



**November
2025**



Proposed Plan Change 120 Information Sheet #13

Qualifying matters

From 3 November to 19 December 2025, Auckland Council invites submissions on Proposed Plan Change 120: Housing Intensification and Resilience (PC120) - a change to the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) (our city's planning rulebook) that proposes to rezone areas of residential land for greater intensification, to enable greater building heights and densities in many parts of urban Auckland, and to strengthen management of natural hazard risks.

Submissions are now open until 5pm on Friday 19 December 2025.

This information sheet explains what qualifying matters are and how they work, and outlines the qualifying matters identified by the government and the council.

Background to Proposed Plan Change 120

PC78 was Auckland's former intensification plan change as required by the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD). It incorporated the Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) which was legally required at the time. This generally allowed three dwellings of up to three storeys to be built on most residential sites without resource consent.

In August 2025, the government amended the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) which enabled PC78 to be withdrawn. Auckland Council withdrew PC78 (in part) and notified PC120 to improve Auckland's resilience to natural hazards and focus intensification around centres and transport nodes.

PC78 was withdrawn in part from 5pm on 9 October 2025, including withdrawal of the MDRS in PC78.

PC120 addresses central government requirements to:

- contribute to the same level of housing capacity in the AUP as was to be enabled by PC78

- enable building heights and densities within and around town and local centres which reflect the level of commercial and community activity these centres offer
- enable building heights of at least 6-storeys within walkable catchments from the edge of the city centre zone, the edge of metropolitan centre zones and around existing and planned rapid transit stops (train and busway stations) and
- enable building heights of at least 10- and 15- storeys around certain train stations listed in the RMA.

These heights and densities must be enabled unless a ‘qualifying matter’ applies to a site which makes that level of development inappropriate.

PC120 also strengthens provisions that manage natural hazard risks. Areas potentially affected by flooding, land instability, coastal erosion or coastal inundation now and in the future are targeted with stronger rules and other planning measures. This approach is to improve Auckland’s resilience to severe weather events and natural hazards, following the storms in early 2023 which resulted in widespread flooding, landslips, and coastal inundation across the region.

What are qualifying matters?

Apart from zoning matters, a number of properties and areas across Auckland are subject to provisions which manage certain characteristics and/or features that have particular value.

Qualifying matters are those characteristics about some properties or areas that mean the council may need to modify, or reduce, the building heights or densities required by the NPS-UD or the RMA.

Qualifying matters include sites of cultural, historic, or ecological significance or requirements to avoid development in areas with natural hazards. Many are shown as overlays in the AUP that protect or recognise the feature or value that is identified.

The government has identified a number of qualifying matters that modify building heights and densities required by the NPS-UD and the RMA. These are listed below, along with the AUP overlay that relates to them (if relevant).

The government also allows councils to identify other qualifying matters that are relevant for places and communities. The council has identified other additional qualifying matters that are important for Auckland, as set out below.

Applying a qualifying matter doesn’t prevent development from happening in that area. It only reduces development enough to ensure that what is being protected or managed isn’t compromised by that development.

Where applied, qualifying matters need to be justified against the requirements of the RMA. This requires council to review the characteristic or feature to ensure it balances the need to provide for growth with the need to manage the values of the particular feature.

Where do qualifying matters apply?

These unique characteristics or features of some properties or areas may apply within, or outside of, areas affected by NPS-UD and RMA requirements:

- Where these apply to land affected by NPS-UD and RMA requirements and are worthy of retention, they are identified as ‘qualifying matters.’

Qualifying matters may apply in parts of:

- a) Areas within and adjacent to town and local centres, where building heights and densities are to be enabled which reflect levels of commercial and community activity in those centres
 - b) Walkable catchments from the edge of the city and metropolitan centres and from rapid transit stops (including train stations and some bus stations), where building heights of at least 6-storeys are to be enabled
 - c) Walkable catchments of the Baldwin Avenue and Mount Albert train stations, where building heights of at least 10-storeys are to be enabled
 - d) Walkable catchments of the Maungawhau (Mount Eden), Kingsland, and Morningside train stations, where building heights of at least 15-storeys are to be enabled.
- Where these apply to land not affected by NPS-UD and RMA requirements, they are referred to as ‘planning matters’ (note that in some instances, these may be referred to as ‘planning constraints’ in the relevant Section 32 evaluation report).

Some of these characteristics or features may be both qualifying matters and ‘planning matters’ if they apply **both within and outside of the areas specified above**. Other characteristics or features may be just one or the other, depending on where they apply.

Within PC78, qualifying matters were applied to more of urban Auckland to manage potential conflicts between the values and the MDRS; however, the MDRS have now been withdrawn as part of the partial withdrawal of PC78.

Some characteristics or values managed in the AUP were unable to be justified against the requirements of the RMA in their current form and are therefore proposed to be modified through PC120. For example, parts of the Special Character Area Residential overlay are proposed to be reduced or removed through PC120 to respond to government requirements for intensification. Further information on the Special Character Area qualifying matter is included in information sheet #14 Special Character Areas.

What are the qualifying matters identified by the government?

