

SUBMISSION: OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED BUILDING HEIGHT INCREASES IN WANAKA

Our first submission:

Oppose: Medium Density Residential Zone (MDRZ) Chapter 8 - Medium Density Residential: Increase in building heights from 7m to 12m

Oppose: Chapter 13 - Wānaka Town Centre (WTC): Increase in building height from 12m to 16.5m

Our further Submission:

Oppose: Medium Density Residential Zone (MDRZ) Chapter 8 - Medium Density Residential: Increase in building heights from 7m to 12m one MDRZ immediately adjacent to WTC

Support: Chapter 13 - Wānaka Town Centre: Increase in building height from 12m to 16.5m

Oppose: Increase in building height from 12m to 20m (UIV section 42a-report-town centres and business zones-Corinne-Frischknecht)

What's the problem?

What we have now is a dangerous scenario of putting the cart before the horse. We don't have any idea where this is taking us and that's scary.

The proposed changes represent a significant change in the character of Wanaka Town Centre and surrounding residential area. Given that adequate capacity exists it is not clear that such a radical change is necessary let alone desirable.

What is the solution?

Put the horse before the cart

1. Complete a Wānaka Master Plan WMP (the horse) to show its growth and development over the next few decades and have this fully ratified by stakeholders.
2. Then... draft and deploy any variations required to satisfy the NPS-D (the cart) such that they fit the overarching WMP.

Putting forward the cart first carries a real risk that we could get it wrong and in doing so irreversibly alter the character of Wānaka for the worse. The character of Wānaka is very important as it is strongly linked to the perceived value of the town for residents and tourists. It therefore behooves us to consider any variations which might alter that value deeply and responsibly. Only then, with context taking precedence over content, can the variations be considered sensibly.

A Master Plan for Wānaka Town Centre was initiated in 2020 with a focus on how the town centre was envisioned to function in the future. It has remained in draft form. “Following strong feedback from the community back in August 2019, the Wānaka Community Board agreed that more detailed investigation was required before the Wānaka Town Centre Masterplan could be endorsed.”

Prior to drafting the WMP the council undertook a significant round of consultation on the future of Wanaka which was compiled in the **Wanaka 2020** community publication.

“It was also recognised that the Wanaka Community had shown enthusiasm for the development of a plan for Wanaka, and had the high level of community interest and commitment to work it through. It was therefore agreed that a Wanaka Community Plan would be a first step and the basis for a comprehensive District-wide plan”.

“The objective of the workshop is to develop a growth management strategy for Wanaka, which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and provides:”

A vital town centre, servicing the daily needs of Wanaka.

- Protection of key landscapes and views.
- Accessibility and ease of movement throughout the town area, by car
- and on foot.
- Access to natural recreational amenities, through walkways, cycle ways, public open space surrounding the town, and access to the lake and rivers.
- A clear statement of the desired character of the town, and of the surrounding rural area, and a clear definition of the transition from town to rural areas.

Rural Landscape

- Increased density of the town was favoured rather than sprawl into rural areas.
- Some extension of existing town boundaries was seen as acceptable
- New developments should be more dense to slow spread through growth
- Respect natural boundaries eg ridges
- Retain a rural working landscape round town – “real farms” are part of the Wanaka character. (This included the idea that planning should support the viability of farming activities).

Infill/Intensification

- Should be generally encouraged
- There should be incentives for sensitive infill in older areas – through amalgamation of lots, concessions on lot size etc.
- Newer areas were seen as less suited for infill because of house

- location on lots
- Encourage future intensification by encouraging mixed lot size in new subdivisions.
- A new urban extension zone encouraging mixed size development was favoured.

Town Centre Character

- Encourage coherence, eg. through character guidelines– but diversity was also valued as part of the Wanaka character
- Upgrade Bullock Creek surrounds – to create a beautified link through town
- No international fast food franchises
- Height to 3 stories was seen as acceptable, but not all at a standard height. Variety in roof lines was preferred.
- Height limit by floors rather than metres was preferred, to encourage roof variety.

