



Oratia And The Structure Plan

Introduction

Waitakere City enjoys a spectacular location as the western sector of New Zealand's major metropolitan area, Auckland. At its western edge are the magnificent bush clad Waitakere Ranges, and the open wild beaches of the west coast. To the south and east are the Manukau and Waitemata Harbours. The City's urban area, shaped by post-World War Two expansion, forms a network of villages, town centres and suburbs. The City's diverse landscape supports orchards, horticulture and viticulture, and high amenity industrial land. It is the sixth largest City in New Zealand with a population of approximately 174,100, growing at a rate of 2% each year since the mid-1980s. The Waitakere Ranges provide:

- an important recreational resource;
- an important landscape backdrop to the region;
- an area of important ecological values; and
- a major source of the region's water supply.

Oratia

Oratia is situated in a part of what is generally called the foothills of the Waitakere Ranges. The foothills cover those areas between the developed, urban parts of the City westward to the bush covered parts of the Ranges.

The Oratia Stream Catchment covers an area of almost 30 square kilometres of Waitakere City. The stream originates in the Waitakere Ranges, from a maximum elevation of 390 metres and flows northwards for 10km to Henderson. The Oratia and the Opanuku Streams meet downstream from Great North Road to become the tidal Henderson Creek, which is an arm of the Waitemata Harbour.

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The upper catchment of Oratia comprises the relatively steep, bush clad northern slopes of the Waitakere Ranges. This area is dissected with steep gullies. The middle reaches of the catchment consist of rolling ridges and valleys, where the soil tends to be poorly drained clay loams. The lower part of the catchment becomes gently rolling to flat alluvial terraces. The stream channel is cut well down into the surrounding landscape, with little flood plain area.

The lower reaches of the catchment fall towards a central basin focused upon West Coast Road with side valleys between Glengarry and Shaw Roads, and also between Carter and Parker Roads. Stream systems lie at the foot of all three main valleys, and the ridgeslines that carry Glengarry, Carter and Parker Roads climb towards a main ridge along which Scenic Drive runs.

Development In Oratia

Within Oratia landuse activities are diverse, ranging from bush living in the upper reaches of Carter and Parker Roads, to the expanse of remnant orchards and horticulture around West Coast Road and lower Shaw Road. There is a scattering of quarter acre sections and large lot development in between. Much of the existing residential development dates back to the days of Waitemata County and is sporadically located, frequently on the edge of the higher bush margins.

The Development Of The Oratia Structure Plan

The Oratia Valley is subject to development pressure or change because it is located on the edge of the urban areas of the city. A number of orchardists in the area consider that the land and market conditions do not support economic orchard operations on their land.

The Oratia Structure Plan (OSP) has been developed over a period of several years, from 1993 to 1997. It seeks to manage the effects of subdivision and development in the Oratia area of the "Foothills Environment" (one of the zones identified in the Waitakere City Council Operative District Plan) and ensures that development is sustainable from an ecological, stormwater, landscape character, geotechnical and community viewpoint. The OSP forms part of the Council's Operative District Plan.

During the preparation of the OSP, the Council consulted with land owners, interest groups, statutory bodies and the Oratia community. Local residents attended meetings, took part in surveys and liaison groups, and completed questionnaires about the attributes and qualities of the area that they value.

They also identified the level of services and amenity that they believe is appropriate to retain the character of Oratia. Residents identified the following valued features:

- the native bush;
- the open space, rural character and landscape;
- heritage areas; and
- the productive land uses, including the orchard activities.

The Environment Court has now determined that a structure plan is appropriate for the development of this environmentally sensitive catchment. Most appeals are now resolved.

What The Oratia Structure Plan Does

The OSP must meet the Council's obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), and should be consistent with the Operative Auckland Regional Policy Statement. Consequently the OSP is required to:

- retain rural character;
- protect native vegetation;
- protect streams and water quality;
- protect heritage;
- protect amenity values and the environment;
- avoid natural hazards such as flooding and unstable land; and
- maintain urban development within existing boundaries.

The OSP provides indicative subdivision concept that is based on the natural features and physical characteristics of individual sites, rather than a standard minimum lot size. Lot sizes are related to the specific environmental and physical constraints that exist within each site and within the wider catchment. Activities that may occur on each site are determined in relation to the landscape qualities and the landform of the surrounding properties.

The indicative lot boundaries in the OSP are designed to:

- protect the visual amenity of each lot;
- protect the visual amenity and rural character of the area;
- retain existing bush areas;

- enhance and restore vegetation; and
- consider drainage patterns and utilise existing roading networks (including utilising existing farm tracks and accessways).

The OSP also identifies areas which require protection or enhancement by revegetation, fencing or the use of covenants and encumbrances on the titles.

The OSP will thereby facilitate the protection and enhancement of sensitive and significant natural features that are characteristic of the local landscape. These include native bush, stream and gully systems, landscapes and heritage features, and steep and eroding areas. It will also enable people to use and develop their land in harmony with these features, and ensure adverse cumulative effects arising from sporadic subdivision and development are avoided.

Subdivision and resource consents will be required to give effect to the indicative settlement pattern identified on the OSP Map. The OSP does not, in itself, confer development rights on landowners.

Developments within the OSP are consented to by the Council using an effects-based approach which considers, amongst other things, the following::

- the protection of natural resources;
- the most appropriate design for the subdivision, and the location of development on a site specific basis;
- the vegetation enhancement and restoration that will be required in conjunction with the development;
- the reduction of any loss of visual or rural amenity;
- the effect of stormwater that is generated by the development in the OSP Area; and
- the potential cumulative effects resulting from the increase in intensification of the OSP Area on downstream communities.

This information is only a guide to Oratia and the Structure Plan. The current Rules are found in Volumes One and Two of the Rules Section of the Operative District Plan. A more detailed guideline brochure on subdividing in the Oratia Structure Plan Area is available from the Council. If you have any queries, or require further information please ask the Civic Centre Counter Staff or telephone the Council Call Centre on (09) 839 0400.