



# Peter Carter

**For Peter the quality of the physical urban environment and streetscape is critical in promoting positive communities; planning and building community by design—with purpose. This means good, thoughtful, people-focused design. Peter advocates that community representation and participation in the planning and development processes, along with ‘real’ listening by councils is the way to ensure those outcomes. His community visioning activities in Milford have championed this process to allow greater dialogue between the community and local authorities.**

Peter has lived in Milford, overlooking the Wairau Estuary, since 1983, but his connections to the area go back to the 1920s, when his maternal grandparents, Rose and Herbert (Bert) Cadness, built a house at the northern end of the beach. The couple were very influential in the community. Rose was involved in many women’s groups in the area and was head of the local Red Cross women’s group during the Second World War. She was awarded an MBE for her contribution in 1953.

Bert’s father, Herbert Cadness Snr, had been mayor of Northcote. He was a riding member for Northcote on the Waitemata Council from 1905 until proclamation of Northcote as a borough in 1908, when he was then elected as the first mayor of Northcote. He held this post from 1908 to 1912, and was a councillor from 1908 to 1921. He also became a justice of peace, and chair of the Northcote School Committee in 1913. He built the first California-style bungalow in New Zealand, at Princes Street, Northcote.

Peter’s father, Harold Carter, attained an MA degree in English from Auckland University in 1934 and, in March 1938, worked his passage to England on a tramp steamer. In London, he took jobs as an understudy/interpreter with the Old Vic theatre company, touring the main European cities, and as a tour guide for groups visiting Europe. He also cycled from England to Prague, after which he queued for four days in November 1938 to get a Nazi exit visa to return to England. He arrived back in New Zealand in June 1939. He spoke German, French and Italian, and was co-opted to work in New Zealand Intelligence during the Second World War. After the war, he was senior lecturer in English at Auckland Teachers Training College, produced plays for the College and Grafton Theatre, and he presented theatre critiques on the radio.

By 1967, Harold was disillusioned with lecturing and obtained a job as head of a reports unit with the International Labour Organization, a United Nations agency. He resided with his



*Peter Carter – Mt Eden Primary Rugby Junior, 1954*

wife, Joan, for four years in Geneva, then three years in Africa, Egypt and Malaysia. Harold and his wife, Joan, spent four years in Geneva, then three years in Africa, Egypt and Malaysia, before returning to New Zealand, to live close to the beach in Milford.

Peter's childhood was spent initially in a state house in Avondale, and then in a house backing onto Mount Eden (Maungawhau), which became an adventure playground for Peter, his brother, sister, and a multi-ethnic range of children from their street. Peter's passion for community development comes from an early age. *I have always been a people person, even at primary*

*school where my playful nature earned me the title of 'village idiot' as I made people laugh.*

Peter met his wife, Judy, at a church function when she was 16 and he was 19. They dated through their time at the University of Auckland, where she was studying for a BA and Peter for a B. Architecture. Peter then studied for a Master of Architecture degree and diplomas in Town Planning and Urban Valuation. In 1971, Peter and Judy married and rented a flat in Jervois Road, Herne Bay. After Peter had completed his master's degree, the couple stayed with Peter's parents in Geneva for a two-month holiday before moving to London for three years, where their first child, a daughter, was born in 1972. Peter practised architecture in England for nearly three years and was involved with the concept design of a new hospital in Oxford, where he explored the philosophy of hospital design when the new profession of hospital management, and the use of computer aided design (CAD), was just being introduced.

When the family returned to New Zealand, Peter, as a qualified architect, felt it almost a requirement to design and build his own home in Castor Bay, overlooking Kennedy Park and looking out towards the sea. As was the norm in those days, Peter and Judy did substantial work to finish the house themselves, such as insulating, gib lining and painting.

Peter formed an architectural partnership with Keith Leuschke and they worked on projects such as the revised roundabout/people space at the bottom of Khyber Pass Road, and the redesign of the Newmarket Borough Council building with its retail, library and office components. Peter also looked after his son, from age three-and-a-half to five years, at the office to enable Judy to attend Training College. During this time Peter attended Playcentre and learnt much about parent-child relationships. *A special time!* The success of a design for a small shopping mall then led to the firm being commissioned to design the Southern Cross Hospital in Gillies Avenue, Epsom.



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The partnership took on further projects, both commercial and residential, but ran into some capacity and contractual difficulties. It failed to earn significantly and, when it eventually faltered, Peter went out on his own and formed Carac Design Ltd. He then worked on a mix of residential, industrial and commercial buildings, including the waterfront Pier 21 office and boat stacking building, and Auckland Chamber of Commerce building in Mayoral Drive. Around this time, Peter purchased several brick-and-tile units as a long-term investment in the heart of Takapuna. These purchases made Peter think about the issues and potential of the North Shore, and particularly Takapuna.

In 1971, Peter worked for the architectural firm Walker Co-Partnership, which was involved with developing a town plan for the Takapuna commercial centre and this stimulated his interest in urban design. In 2007, Peter brought a number of local architects together to share their knowledge and experiences, and to get them talking with one another. This informal body, under the aegis of the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA), became the North Shore Practice Support Group. Peter and another architect, Stephen Matthews, chose to do an independent design and report on the Takapuna central area, which they presented to the Takapuna Community Board. The Board considered their independent report to be better and more exciting than the official plan for the area, because it connected the city centre visually with pedestrian linkages to the sea.