Town Character

Wānaka does have character. While it does not have heritage character like that exemplified by Arrowtown it does, nonetheless, have a unique character.

This is exemplified by its human-scale, low-key village-like town centre and its predominantly low-rise residential community. This character is accepted and endorsed in the QLDC Wanaka Town Centre Character Guidelines 2011 “Existing Town Centre Character, whereby WTC is defined by the strong visual connection to its landscape setting with wide open, sunny streets, and low built form of one, two, and occasionally three levels nestled into a moraine basin and alpine backdrop”

Two key zones capture this character, WTC and that of the MDRZ immediately adjacent to it, with its uncluttered single and double level homes, abundant vegetation, open spaces and vistas to the lake and surrounding mountains. This is the character of an *alpine resort town*. The linkage of WTC and this adjoining MDRZ is recognised in the draft Wanaka Town Centre Masterplan 2020



My concern is that at the proposed new heights, the WTC and residential area surrounding it, will begin to dominate the lakefront and irreparably change the experience of Lake Wanaka.

Next Steps

Given the immediacy of the tabling of submissions and given that the drafting of a comprehensive WMP will take significant time, we suggest an interim compromise.

1. Preserve the integrity of the character of Wānaka (assumed to be as described above while awaiting formal investigation and ratification in the proposed WMP) by limiting the proposed variations for two areas, namely WTC and its adjoining MTRZ. By any standard these two areas are key to any definition of town character.

WTC Heights:

Agree to a more measured increase in heights to in WTC to a maximum of 16.5m as put forward in the current UIV. Do not increase the permitted height of 20m as proposed by Corrine Frischknecht in her 42a report. Ensure tight urban planning in order to prevent compromising the underlying character of the town.

Given the nature of the Wanaka Town Centre it is not yet clear what outcomes are likely from the significant change from 16.5m to 20m. Whether it would enable coordinated development that will achieve good urban design outcomes or whether the existing land sizes and ownership arrangements are going to make this challenging. The 'after the fact' analysis of this through the section 42A report is not sufficient to support such a significant change.

