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## PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

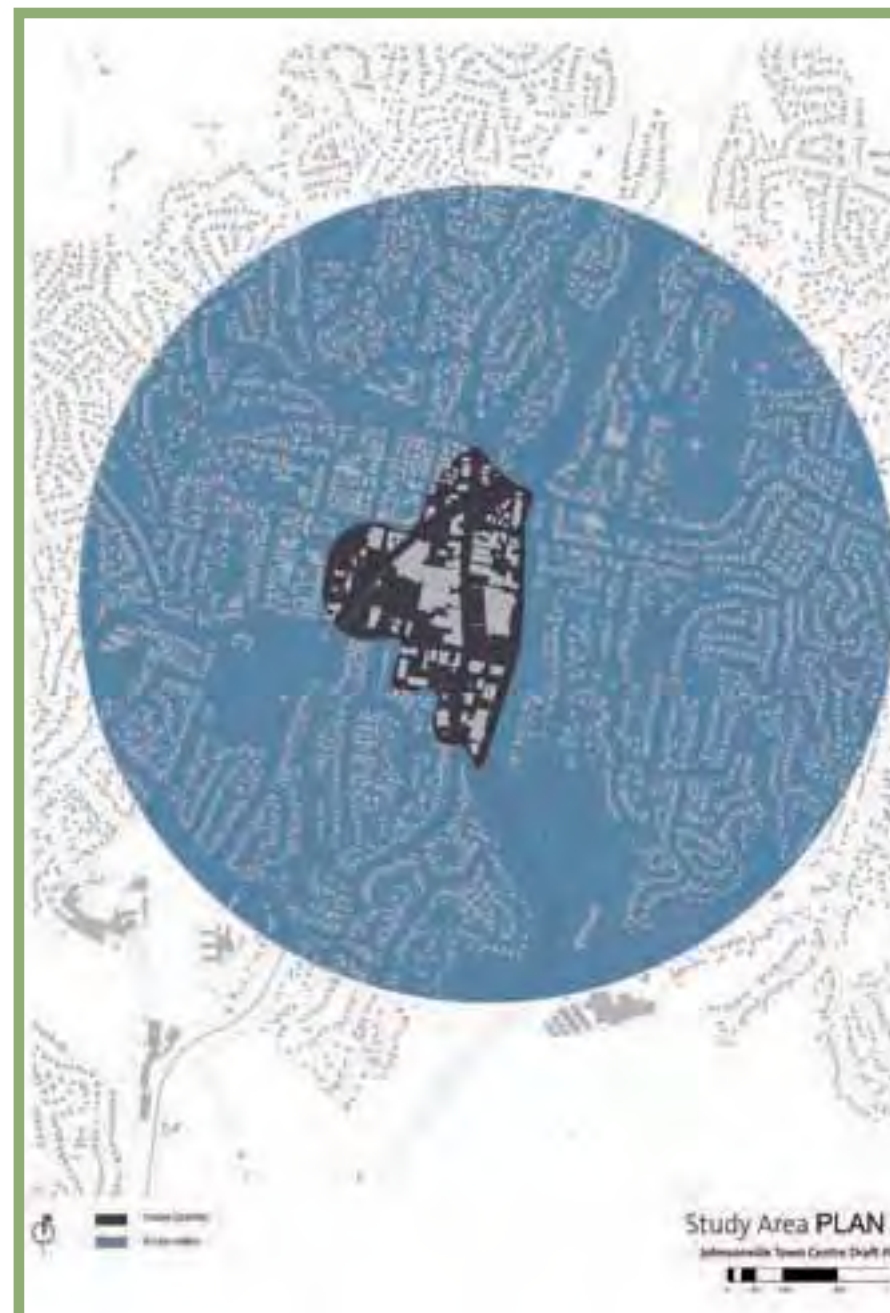
The Johnsonville Town Centre Plan (the Town Centre Plan) outlines a framework to guide the future development of Johnsonville. The Town Centre Plan defines Wellington City Council's vision for Johnsonville and identifies measures to manage change. It is intended as a long-term plan for the next 20 years.

Johnsonville is the largest and most significant town centre in Wellington outside the central city and plays a key role in servicing the northern suburbs. Johnsonville is at a crossroads, with significant changes proposed to its retail heart, improvements to its transport systems, and continuing residential growth. The Town Centre Plan seeks to guide and coordinate public and private investment in the area to ensure that these opportunities enhance the town centre and benefit communities in the wider northern suburbs.

The focus of the Town Centre Plan is on future urban development – this encompasses shops, businesses, housing, infrastructure, community facilities and public spaces – and links these elements in a comprehensive plan.

