

Russell Street Heritage Precinct



View south from corner of Mount Pleasant Avenue (2015, Ann McEwan)

RS.1 Introduction

Russell Street has notable character by virtue of its historic residential development in response to the natural topography of the hillside overlooking the Port of Nelson. The defining houses in the precinct date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and are in the vernacular cottage and villa styles. Construction of dwellings at the lower, northern end, of the street generally, but not exclusively, preceded the development of the elevated, southern end. The heritage precinct has a historic relationship with the Port of Nelson and represents private residential development close to the port around the turn of the 20th century.

RS.2 History

Russell Street was mapped between Haven and Washington Roads in the original 1842 survey of Nelson. Five of the lots fronting the roadway were originally set aside as native reserves and two as New Zealand Company reserves. GW Schroder was the original grantee of 21 acres on the eastern side of Russell Street, encompassing what are now the dwellings at numbers 21 through 53 inclusive. Schroder later conveyed the parcel to John Poynter, Resident Magistrate, who was offering lots for sale on both sides of Russell Street in December 1859.

The northern end of the western side of Russell Street generally experienced closer subdivision and earlier development than the rest of the street. By 1862 there were almost two dozen residences in the street, in addition to a Native Hostelry and the

Steamboat Tavern at the bottom of the hill on Haven Road. Many of the street's 19th century residents were connected to the port, which is to be expected given that Haven Road once ran along the harbour foreshore. The Kidson family (8 Russell Street), for example, are known for their association with the Boulder Bank lighthouse.

FOR SALE, ALLOTMENTS in Russell Street, and Stanley Crescent, suitable for BUILDING SITES. Also, a portion of ACRE No. 59, at Auckland Point. 5403 Apply to G. W. SCHRODER.

Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle 3 November 1860, p. 2. PapersPast.

In December 1866 port engineer William Akersten drew attention to the state of Russell Street and emphasised in his presentation to the Nelson Board of Works 'the importance of improving the appearance of a street which was first seen by visitors who landed from the steamers, and who were likely to be disgusted at its present rough state. The Board resolved that the work should be done if the inhabitants would pay one-half of the actual cost' (*Nelson Evening Mail* 24 December 1866, p. 3).

Although the street dates to the early 1840s, the houses within the heritage precinct were generally built in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. A cluster on the east side of the street at its southern end date from the inter-war period and there are a few mid-century and more recent dwellings around the mid-section. According to the history of the street, No. 8 and No. 11 are the oldest extant houses, both dating from the 1870s. For the most part, however, the existing building stock represents a second-generation wave of construction, largely superseding the mid-19th century cottages that were initially erected in Russell Street.

In 1982 Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (formerly NZ Historic Places Trust) listed Numbers 6, 14, 16, 18, 20, 27, and 41 Russell Street as Category 2 historic places. The latter was the home of well-known Nelson artist Jane Evans (1946-2012). Nelson City Council features the Russell Street Walk on its web site and the 1991 publication titled *Historic Russell Street, Port Nelson* was produced to mark Nelson's 150th anniversary and support recognition of the street's historic character.



'Russell Street view', undated (43866, Nelson Provincial Museum)

RS.3 Visual Characteristics

RS.3.1 Height and Roof Form

Houses are generally single storey which creates the appearance of modestly scaled built form in relation to the street and wider setting. The topography of the street, rather than the height of the houses themselves, gives rise to the varied roofline of the dwellings in the precinct.

RS.3.2 Setback from the Street

Although houses vary in setback to the street they are generally open to it. This openness helps to create a sense of connection between the houses and between the dwellings and the street. A number of houses are built close to or on the street boundary, while others are elevated above it. Some of the houses are very close together on their side boundaries. Any new buildings should take their cue from neighbouring buildings.

RS.3.3 Materials and Detailing

Timber weatherboards and corrugated iron roofing are authentic to the houses within the precinct, although timber shingles may be historically correct in some instances. Timber detailing, in the form of decorative gable ends, eaves brackets, veranda posts and friezes, typically enlivens the surface of the principal elevation of the historic houses. The use of authentic materials is highly desirable whilst the retention or restitution of decorative detailing is preferred to the replication of features that may not be authentic.