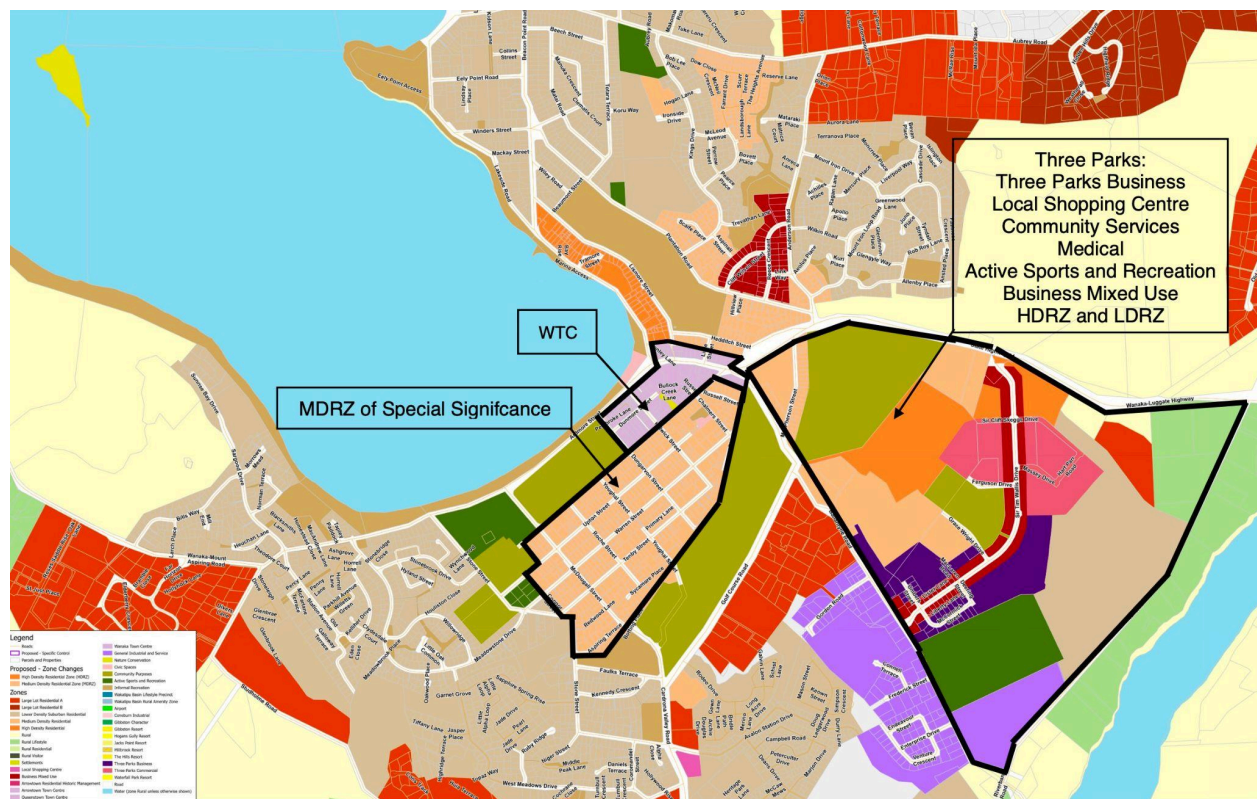
Can the geological conditions underlying the area support that level of development? can the setbacks be achieved with the predominance of small landholdings in the area?

The MDRZ immediately adjacent to WTC:

Agree to limit the increase in heights within this particular MDRZ of defining character (linked to town center) to 8m (with one extra metre for roof line) with reduced boundary setbacks and increased recession planes proposed in the UIV. This compromise would permit some intensification of this area and improve the building envelope sufficiently to accommodate better architecture guided by tight urban design mandates.

2. Identify and debate robust alternative options for Wānaka (most obviously Three Parks TP that satisfy the NPS-UD while preserving and enhancing the character of the town.

3. Following all of the above, redraft the UIV and put that to the test



With a nuanced bespoke approach, Wānaka has the opportunity, right now, to preserve its character while meeting the demands of urban growth and the mandates imposed by the NPS-UD and UIV. Without revision the current UIV impacts heavily on that opportunity. Once done, it can not be undone.

Best Practice Examples

Ponsonby, Herne Bay, St Mary's Bay, Auckland: Successful character protection through heritage overlays and height restrictions has, thus far, preserved the suburb's distinctive low-rise character while allowing sympathetic intensification. Unfortunately, this may not be sufficient as, like Wānaka, this highly valued character has come under threat of further intensification as a result of the NPS-UD.

Park City, Utah has implemented stringent architectural guidelines that prioritize aesthetic values as economic assets. As a community dependent upon the tourism industry, the atmosphere and aesthetic features of the community take on an economic value for the residents and Property Owners of Park City. Their building regulations specifically eliminate architectural styles "foreign to this Area" to maintain community character.

Telluride, Colorado demonstrates sophisticated height management through its Design Guidelines. Despite accommodating tourism growth, Telluride maintains strict controls on building mass and height to preserve its mountain town character. The town's design framework balances density with scenic preservation through careful zoning distinctions between commercial and residential areas.

Telluride's Approach

Telluride uses a zone district system with strict dimensional limitations tailored to each area. The Residential Zone District focuses on areas "within the original Telluride townsite which were historically divided into lots of approximately twenty-five feet by one hundred feet" to ensure historic district compliance.

The town's Land Use Code establishes different standards for each zone district, with dimensional limitations, parking and affordable housing requirements that vary based upon each district Planning & Building. This allows for nuanced control that respects the historic fabric while accommodating necessary growth.