### DEFINING THE TOWN CENTRE AREA

The project area for this Town Centre Plan encompasses the area zoned for 'Suburban Centre' as well as the surrounding residential areas, up to a nominal boundary of 800 metres (or 10 minutes) walking distance from the town centre. This equates to the town centre and its immediate catchment. Distances of 400 and 800 metres generally equate to five and 10 minute walking distances, respectively. These are commonly accepted as being the areas within which higher proportions of people will walk to public transport facilities or to use the town centre.



The town centre sits on the floor of a natural basin surrounded by the hills of the northern suburbs, which have been developed for housing. The area zoned for Suburban Centre includes all of the traditional 'town centre' uses. These are focussed around a triangular block bounded by Johnsonville, Broderick, and Moorefield Roads as well as land between Johnsonville Road and State Highway 1. Within these areas, shops and other commercial uses dominate, mostly in large-footprint buildings of one or two storeys with extensive areas of surface car-parking. The highest building in this area is currently four storeys.

The surrounding residential areas comprise a mix of housing styles – most is single-storey although there are pockets of infill housing of two storeys, especially in the areas closest to the town centre. There are few other land uses present in these areas apart from community facilities.

## STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT

**Wellington Regional Strategy:** The Strategy (2006) seeks to mature the identified sub-regional centres throughout the region, including Johnsonville. Action areas include completing a centre vision for each of the sub-regional centres; developing a transport investment programme for these centres; and developing regionally consistent principles for the management of big-box retail.

**Northern Growth Management Framework:** The Framework (2003) also seeks to strengthen the existing town centre of Johnsonville by consolidating land use and expanding park and ride facilities. An extensive community consultation exercise was undertaken as part of the development of the Framework in 2002–03. One of the key conclusions of this consultation was that there should be no new town centre and that new growth should be directed to strengthen existing centres. For Johnsonville, the Framework proposed to intensify in and around the centre to assist the viability of the rail system, improve park and ride provisions, and investigate new motorway on and off ramps at Helston Road.

**Urban Development Strategy:** The Strategy (2006) seeks to concentrate additional growth along a 'growth spine' from Johnsonville through the CBD to the Airport. This will be supported by promoting a high quality public transport system as the main means of movement along the growth spine. Improvements to the quality of development as well as better integration with supporting facilities and services are also key objectives. Johnsonville is a key growth node in the growth spine and is the first of three key centres to be the subject of a centre planning process.

**North Wellington Public Transport Study:** This study (2002–06) reviewed the provision of passenger transport services to Johnsonville. It considered four options including retaining and enhancing rail; creating a busway on the rail corridor; running buses on the street and replacing the rail line with a walking and cycling track; and light rail on an extended rail line through the CBD. The final preferred option was the retention and improvement of rail.

**District Plan:** The District Plan sets out a vision of a sustainable city, while also identifying areas for economic growth. The operative District Plan identifies the town centre as having a Suburban Centre zoning. This is a permissive zone that allows a range of activities to occur, including retail, industrial and residential. A plan change is proposed for the Suburban Centre Zone and the Residential Zone.

**Centres Policy:** In August 2008, the Council adopted a Centres Policy with the intent of maintaining and strengthening centres as primary places for shopping, living, employment growth and services. The Policy defines the hierarchy and function of various centres, provides guidance on how they should be managed and developed, and assists in coordinating Council investment in and around the centres. The policy defines a hierarchy of centre types: the central city, sub-regional, town, district, and neighbourhood centres. Johnsonville is defined as a Sub-Regional Centre serving the northern suburbs.

**Urban Character Assessment:** The City Council commissioned in 2008 a comprehensive citywide assessment of urban character and townscape. This has been followed by a more detailed assessment of the Johnsonville area. Extensive analysis documented natural character elements (topography, open space, and green structure such as trees and bush) and built character elements (development patterns, housing character, and landmarks). The reports identified areas sensitive to change due to natural and built character elements. Johnsonville is considered to have the ability to absorb change due to its existing diversity and range of housing types.

**Infill Housing Review:** This project is examining where new intensive housing development would best meet the needs of the future. The work on housing intensification has been coordinated with the Town Centre Plan, and Johnsonville has been identified as an 'Area of Change'.

## THE JOHNSONVILLE STORY

In 1840, Frank Johnson arrived on the sailing vessel *Adelaide* in Port Nicholson, and established a timber mill near the centre of what is now Johnsonville. At the time, the area was on the Maori track from Wellington to Porirua and it became known as Johnson's Clearing. Literally a clearing in the thick bush, it was on the western side of the present-day Johnsonville Road.

It is believed that during a picnic in Johnson's Clearing, one participant suggested to Mr Johnson that the locality needed a better name. Mr Johnson took a piece of charcoal from the picnic fire and wrote "Johnsonville" on a piece of wood and nailed the board to the trunk of a tree.

The settlers initially felled timber for the sawmill, but after a few years of clearance, employment was dominated by pastoral farming and Johnsonville became a service centre for farms in the district. Johnsonville was also a popular stopping point for horses travelling north. There were four hotels in the area including the Rifle Volunteer and Ames Arms in Johnsonville.

A small wooden church was built in 1847 to provide for the community, with the first post office being established in 1871. The town took official shape in 1874 when it was proclaimed a local board district and the first election for its five members was held in the public school.



Johnsonville – mostly undeveloped land in 1894

Panorama of Johnsonville in 1961

The coming of rail in 1883 made a big difference to the growth of Johnsonville. Suddenly it was on the main line to the Manawatu and Wellington and it started to grow more rapidly. Before that the journey to Wellington had taken two hours by coach.

Around 1894 Freeman R. Jackson and Co. established the saleyards next to the railway station making it the chief stock station on the Wellington–Manawatu railway and a main supplier for the Wellington Meat Export and Freezing Works at Ngauranga.

However the opening of the Tawa Deviation on the Main Trunk Line in 1937 reduced Johnsonville to a terminus on the suburban railway and it lost stock traffic from the north. This, coupled with rapid population growth which steadily reduced available farm land, saw Johnsonville's role as a farming service centre diminish.

Amalgamation with Wellington was officially proposed in 1921 by the town board, but it was not until 1953 that Johnsonville finally amalgamated with the City of Wellington.

A few examples of built history remain in Johnsonville. Defined heritage areas include the Johnsonville Cemetery at Norman Lane, and along Old Coach Road to Ohariu at Safari Crescent. One heritage object is listed: the Trooper Retter Memorial 1902, on Moorefield Road. Four heritage buildings are also listed: St John's Church (1921) on Bassett Road at the corner of Ironside Road; Johnsonville Masonic Hall (1908) on Phillip Street; Lawrence Laboratory (1908 and 1920) on Hardy Street; and Daisy Hill Farm, "Bould House" (1857) on Truscott Avenue.

Johnsonville today is one of Wellington's largest town centres outside of the central city, containing over 711 businesses employing almost 2750 people (Statistics NZ 2007). Employment is dominated by the retail, construction and service sectors. The retail core includes the Johnsonville Mall on the central triangle block. The property owners intend to rebuild the shopping mall in this central location.

Johnsonville also has a wide range of community facilities including primary and secondary schools, a kindergarten, recreation and playground facilities, police and fire stations, a medical centre, library and community centre.

The area enjoys excellent transport services, including a suburban rail service to the central city, extensive bus services and direct access to State Highway 1. The average journey to the central city today takes just over 25 minutes by rail. Public transport accounted for 14.9% of all journeys to work each day from the northern suburbs with 37% of these trips by train and 63% by bus.

Johnsonville is home to about 9000 residents (or 3500 households), and has experienced significant growth in the last few years. Between 1991–2001, Johnsonville had a 9% population increase, with a further 4.2% increase between 2001–2006.

The last 160 years has seen major change in Johnsonville, as it developed from a clearing in the forest to a major shopping centre and residential suburb. The next 20 years will continue this process of change.

## SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

### Initial Consultation 2006

An initial phase of public consultation on Johnsonville was held from September to November 2006. It discussed issues and futures for the town centre. This consultation included:

- a letterbox campaign to all residents, businesses and community organisations in Johnsonville (approx 5000) using a purpose designed leaflet
- an internet information page and information at libraries and service centres
- a telephone and field survey of most businesses (195) in Johnsonville town centre
- three public drop-in sessions held at Johnsonville Community Centre in October 2006

- meetings with local community organisations
- a workshop with the owners of the Johnsonville Mall
- consultation with public-sector agencies and infrastructure operators
- formal submissions – 201 were received.

The consultation revealed a number of key issues of concern to the community, including traffic, parking, public transport, shops and services, urban design, community facilities, entertainment, housing and safety. The strongest consensus was around transport issues, including providing for traffic, public transport and walking. Almost 80% of submitters mentioned transport issues as one of their top priorities.

### Draft Town Centre Plan Consultation 2007

Following the initial consultation, a draft Town Centre Plan was prepared and released in 2007. A second round of consultation was conducted through May and June, which included:

- Southern Ward Meeting, Tawa Community Board Meeting, Eastern Ward Meeting and Northern Ward Meeting
- mailing postcards to 3500 Johnsonville homes
- distribution of copies of the draft Town Centre Plan to stakeholders, libraries, service and community centres
- an internet information page
- two articles in the *Our Wellington* Page in the Dominion Post
- meetings with local residents/progressive associations, Johnsonville community interest groups, the Disability Reference Group and the Johnsonville Business Association
- display in Johnsonville Mall
- formal submissions of which 103 were received.

The consultation on the draft Town Centre Plan indicated very high levels of support (over 90% agree and strongly agree) for the key goals of managing traffic and retaining a compact town centre. The respondents stated strong support for enhancing services – developing a wider range of town centre functions such as shops, entertainment and recreation (88%) and increasing and improving community facilities (83%).

Consultation on the housing aspects of the draft Town Centre Plan showed support for the key goals of facilitating and managing growth (77%) and encouraging more people to live in the town centre (74%).

Results also showed majority support for all other key goals (69% and above agree and strongly agree for all key goals) as discussed opposite.

**The respondents stated strong support for enhancing services – developing a wider range of town centre functions such as shops, entertainment and recreation and increasing and improving community facilities.**

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS – ANALYSIS

The table below considers the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to the Johnsonville town centre, compiled from various phases of community input and consultation.

In summary, the SWOT analysis indicates that:

- Johnsonville has the potential to develop further into a multi-functional town centre serving the northern suburbs.
- There are opportunities for living within close walking distance of services and public transport.
- Johnsonville already has many ingredients for a desirable satellite centre including:

- a successful commercial core with retail, services, and building construction industries
- good rail and bus connections
- interesting topography and visual connections.
- Due to more car-oriented development, the centre has some challenges for visitors including:
  - a lack of a central gathering space for the community
  - poor public transport integration
  - high levels of vehicle congestion
  - poor pedestrian access through and around the town centre
  - a lack of urban design quality.

### STRENGTHS

- Strategic location at the centre of the northern suburbs, and visibility from SH1
- One of the largest town centres outside of the central city, with a good range of shops
- Continued population growth expected across the northern suburbs through 'greenfield' development and infill
- Excellent transport connections to SH1, a suburban rail line and the bus network making it accessible and an easy commute
- Good range of community facilities including schools, recreation facilities, a library, childcare facilities, police and fire stations
- Compact town centre
- Extensive family housing that is more affordable than other Wellington City suburbs
- Flexible planning regime that does not restrict land uses
- The row of shops along the west side of Johnsonville Road is a successful example of an active street edge.
- Community anchor points of the Community Centre, Library and Salvation Army complex
- Sense of community – family friendly, slower pace than the central city
- Support for redevelopment and expansion of the town centre and population growth
- Sophisticated and loyal customer base, visiting several times a week for shopping, recreation and transport purposes
- Free parking.

### WEAKNESSES

- Employment dominated by only a few sectors (retail, construction and services)
- Conflicting role of Johnsonville Road, major motorway off-ramp and mainstreet
- Roads carry high traffic volumes and some intersections are close to capacity
- Lack of housing choice
- Community facilities not well integrated and some require further investment
- Town centre dominated by vehicles, road infrastructure and surface car parking
- Poor urban-design quality of town centre
- Limited catchment population for rail station due to low population density
- Poor rail and bus interchange
- Pedestrian routes through the town centre not well defined and some unsafe
- Not a strong business association
- Planning regime provides little clear guidance on desired outcomes or quality
- Limited connections across motorway to Newlands and Paparangi
- Limited entertainment and night-time activities
- Exposed in all weather conditions
- Limited land available for expansion
- Lack of a community focal point or central public space.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Expand multi-functional town centre to serve northern suburbs
- Make Johnsonville pedestrian-friendly
- Provide for more housing choices, including apartments and townhouses
- Develop residential uses within the town centre
- Positive vision for the future development of Johnsonville
- Facilitate investment in Johnsonville
- Improve overall urban design quality
- Provide a more active street edge along Johnsonville Road
- Create a new central public space
- Create a new community services hub with a new/ expanded library, pool and public space links to local parks
- Develop alternative routes for through traffic
- Improve the capacity of key intersections
- Develop a high quality rail and bus interchange integrated into adjacent development
- Provide for more intensive development within the town centre
- Make Johnsonville a distinctive place with a positive identity
- Improve provision for cycling
- Centralise and screen parking areas for employees and visitors, and improve park-and-ride provisions
- Significant contour differences throughout the town centre offer potential for underground parking and varied heights without impact.

## THREATS

- Growth in traffic will increase congestion and make conditions for pedestrians unpleasant
- Increased parking provision will visually dominate the town centre
- Internalised mall redevelopment does not integrate with the rest of the town centre
- Investors in other sub-regional centres use statutory processes to delay retail redevelopment
- No agreement on proposed improvements to motorway interchanges
- Increased infill development results in poor urban design and stymies opportunity for more comprehensive redevelopment
- Lack of investment
- Economic downturn delaying commercial investment
- Lack of future vision
- Lack of investment in rail network, station facilities or park-and-ride
- Lack of implementation mechanisms
- Lack of political will and community consensus to achieve vision.

**ALMOST 80% OF  
SUBMITTERS MENTIONED  
TRANSPORT ISSUES AS ONE  
OF THEIR TOP PRIORITIES.**