The Board then recommended their involvement in discussions on urban design issues at monthly meetings with North Shore City planners, and their plan ideas were finally realised using different architects, but without further input from their group. *The initial discussions allowed us both to feel as though we were being listened to*

*and making a contribution with local knowledge, but after the two- to three-year input our meetings ceased, and we felt no due appreciation or acknowledgement for our effort, commitment and involvement.*

Peter believes that Council management structures and processes, especially at chief executive level, need to embody and employ the will and the capacity to listen to the communities they serve, and utilise their extensive local knowledge rather than simply dictating outcomes managed by Council officers with no intrinsic knowledge or personal interest in those communities. *Community engagement and knowledge can influence so many of the things that make the community a better place because Council does not have the resources or the understanding. They are working from their ivory tower, in a sense, with so much money wasted in the design and implementation of projects by Council's 'preferred contractors' rather than using local contractors for smaller projects.*

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*My experience with 'urban village' planning as a generic term, is that most people in the community do not feel as though they make a difference or are being listened to. The knowledge that 'one' is being listened to, that somebody is taking on board your ideas, is so important when engaging with community, and maybe relates back to childhood when every child needs to be listened to and not just lectured to.*

Peter's first open and visible involvement with the Milford community was as part of a Milford residents' group that protested against the development of the 1981 Milford shopping centre development, which saw the 'buy up' of residential properties in Milford and Ihumata Roads and their subsequent conversion to commercial zoning. He, and the group, spent three months fighting the development, but the community lost the battle after the case was taken to the Environment Court.

Subsequently, in 2008, Peter opposed the development of several high-rise buildings in Milford, considering them out of scale and inappropriate in context with the community environment and the 'sense of village'. As part of his protest, he held a public meeting, then formed the Milford Residents Association Inc. and chaired it for almost three years, gaining significant local support with a membership of four hundred. He spent a huge amount of his own time preparing viable alternatives to the proposed building platforms, demonstrating how four-storey buildings could house as many apartments as the proposed high-rise development. Eventually, in 2009, North Shore City Council approved a low-rise model for residential intensification on this Milford site. *It was a major victory for the community.*

Peter also redesigned the Milford Village Square after becoming dissatisfied with the chaos and arbitrary placement of seats, phone booths, signs and gardens. *It took two years of presentations to the Council, including obtaining two commercial building quotations, after which the Community Board said it had no money. But suddenly, when the new Auckland Council was amalgamating all the city councils, monies were found.* A Jeff Thomson sculpture was selected, and the attractive new people-place was realised using Council-appointed contractors.

It was at this stage Peter attended a North Shore City initiative to listen better to community groups and, along with Max Thomson, became involved with North Shore Community and Social Services' Flaxroots Community Planning group. Peter then broadened his sights from this individual Milford Mall development battle to looking at the overall



urban design prospects for the area, and wanted the Council and the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board to listen more closely to the wishes of the community.

He formed the Milford Village Forum in 2011, which was an organisation distinct from the Residents' Association, of which he is still a committee member. This new organisation was set up to allow for the inclusion of the voices of all the businesses, clubs and organisations in the area, and prepare a holistic Milford vision identifying development opportunities, resulting in seed-funding from the Local Board to prepare a community-led visioning report. He found the Board to be very community minded and receptive, and this was another discovery, showing that there are more positive outcomes by engaging face to face with people and regularly discussing conceptual and philosophical ideas. *If you establish the broad picture, people can often see things that they may not have seen otherwise.*

The vision document encompassed the whole area from the Milford beach front through to Smales Farm, with the objective of keeping Milford at a 'people scale', with a focus on streetscape rather than cars, where people can enjoy convivial people spaces for 'meet and greet', and public spaces are not over-dominated by high-rise buildings. Peter drew on his understanding and experience as an architect/urban designer, knowing that the profitability of long-term commercial real estate investments depends finally upon consumer (shopper) satisfaction, which presumes a creative, vibrant, varied and sympathetic environment. His studies showed that low-rise commercial buildings can be as profitable as the attention-seeking high-rise developments, and that there remained a certain value in maintaining a differentiation between unique and distinctive urban centres, especially in relation to their environment; *i.e. bigger is not necessarily better.*

The Milford Community-Led Visioning report was submitted to the Local Board in May 2013, and formed the basis for many of the ideas incorporated into the Milford Centre Plan prepared by

Auckland Council. Council Planners were very satisfied with the community-led process and felt that the model could be usefully cloned in other areas. Currently, Peter has been contracted to facilitate the Sunnynook Community-Led Visioning Project.

Peter's contribution to his local and broader community has also been expressed through his membership on the board of the Takapuna North Community Trust. *My role while I'm on the Trust is to promote a balance between 'communities of interest' and the voluntary community leadership that promotes well-being, arranges events and projects, and engages with their communities.*

Peter likes to laugh; he gets involved with his community. He is currently learning German after having learnt Italian, and speaks a little French. He enjoys meeting people and discovering their stories, and he believes their wealth of knowledge and experience can contribute so much to a community.

*I think once you retire, there is still a need to maintain a passion for life and an interest in discovery. Life is just a series of discoveries and it is often family, friends and people, combined with caring and laughter, that provides the enrichment of the soul. I know people who are wealthy, yet I consider them to be less happy than I am, in my terms. There are many examples of people who have wonderful lives, and it's not because of their money, it's because of their passion for life. So, in the end, whether it is music, arts, culture, or some other passion, what makes life important, is about being a caring human being.*