Park City's Height Restrictions

Park City employs a more detailed height control system across its historic districts. In the Historic Residential-Low Density (HRL) District, the Zone Height is twenty-seven feet (27') with the Planning Commission having authority to require reductions in Building Height for all, or portions, of a proposed Structure to minimize its visual mass.

For commercial historic areas, no Structure shall be erected to a height greater than thirty-two feet (32') from Existing Grade, though gable, hip, and similar pitched roofs may extend up to five feet (5') above the Zone Height.

Zone-Specific Controls: Rather than blanket restrictions, both towns create different zones with tailored height and density limits that reflect the historic character of each area.

Design Review Requirements: Both require design review processes to ensure new development complements existing historic structures and maintains neighborhood character.

Infill Focus: Telluride specifically emphasizes infill development and renovation of existing structures rather than wholesale redevelopment.

Visual Impact Considerations: Park City gives planning commissioners discretion to reduce building heights to minimize visual mass and impact on the historic streetscape.

Flexible Height Standards: Both towns allow some flexibility (like Park City's pitched roof exceptions) to accommodate traditional architectural styles while maintaining overall height limits.

These strategies allow both resort towns to accommodate growth and development pressures while preserving the intimate scale and historic character that defines their identities as authentic mountain communities.

Aspen, Colorado has successfully implemented view corridor protection through height restrictions and setback requirements, ensuring that development enhances rather than detracts from the natural mountain amphitheater setting.

These international examples demonstrate that economic prosperity and tourism success are enhanced, not diminished, by thoughtful height restrictions and infill density that preserve the very qualities that make mountain resort destinations attractive. Doing the opposite and agreeing carte blanche to the UIV may well have the opposite effect in Wānaka.

Examples of lost opportunity

Queenstown's Transformation: The aggressive pursuit of density in central Queenstown has resulted in a fundamental change in urban character, with residents citing loss of community feel and affordable housing displacement. Wānaka, by contrast, is at an earlier, more pivotal, stage of evolution. Its ship has not yet sailed.

Melbourne's Inner Suburbs: Aggressive infill has created planning conflicts and community division

Sydney's Inner West: Intensive development has priced out local residents and altered neighborhood character

Vancouver's West End: While successful in creating density, the transition from low-rise to high-rise fundamentally altered neighborhood character, displacing long-term residents and changing community dynamics.

European Alpine Towns: Many Swiss and Austrian resort towns that failed to implement proactive height controls in the 1970s-80s now struggle with oversized developments that detract from their tourism appeal.

Lisbon Portugal: Intensification has sharply tipped the balance in favour of high short term rentals (Airbnb) with a corresponding steep increase in property prices to the point of forcing out

local residents. Admittedly, while much of the increase in house prices in high tourism destinations such as Lisbon may be attributed to the tourism per se rather than the intensification but careful planning to prioritize the intensification into less visually impactful areas rather than highly valued zones it is possible to fully mitigate this risk.

Getting it wrong has consequences. It often results in disruption of established neighbourhood character, inadequate infrastructure to support intensification and disenfranchised angry residents.

A square peg in a round hole-a bad fit with a lot of collateral damage

The scale of development envisioned for WTC and its adjoining MDRZ has not been matched by appropriate investment in local infrastructure. Roads, stormwater systems, wastewater treatment, parking availability, and public transport are all under existing pressure. Existing congestion issues are already a significant issue. This is due in large part to the current layout of Wanaka. Can it really sustain the level of increased traffic that will be facilitated by the changes? Again - pointing to the need for careful consideration of where TP and WTC sit relative to each other.

Increasing the rentable space of WTC and significantly adding infill dwellings per hectare to the MTRZ adjacent to it without guaranteed infrastructure upgrades will necessitate expensive retrofitting of that infrastructure, exacerbate congestion, reduce safety, and degrade service levels for all residents. The retrospective nature of the intensification in these sites will undoubtedly be much more disruptive and expensive than placement in purpose-built greenfield locations.

