

Christchurch, which I will refer to 'à la Kiwi' as CHCH, was struck by a large earthquake Sept 4th, 2010. This had been the first major earthquake the Canterbury region had experienced in many years, to the point that most people were unaware the area even sat atop a fault line. Feb 22, 2011 another earthquake, with a magnitude of 6.3, struck this time killing 185 people and leaving the majority of the city's CBD/residential areas destroyed.

Despite the obvious devastation these events caused the city, it also provided the nearly unprecedented opportunity to renew, rethink and revitalise central CHCH. With such sudden, unexpected and widespread devastation the concerned government authorities acted fast to devise a comprehensive, non-sequential strategy that would address the city's idealized future form. In a 100-day effort 'Blueprint Plan', a high-level central city master plan was created. The primary physical aspects of the plan are the 'frame', anchor projects, designated 'precincts', mid rise height restrictions and Avon River Garden City connection. I had the pleasure of learning about the plan directly from the Christchurch Central Development Unit's General Manager of Planning and Design – Don Miskell.

The core city is bounded by the Avon River and to the north, east and south by what the Blueprint refers to as the 'Frame'. The frame is a continuous right-angle of land (Figure 1) purchased by the city intended for green space, with the aim of 'framing' a distinct, compact core while providing a green relief network and vibrant city centre entry points. With over 70% of the buildings in the Central business now gone, there is opportunity to congregate and strategically locate like uses into 'precincts' - arts, innovation, retail and health precincts, to name a few, have been determined. Many of these precincts are to be lead with anchor projects such as a new stadium, convention centre and art gallery. In an effort to get people of all ages contributing to the discussion, CHCH launched a contest to the city's elementary school students to design their ultimate play-space by making models. Hundreds of models were submitted and one lucky winner will see their play-space be realised. (Figure 2))

Though all these plans have been made, it will take time for the very barren core to see these aspirations come to fruition. In the mean time, the resilient and resourceful people of Christchurch have made 'gap fillers' all over the formerly empty cityscape, on lands temporarily loaned to such projects by the city. Gap Filler projects range from community gardens, to a large palette pavilion affording Wi-Fi, seating, mini golf, a performance space, gardens AND food stalls.

While all of the planning and physical aspects of the rebuild were fascinating, undoubtedly the most impressive aspect of the recovery efforts is the obvious will, strength and resilience of the CHCH people. 'Made in Christchurch' signs are proudly scattered through many store window fronts and teamwork can be spotted everywhere from neighbourhoods to government agencies. For more detailed information about the plan and the city's transition visit: cera.govt.nz, futurechristchurch.co.nz or gapfiller.org.nz. If you have any further questions regarding topics covered here or my findings, please feel free to contact 11sjh12@queensu.ca.

