

Tauranga Domain stadium: City council commissioners debate \$220.2m proposal

By

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An artist impression of what a proposed stadium at Tauranga Domain could look like.
Image / Supplied



Emotions spilled over as people spoke out against a proposed \$220.2 million stadium at the Tauranga Domain during a Tauranga City Council meeting on Monday.

Members of sports clubs affected by the proposal spoke in the meeting's public forum and were supported by around 20 people in the public gallery.

This was ahead of the commission being presented with the preliminary business case for the Tauranga Community Stadium.

The “people’s stadium” would provide 7000 permanent seats with the provision for an additional 8000 temporary seats.

It would also include a “light” exhibition centre with 2000 square metres of exhibition space; a 1300sq m function centre, a community multi-use facility with 400sq m of changing rooms and lounge space, and a sports science/physiotherapy space with 250sq m of exclusive space.

If built, the stadium was expected to displace the Tauranga Croquet Club and the Tauranga Bowling Club, and demolish the all-weather athletics track.

Tauranga Croquet Club president Gretchen Benvie told the commission in her view the plan would be “taking paradise and turning it into a parking lot.”



Tauranga Croquet Club president Gretchen Benvie. Photo / John Borren, Sun Media

“To destroy the fine open green space that is the Tauranga Domain because of the desire of a few to build a rugby stadium for a few games a year would be ignoring the wants and needs of the majority of Tauranga residents.”

The club first heard about a stadium proposal in 2021 and 17 months later there was still uncertainty about where they would relocate to and who would pay for it, said Benvie.

She said the club had been there for more than 100 years and was the second-largest croquet club in New Zealand.

Tauranga Lawn Tennis Club president Philip Brown reiterated Benvie’s concerns around greenspace, saying the domain was the “only large green area in downtown Tauranga”.

As housing intensified around the central city, greenspace would be more valued and the club wanted the greenspace to remain, he said.

“Greenspace is far more valuable than any stadium.”

He also expressed concern about how the stadium would be funded and said in his view ratepayers “shouldn’t fund a whimsical stadium”.

Tim Searle has lived in Tauranga for 25 years and told the meeting he was a “passionate runner” and used the domain every Thursday.

He said he had watched the “heart of the city slowly fade” since living in Tauranga.

“Our city centre needs to be an economic hub, constantly finding ways to attract new business, new events, tourism, importantly, filling our hospitality sector.”

He said concerns caused by potential changes to the domain needed to be managed and communicated well.

Bay of Plenty Speedway Association (BOPSA) representative Rodney Wood asked to speak in place of someone who did not want their place in the public forum, as his previous request to speak had been turned down.



Tauranga City Council commission chairwoman Anne Tolley. Photo / Alex Cairns
Commission chair Anne Tolley said no as the meeting was running late and others had spoken for longer than their allocated five minutes.

Wood said: “It’s disappointing that you don’t hear from our community and those that are actually affected.”

Tolley responded she received the association's request to speak at 10pm on Sunday and this was "unreasonable". She was happy to meet with speedway or have them speak at another meeting.

People seated in the public gallery expressed their disappointment, with one man saying "if that's democracy, that's not really good enough".

The croquet club, tennis club, the Tauranga Millennium Track Trust that built the athletics track, and the speedway association formed the Hands off Tauranga Domain alliance in February and held a protest against the stadium in March.

Nigel Tutt chief executive of Priority One, the Western Bay of Plenty economic development agency that led the business case, told the meeting a location analysis showed Tauranga Domain was the right place for the stadium.

"Stadiums are complex and difficult ... it's not something for the faint hearted," he said.



Priority One chief executive Nigel Tutt. Photo / NZME

"Plenty of people have opinions, either to not do it or to do it way bigger, but we are really, really confident that we have this in the best configuration."

He said the boutique stadium would be used for professional and community sports, functions and exhibitions, concerts, festivals and as a teaching space for the University of Waikato.

It would be open to the public provided it was not in use, said Tutt.

"We don't want this to be a concrete jungle, something that everyone gets to look at from afar."

Funding for the stadium was yet to be determined, which was part of why it was a preliminary business case rather than a final one, he said.

“This represents the best opportunity for Tauranga to have a stadium. It’s multi-use, it’s the right size and it fits all the needs that we have.”

Tutt said he sympathised with clubs potentially facing relocation.

“We can’t let things get in the way of progress ... This represents a really good opportunity to improve things for the future.”

Tolley said she was disappointed to hear some domain users “continue to misrepresent what is being proposed.”

“It’s been very clear from the start that this was to be an enhancement of the facilities that are currently there.”

Tolley also said it was important the “critical greenspace” in the city centre was enhanced.

Commissioner Bill Wasley said: “Much still needs to be done in terms of understanding and confirming that community support.”

He also raised the question of how the stadium would be funded given the “balance sheet challenges the council had now and into the future”.

Wasley said other funding mechanisms would be “absolutely critical” if the proposed stadium were to proceed.



Commissioner Bill Wasley. Photo / John Borren, Sun Media

The current cost estimate of \$220.2m included contingency and cost escalation provisions totalling \$59.2m.

The proposed concept would be expected to generate positive earnings, but would be unlikely to fully cover debt, interest and depreciation costs. If the council proceeded with the stadium, an operational grant would likely be needed to offset those costs.

Commissioner Stephen Selwood said he supported what the other commissioners had raised.

Addressing uncertainty for the existing users of the domain was a “critical need” he said.

“We will commit to supporting the relocation of existing users, it has to be a fundamental component of the stadium.”

Providing funding for relocation was a “moral obligation” of the council and community, Selwood said.

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He also wanted the “wider social and economic benefits” the stadium would provide highlighted more strongly in the business case.

“If we understand the wider benefits and we understand who is benefiting, then we’ve got a pathway to understanding who should be funding the investment.”

The commission supported the concept for the stadium “in principle”, but asked for further information before deciding whether or not to include it 2024-34 draft Long-term Plan (LTP) and put it out for public consultation.

This included more detail on the wider regional social and economic benefits, the cost of the stadium and how it would be funded as well as information on potential ownership and delivery models.

Tolley said the decision about whether or not to include the stadium in the LTP would likely occur at the end of September.

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