Implementing such changes will inexorably and irrevocably alter the character of the town. An increase in building heights in the town centre to 20m runs counter to typical resort town character and a change in use and typology of housing in the adjoining MDRZ from predominantly individual one and two story dwellings to multi storied and multi owned three level terrace housing and apartment blocks will compound this further. Unfortunately, many of these properties will be investment (Airbnb) rather than residential homes and many owned by absentee landlords resulting in escalating short term rental prices and steeply rising property values.

Paradoxically it also has the potential for the building of super penthouses that will maximise views and dominate the existing residential character. Furthermore, all of this development would be piecemeal and stand in stark contrast to non developed established homes.

This disparate, unattractive and unaffordable townscape will then assume dominance in defining a new, unintended and undesirable character of the town. This clearly runs counter to the laudable intent of the NPS-UD to provide equity and access as well as affordability to first home buyers and the downsizing elderly.

From the viewpoint of existing residents in the aforementioned MDRZ adjacent to WTC (of which I am one) this is not a happy place. Existing homes in this zone stand to be highly

compromised in terms of their amenity, views and sunlight. Such a process is likely to pit neighbour against neighbour as there would be clear winners and losers. Some would see a significant drop in the value of their properties while others would stand to benefit significantly from development.

Many may be forced into a situation of on-selling or demolishing/redeveloping their properties. For many or most this will not be an option. It will result in great uncertainty and stress. I find myself in this situation.

See below renders of the effect the UIV would have on my home if fully implemented.

Note:

Some degree of intensification in this MDRZ is acceptable and even desirable. This is achievable in an acceptable manner by tightening up the setbacks, recession planes along with a modest increase in building height would allow for this in a controlled incremental manner in line with the enduring character of the town.

Clearly what we are proposing appears to run counter to Objective 4 and Policy 6 of the NPSUD. Both focus on “ensuring urban environments are well-functioning and adaptable to the changing needs of communities”. Objective 4 emphasizes the need for urban environments to develop and change over time to meet the diverse and changing needs of people, communities, and future generations, including consideration of amenity values. Policy 6, in turn, directs decision-makers to consider the planned urban built form anticipated by RMA planning documents, including the potential for significant changes to an area that might impact amenity values but also provide increased and varied housing densities and types.

We concur that these strategies and inferred outcomes are laudable. Indeed, we are not in favour of slowing down or halting development simply to preserve the status quo (NIMBY). Rather, we propose that, with a more nuanced approach of repositioning the intensification to more favourable sites, development may be better facilitated in a more sustainable and attractive manner that will enhance the value of Wanaka rather than detract from it.

A round hole - Three Parks: The Logical Intensification Solution

A more logical and desirable approach would be to focus intensification on greenfield sites where it can be prospectively planned and staged in a manner that is less disruptive, less divisive and more cost effective than attempting to retrofit it into existing neighbourhoods and town centres.

Three Parks TP, is an obvious choice. Its discounting by Corinne Frischknecht in her 42a report is, in our opinion, short sighted. Because we live in Wānaka we see how TP is assuming ascendancy and is becoming, by default, the centre of town. This is because the existing WTC has such a limited footprint from which to grow. Indeed the very development of TP was a response to this deficiency. It is already planned for higher-density development, with zoning, infrastructure, and design provisions to support it. Given the expansion at Three Parks, careful

consideration needs to be given to the place that each commercial centre has within the economic eco system of Wanaka and what urban design outcome is a best fit for that.

Starting with a blank slate in TP would allow for a comprehensive solution to the demands of the NPS-UD without the downstream risk of degrading the character of the town. Issues associated with traffic, access and parking make TPs more attractive as the commercial service centre of Wanaka. Such a strategy would be far more defensible than the proposed intensification of the established WTC and the MDRZ next to it.