The government has already identified a number of qualifying matters that should be protected and reflected in proposals for intensification. They include:

- a) A matter of national importance

- b) A matter required to give effect to a national policy statement or the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement
- c) A matter required to give effect to Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato - the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River
- d) A matter required to give effect to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 or the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008
- e) A matter required for the purpose of ensuring the safe or efficient operation of nationally significant infrastructure
- f) Open space provided for public use, but only in relation to land that is open space
- g) The need to give effect to a designation or heritage order, but only in relation to land that is subject to the designation or heritage order
- h) A matter necessary to implement or ensure consistency with iwi participation legislation
- i) The requirement to provide sufficient business land to meet expected demand.

What are the qualifying matters identified by the council?

Other qualifying matters can be identified by councils where a particular feature or characteristic is important to the local community, but is not specifically listed by the government.

The council has looked at Auckland's landscape, infrastructure, built form and community values to identify whether there should be additional qualifying matters applied through PC120, and has identified the following as being important to Aucklanders and Auckland's identity:

- **Local public views including Stockade Hill**

Individual viewing points, heights and their locally significant viewshafts from public places, contribute to the unique character of some of Auckland's neighbourhoods.

- **Special character areas (Residential and Business)**

Special character areas are older established areas and places of special architectural or other built character value. They are areas that have collective importance, relevance and interest to a local area or to the region. Special character areas are managed by the Special Character Overlay, which includes rules that limit building height and density to manage special character values. More information is provided in Information Sheet #14 Special Character Areas.

- **Notable Trees**

Notable trees are individual trees or groups of trees which have been identified for protection because of the significant value they offer – sometimes this is for amenity purposes or ecological benefits.

- **Combined wastewater servicing constraint**

Combined wastewater servicing constraints exist in some older parts of Auckland where separated wastewater and stormwater pipes have not yet been constructed. In these

areas, the combined wastewater network collects both wastewater and stormwater. Additional growth and intensification in these areas can cause or contribute to overflows, which can result in public health and environmental risks.

- **Cohesive Zoning Response**

This refers to ‘refinements’ to zoning patterns, where application of zones and qualifying matters could otherwise result in unusual zone anomalies and/or built form outcomes. Refer to information sheet #18 Cohesive Zoning for details.

- **Complex Precincts**

A number of existing precincts have rules or standards which were developed to manage specific or bespoke matters, which continue to be relevant and have been maintained as qualifying matters within the PC120 context. Refer to information sheet #20 Updates to Precincts.

The council must provide strong evidence to justify why these ‘other’ qualifying matters should apply, given the government’s direction for more housing. To provide a strong evidence base, the council must do site-specific analysis and assessment. The threshold for limiting building height and density through qualifying matters is very high.

How will the council identify qualifying matters in Plan Change 120?

Many of the matters listed above are already protected or recognised in the AUP through overlays that restrict the amount of height or density that can happen on a site, where one or more of these qualifying matters applies.

Table 1 below indicates which of the overlays in the AUP, or other items or features known as ‘management layers’ in the AUP planning map viewer, are considered as relevant to the required qualifying matter in PC120.

a. Matters of national importance	Areas in the following AUP zones and overlays: • D9 Significant Ecological Areas • D10 Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes • D12 Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area • D14 Maunga Viewshafts and Height Sensitive Building Areas • D17 Historic Heritage • D19 Auckland War Memorial Museum Viewshaft • D21 Sites and Places of significance to Mana Whenua • Significant natural hazards: controls for coastal inundation, coastal erosion, flooding, land instability • The coastal environment and margins of Lake Pupuke
--	--

	• Areas within Precincts that protect matters of national importance
b. Gives effect to other NPS	Areas in the following AUP overlays or other features: • D9 Significant Ecological Areas • D10 Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes • D26 National Grid Corridor • The Coastal Environment
d. Matters required to give effect to the Hauraki Marine Gulf Park or Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008	• D12 Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area • The Coastal Environment
e. Nationally significant infrastructure	• D24 Aircraft Noise Overlay • D26 National Grid Corridor Overlay • Strategic Transport Corridor zone • Oil refinery pipeline • Gas transmission pipelines
f. Open space for public use	Open Space zoned land: • Conservation zone • Informal Recreation zone • Sports and Active Recreation zone • Civic Spaces zone • Community zone
g. Designations & heritage orders	Land subject to: • Designations • Heritage orders
i. Suitable business land	• Business – Light Industry zoned land in some locations (walkable catchments from Morningside and Baldwin Ave train stations)
j. ‘Any other matter’	• D13 Notable Trees Overlay • D16 Local Public Views Overlay • D18 Special Character Areas Overlay – Residential and Business • D20A Stockade Hill Viewshaft Overlay • Combined wastewater servicing constraint • Cohesive zoning response

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex precincts |
|---|

Further information

- For detailed information about the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)
- For more information on the amendments to the RMA [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)

Please note:

This information sheet is a summary document to assist with understanding Proposed Plan Change 120 – Housing Intensification and Resilience, which gives effect to Policies 3 and 4 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and addresses the requirements of Schedule 3C of the Resource Management Act 1991.

Proposed Plan Change 120 to the Auckland Unitary Plan was publicly notified by Auckland Council on 3 November 2025.

All information provided in this information sheet should be considered as being illustrative and indicative only. Users should take specific advice from qualified professional people before undertaking any action as a result of information obtained from this information sheet. The user waives and releases Auckland Council from any claims arising from use of the information provided in this information sheet.