The colour scheme of this bay villa highlights its architectural features (Mike Scott, 2019)

RS.3.4 Windows and Doors

Depending on the age of the dwelling, double-hung sash or casement and fanlight type windows are authentic to the houses in the precinct. Timber-framed windows and doors are authentic and maintain the integrity of the streetscape. Inappropriate replacement of windows and doors can detract from the integrity of an individual house and compromise the overall appearance of the historic streetscape. The fenestration of new houses should be designed in sympathy with the typical size, scale and materials of existing housing.

RS.3.5 Verandas and porches

The houses in the precinct typically have verandas or porches facing onto the street, although some have been enclosed. These are an important feature of the vernacular cottage and villa styles and provide a transition space between the public street and private home. Development should maintain the appearance and detailing of verandas and entrance porches, where these are authentic to the building.

RS.3.6 Fencing

The historic character of the street depends upon the openness of the houses to the roadway. Low-scale fencing can define the property boundary while maintaining visual contact between the public domain and the principal elevation of each house. High fences on the street frontage undermine the historic character of the street and are therefore inappropriate. Fencing materials should be sympathetic to the individual house concerned.



Picket fences enhance the historic character of the streetscape and provide allow pedestrians to appreciate the heritage values of the cottages, villas and bungalows within the precinct.

RS.3.7 Garaging

Off street parking cannot always be provided and parking requirements within this precinct may be flexible. Where there is room to erect a garage on site it should be located at the rear of the property where possible.

RS.4 Performance Guidelines

Applications for resource consent will be evaluated for their alignment with the following guidelines.

RS.4.1 Scheduled Heritage Buildings

The scheduled heritage buildings in Russell Street are the defining elements of the precinct. Proposals relating to scheduled buildings are appropriate where:

- a) Group A and B buildings are retained in all but exceptional circumstances, with demolition or removal a last resort;
- b) additions or alterations continue the use of timber weatherboards, corrugated metal roofing, timber joinery and detailing, in keeping with the original dwelling; and
- c) proposals consider the reinstatement of original façade elements, including verandas and entrance porches, when undertaking alterations.

RS.4.2 Non-scheduled Buildings

Non-scheduled buildings within the precinct contribute to its overall character. It is important that alterations and additions which impact on the streetscape are in keeping with the historic character of the precinct but do not try to replicate the appearance of the original houses. Proposals relating to non-scheduled buildings are appropriate

where:

- a) materials used complement and enhance the historic character of the precinct;
and
- b) the size, scale and proportion of new roof forms, doors and windows, as well as verandas or porches, are in sympathy with the authentic detailing of the scheduled houses in the precinct.

RS.4.3 New Dwellings

New dwellings within a heritage precinct, whether due to removal of an existing dwelling and replacement, or construction of a second dwelling, also have the potential to adversely affect the character of the precinct, unless done in a sympathetic manner. Proposals for new dwellings are appropriate where:

- a) the new building is designed in such a way as to maintain and enhance the historic character of the streetscape;
- b) the form and scale of new work is in sympathy with the existing scheduled houses when viewed from the street;
- c) materials used complement and enhance the historic character of the precinct;
- d) the building is generally single storey, although lofts within the roof space may be acceptable where they do not penetrate the roof envelope when viewed from the street;
- e) the inclusion of street front verandas and entrance porches is encouraged;
- f) roof lines are in sympathy with the form of existing houses; and
- g) the setback of new houses from the street boundary is consistent with that of neighbouring houses.

RS.4.4 Accessory Buildings

Accessory buildings are appropriate where:

- a) they are designed to be complementary to the streetscape in form, detail and use of materials when viewed from the street;
- b) they are not constructed in the front yard (except garages where physical and legal access to the rear or side of the site is not possible).

RS.4.5 Fences

Painted timber pickets, decorative wire or wrought iron are appropriate materials for new fences on the road boundary of each property.

RS.4.6 Commercial Buildings

The residential/commercial building at 213 Haven Road stands at the northern entry to the precinct and contributes to its character. Development on this site is appropriate where it takes into account the historic character of the precinct and is designed in such a way as to maintain and enhance the existing streetscape:

- a) the form, size and scale of new work is in keeping with the neighbouring streetscape. The building is not more than two storeys;
- b) the proposal considers inclusion of a veranda on the Haven Road frontage;
- c) roof lines are in keeping with those of neighbouring buildings overlooking Haven Road, and
- d) any commercial signage is sympathetic to the visual character of the precinct.



Residential/commercial building at the corner of Haven Road and Russell Street (Mike Scott, 2019)