TP has existing and planned Infrastructure adequate to satisfy the NPS-UD:

TP has a supermarket, sports and recreation facilities, retail (big box and boutique), commercial and industrial facilities, medical/dental facilities and other professional services, provision for aged care and a private hospital **and** it already has ample parking and plenty of land zoned for high and medium residential housing. All of the infrastructure requirements for further intensification of this area can be planned and installed prospectively. Most importantly there are no existing residents here yet to disrupt and so implementing intensification prospectively rather than retrospectively will not be disruptive or divisive. This in turn allows for both residential development and visitor accommodation to house shorter term visitors and temporary workers, while still being within close proximity to TP commercial amenity and to WTC. Community support for such a strategy is therefore likely to be broad-based and sustainable. While Wanaka's tourism market is still seasonal it is inexorably becoming more year-round. WTC has capacity to absorb increasing tourist numbers and cater to their needs while TP is well suited to provide for the growing needs of its resident and visitor communities as a whole..

The good news is that, if growth and intensification are necessary, and we acknowledge they are, Wānaka is in a fortunate position in its growth trajectory by having more than one option available for intensification. However, not enough rigor has been given to exploring other options aside from intensification of the “Centre of Town”

CONCLUSION

Wānaka stands at a crucial juncture. The proposed height increases represent an irreversible step away from the town's defining character as a low-rise, boutique mountain resort. International examples demonstrate that thoughtful height restrictions enhance rather than diminish resort town appeal and economic success.

We urge Council to:

Develop a complete WMP, articulate this with the stakeholders with clear development scenarios accompanied with realistic renders. In the interim, and given the immediacy of the NPS-UD do the following:

1. Limit building heights in WTC to 16.5m with appropriate setbacks and recession planes

2. Limit building heights in the MDRZ adjacent to WTC to 8m (plus 1m for roofline) with reduced boundary setbacks and increased recession planes to allow for improved ability to densify existing sites without such drastic impacts on neighboring properties.
3. Engage with and set up a recognised Urban Design Panel, consisting of widely acclaimed Urban Designers, Architects, and Landscape Architects to ensure that a design overlay is applied to future development that promotes considered, sustainable design that is innovative and appropriate for this location.

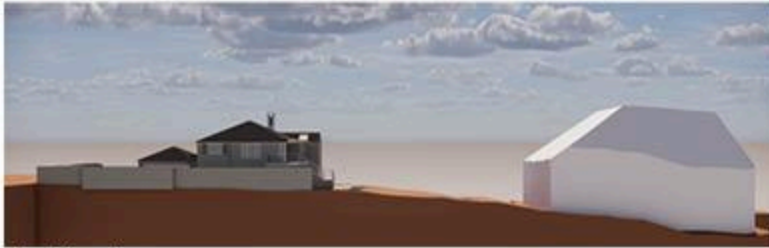
The time for preserving Wānaka's character is now – once lost, it cannot be recovered.

We owe this to future generations. Wānaka should, and could be, an exemplary alpine resort town of international repute.

While this is a lay submission and by definition I am a lay person, I am also an expert. I live in Wānaka and my feet are in its soul. In my heart I feel that destroying the existing character of the town would be a big mistake and I suspect if put to the test, most residents and visitors would agree with this view. I doubt there would be a single person who would prefer to see this altered into a highrise, high density urban behemoth.

This submission represents the views of residents committed to ensuring Wānaka becomes an outstanding town of international repute through thoughtful, community-endorsed development that honors its unique mountain resort heritage.

