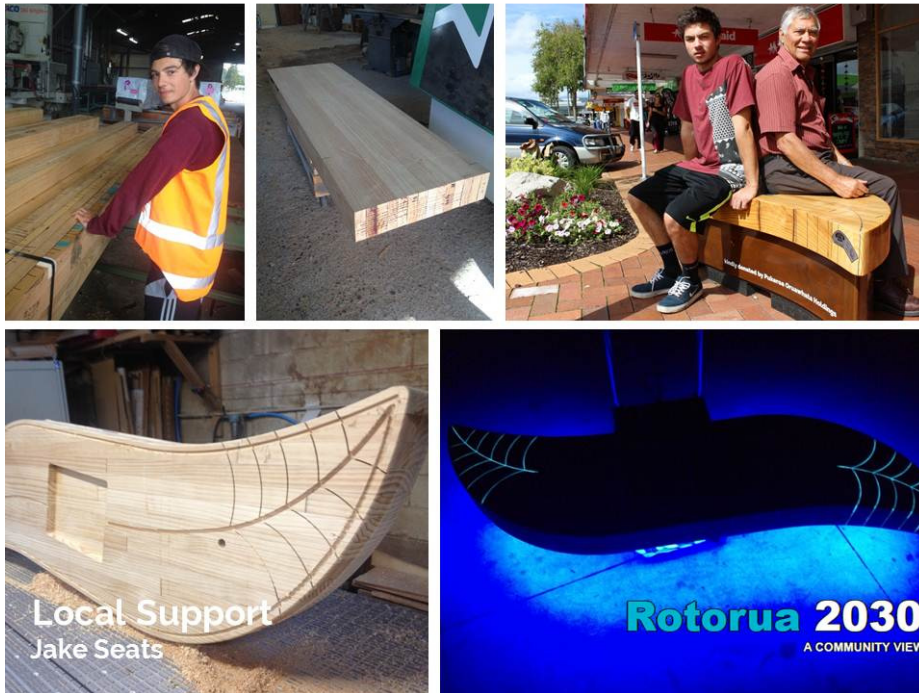


*Eat Street – Before and After*

The Jake Seats project was very successful. Existing seating was dated and encouraged groups of people to loiter and gather, and some pedestrians and retailers were feeling intimidated by this. New seating was required in the city and to achieve this design competition was run among high school student who were urged to submit public seat designs. The competition prize was awarded to Jake Krebs, a 16 year old student from Rotorua Lakes High School. Jake designed a seat with in silver fern shape that glowed at night from an integrated solar power unit. The design was then taken through into more detail. It was crucial that the manufacture of the seats would be local. Jake visited all the local suppliers involved to watch first-hand and to participate in the manufacturing of the prototype



seat. To construct a single seat, the products move through five different Rotorua suppliers. The results have proved to be very popular and local sponsors have contributed towards 13 seats now in place throughout the city. Jake has now gone on to be awarded an apprenticeship with a local engineering company. The seats are a great example of supporting local - a young local designer, local suppliers and local sponsors. The cost to the council has been near to nothing.



One of the most successful points of the project has been the low cost to Council and with the high level of engagement, sponsorship from external parties has been easily attained.

#### Project learnings

One key lesson learnt was that open face-to-face communication with the community reaped rewards far in excess of traditional consultation and engagement methods. Old fashioned values of talking, listening then acting promptly helped overcome past distrust. While many people are adverse to change, it was the very newness of the council's approach that captured the community's imagination. It was a marked contrast to the previous approach where the community did not know or understand what was happening next. This change allowed the council to achieve things through collaboration and partnership with the community – things that in the past has been very challenging and often not understood or embraced.

Another lesson learnt was the importance of identifying community leaders for community projects. At the establishment stage of any new group or project, the council undertook just a facilitation role rather than the critical leadership role. Leadership became part of the community's commitment to change. An example was the community request for establishing a Tulip Festival. Instead of the council leading this project, the community now owns it, funds it and takes strong pride in it – with support from the council.

The Inner City Revitalisation approach was quickly adopted by the other key council project portfolios that arose from the Rotorua 2030 visioning process, recognising the significant change in perception and community response it received. The council had learnt to follow through with promises, and to speak as residents rather than as local government bureaucracy staff.

This model of engagement, portfolio development and project management that has been set up as a result of this strategy development have now flowed through into the other five portfolios and are informing their success.

Chief Executive's name: Geoff Williams

Chief Executive's signature:

Mayor or Chair's name: Mayor Steve Chadwick

Mayor or Chair's signature:

