SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE OF CHRISTOPHER MURRAY MCDONALD

PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE E – ROXBURGH CRESCENT

A. INTRODUCTION

[1] My full name is Christopher Murray McDonald. I prepared the s42A report dated 23 April 2025 and Reply Evidence dated 16 May 2025 on Urban Design on behalf of Palmerston North City Council for proposed Plan Change E: Roxburgh Residential Area (**PCE**).

[2] My involvement with Roxburgh Crescent commenced in 2020, when I co-authored the Roxburgh Crescent Urban Design Report. Subsequently, I have contributed to the evolution of the Roxburgh Crescent Structure Plan and its associated illustrative masterplans. I have participated in stakeholder engagement, and I have provided advice on proposed amendments to District Plan policies and provisions.

B. STRUCTURE PLAN

[3] Key plan features include:

(a) A southern extension of Roxburgh Crescent to create a north-south spine.

(b) A new local street between Roxburgh Crescent and the river.

(c) A new central public open space with a river access point.

(d) A new east-west street co-located with the river access.

(e) A new pathway linking the south end of Roxburgh Crescent to Ruahine Street.

[4] As set out in my s 42A Report and reply evidence I consider the structure plan provides for and directs the following outcomes:

(a) Good internal and external connectivity.

(b) Improved public access to the river corridor.

(c) A framework that is receptive to compact houses on small lots.

(d) Recognition of the exceptional amenity of the river corridor.

C. ISSUES IN SUBMISSIONS AND EVIDENCE

[5] Key issues raised through submissions and evidence are set out below:

Energy use

[6] One submitter has raised the issue of energy efficiency. I am of the view that PCE adequately addresses the need for site planning and subdivision layout to support efficient energy use. The proposed Structure Plan delivers a joined-up movement network with built-in resilience and good permeability for active modes. Together with proposed District Plan provisions, the Structure Plan facilitates subdivision into compact east-west oriented lots with good front and rear sun.

Density & Lot size

[7] In response to concern that insufficient density is enabled, I note that PCE allows as many as one-third more dwellings compared with standard Residential Zone provisions. In clarification, I regard this as a theoretical upper limit. When existing property boundaries are taken into account, I believe 110 lots is a realistic yield from the RRA. This compares with 105 new homes anticipated in the PNCC's Future Development Strategy. Increased density is justified by exceptional open space and the benefits of comprehensive design.

[8] In response to submissions that the proposed minimum lot size is too small, I argue that 250m2 is a realistic minimum site area that delivers an acceptable degree of amenity and accommodates a range of dwelling types. By enabling compact lots, PCE reflects a shift towards smaller households and a need for more diverse housing stock.

[9] In response to requests for a greater maximum lot size, I do not support an increase to 600m2. Existing residential scale lots readily subdivide into parcels measuring less than the proposed maximum i.e., 500m2. In geometrically complex parts of the RRA – where subdivision design is more challenging – large parcels allow lot size to be managed over a wide area. In this case, over-size lots can be avoided by distributing the land area equitably among a larger number of parcels.

[10] In response to the evidence filed for Frances Holding Limited which suggests that increased maximum lot size would facilitate a wider variety of house types; I am of the view that the proposed 500m2 maximum presents no impediment to the construction of duplex housing or generously scaled detached dwellings.

[11] More generally, in response Mr Thomas's observation that examples in my primary evidence fail to account for permeable surfaces, I note that my indicative designs for 250m2 lots restricted building footprint to 45% of the site. I note that required areas for permeable surfaces are achievable within the remaining portion of the lot.

Building height

[12] In response to a request for an 11m maximum building height to apply throughout the RRA, I note that the proposed 9m height limit recognises that the RRA has an extensive interface with existing residential areas, which are principally composed of one-storey dwellings. Further, extending the 11m height limit beyond the Riverfront area is unlikely to increase yield because other planning provisions – such as site coverage and height-to-boundary controls - are often the critical determinants of development intensity.

[13] In response to concerns about increased building height in the Riverfront area, I consider that the proposed 11m height limit encourages developers to build up rather than out. The height limit enables an efficient 'townhouse' format that engages positively with the river corridor. I note that three-storey dwellings will create a more definite built edge along the river. However, in my view this outcome is compatible with a heavily modified urban landscape and with the city's increasing orientation towards the Manawatū River.

Tilbury Avenue

[14] In response to concerns about the impact of RRA development on Tilbury Avenue, I note that the gradual removal of industrial activities will substantially improve the wider context of existing residential properties. However, I acknowledge that modifications to Waterloo Reserve may justify additional development control along much of the RRA's southern boundary. With this in mind, I have suggested that separation distance could be increased from 1.5m to 5m along the RRA's shared boundary with Tilbury Avenue properties. This change would provide additional protection from overlooking and allow space for medium-size planting at the boundary.

Prescriptiveness of Structure Plan

[15] The planning evidence of Mr Thomas and evidence jointly authored by urban designers Katherine Blagrove and Jamie Devereux, raise concerns over the prescriptiveness of the Structure Plan.

[16] I consider the level of detail to be appropriate for the size of the RRA and the complexity of local context. Relevant contextual features include limited connectivity with surrounding neighbourhoods, sensitive interfaces with nearby housing and the exceptional amenity of the river corridor.

[17] In response to requests for greater flexibility, I have suggested that the Structure Plan could be amended (subject to other technical opinion) in two ways:

(a) Although it is preferable to retain Local Street B as proposed, the northern arm of this street could be replaced by a lane.

(b) The central open space reserve could be placed north or south of Local Road D with the final location determined as part of a detailed subdivision layout.

[18] In response to Mr Thomas's suggestions that PCE embodies 'an optimal structure plan' or 'an optimal urban design scheme', I contend that the proposed Structure Plan is a pragmatic 'bare bones' framework for development and is 'optimal' only in the sense that it reconciles good urban design with multiple constraints and competing public and private interesting.

19 May 2025

Name