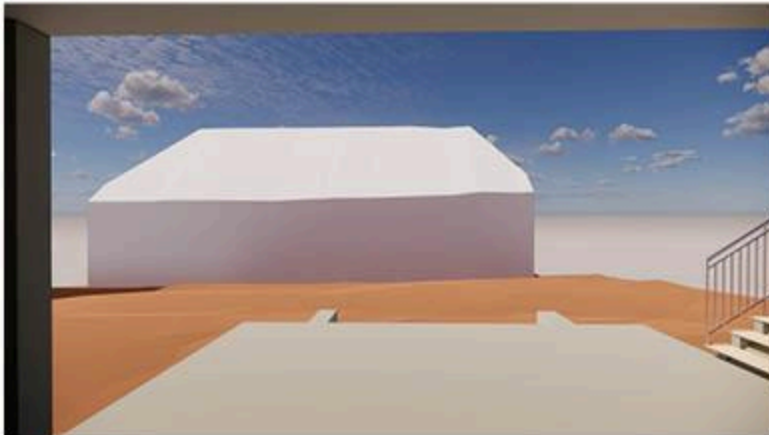
IMPACT ASSESSMENT AT 53 WARREN ST, WANAKA



Site Elevation



First Floor Outlook



Ground Floor Outlook

1. PROPOSED UV MDRZ

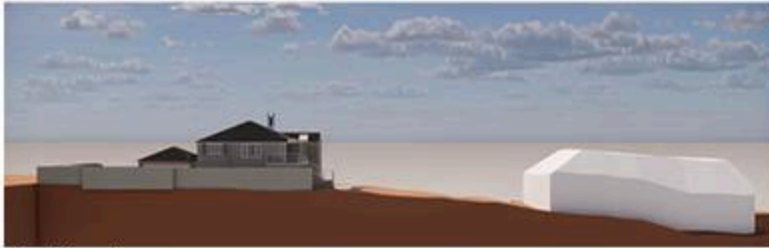
Setbacks: Road 3m, all others 1.5m

HIRB: South 4m + 35 degrees, all others 4m + 60 degrees

Max Height: 11m + 1m for pitched forms (allowed 12m)

Building Coverage: 45%

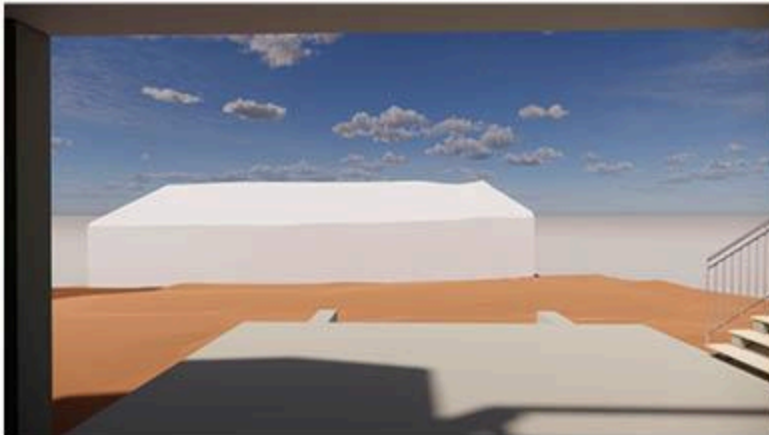
IMPACT ASSESSMENT AT 53 WARREN ST, WANAKA



Site Elevation



First Floor Outlook



Ground Floor Outlook

2. CURRENT PDP MDRZ

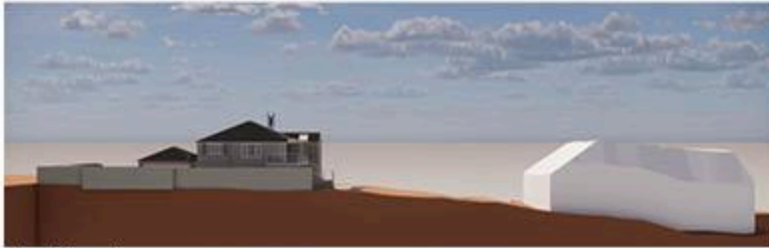
Setbacks: Road 3m, all others 1.5m

HIRB: North 2.5m + 55 degrees, West/East 2.5m + 45 degrees, South 2.5m + 35 degrees

Max Height: 7m

Building Coverage: 45%

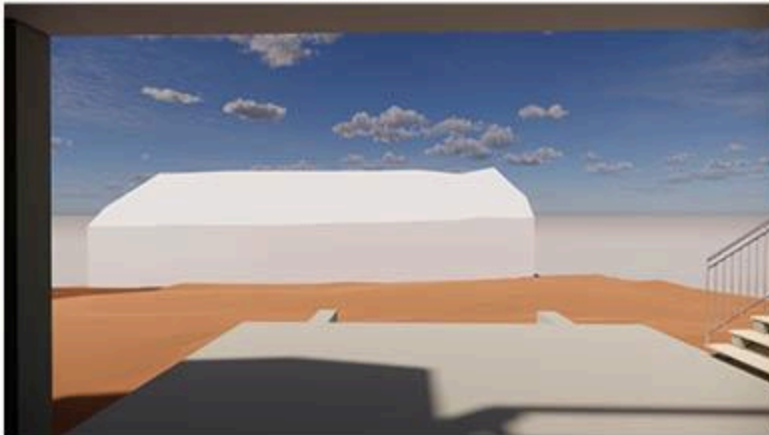
IMPACT ASSESSMENT AT 53 WARREN ST, WANAKA



Site Elevation



First Floor Outlook



Ground Floor Outlook

3. CURRENT WITH URBAN INTENSIFICATION PROPOSAL

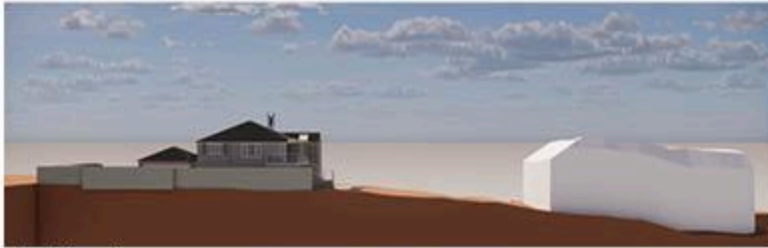
Setbacks: Road 3m, all others 1.5m

HIRB: South 2.5m + 35 degrees, All others 2.5m + 60 degrees

Max Height: 8m

Building Coverage: 45%

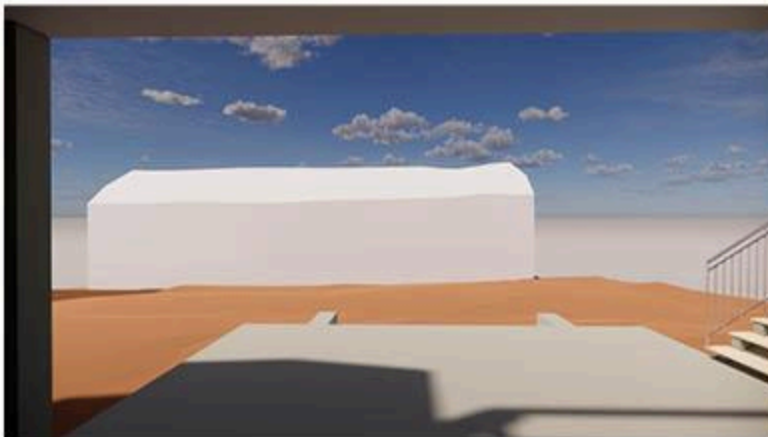
IMPACT ASSESSMENT AT 53 WARREN ST, WANAKA



Site Elevation



First Floor Outlook



Ground Floor Outlook

4. A HYBRID PROPOSAL

Setbacks: Road 3m, all others 1.5m

HIRB: South 4m + 35 degrees, All others 4m + 60 degrees

Max Height: 8m + 1m for pitched forms (allowed 9m)

Building Coverage: 45%