

# Tauranga Racecourse hearings: Final round of submissions loud and clear - hospital plans ‘a waste’

By

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Tauranga City Council commissioners listening to Willem Jonkers making a submission on the future of the Tauranga Racecourse. Photo / Alex Cairns

In the last session of submissions for the future of the Tauranga Racecourse Reserve, one message was clear - keep the green space, and put a potential hospital elsewhere.

Twenty-one people voiced their views in person at the Tauranga City Council’s Greerton Mārawaewae Study hearings on [Monday](#) and [Tuesday](#).

The major project was launched in 2021, aimed at using the large tract of reserve land to help future-proof the city. The land hosts three main lessees: Racing Tauranga, Tauranga Golf Club, and Tauranga Equestrian Sports Association.

After substantial community feedback, a shortlist of potential future plans were: Option A, removal of the racecourse for a future hospital with recreation space; Option B, a Central Park-style option removing the racecourse and creating a large public park; or Option C, an enhanced status quo option, which would retain the racecourse track.

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On Tuesday afternoon, the last of those offering verbal submissions shared their views - can the hospital idea. The feedback echoed much of what had already been put forward in the hearings.

Michael Bayly spoke as a trustee of the Tauranga Racecourse Reserve Charitable Trust. It was his second appearance that day, [having appeared earlier](#) as deputy chairman of Racing Tauranga.

Bayly told commissioners, as trustee, the racecourse was “one of the few historic pieces in Tauranga left”.

“This is Tauranga history, ongoing. This absolutely priceless jewel must be preserved for now and future generations - they will thank us for it,” he said.

“This is Tauranga’s Hyde Park, Hagley Park or Central Park equivalent. It’s an absolute treasure.”

Any attempt to relocate the racecourse, an option previously preferred by the city council, would likely come at an “eye-watering cost to ratepayers”, he said.



Tauranga Golf Club and Tauranga Racecourse, as viewed from the air in 2008. Photo / Jimmy Joe

Bayly said there were nine hectares of the land already “eyeballed” for potential remodelling.

Potential future use of the land, if the council chose to retain the reserve with enhancements, could include a cultural centre, or an emergency management operation base, he said.

He called for the commission to choose Option C.

“Let us leave a lasting legacy.”

Asked by commission chairwoman Anne Tolley whether he believed the Tauranga Racecourse could survive New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing’s aspiration to consolidate Bay of Plenty racecourses to one single racecourse, Bayly said he believed it was “very favoured as the go-to track”.

“I would say we have a very good chance,” Bayly said.

Tauranga Adult Riding Club’s Duncan Guy also expressed support for Option C, “but without some of the enhancements” because certain areas were needed for parking.

Guy wanted to dispel any perception that people in the equine world were “elitist”, drove around in big expensive trucks and could easily go elsewhere.

“I feel that without you people talking to someone like me, who’s just an ordinary guy with a horse, you will think [that].”

Guy said having a green space where horse owners could ride and train was important, and he questioned where such facilities would go if not the racecourse reserve.



Tauranga City Council commission chairwoman Anne Tolley listens to submissions on the Greerton Mārawaewae Study. Photo / Alex Cairns

Tolley said it would take time to come to any decision, and while she could not offer a specific date, the commission would “hopefully make a decision, probably in the next few months”.

Tauranga resident Deborah Garrett reminded commissioners that the Bay of Plenty signed up to the Universal Charter for National Park Cities in 2019, which should, in her view, ensure the racecourse and golf course land remained a green space - with or without a racecourse. She said it would be “a shame” if it were to be relocated somewhere less central.

“I’m here because I’m passionate about the future of this land and the need for it to remain as green space. This block of land is a taonga, treasure, and when something is precious, you take special care to look after it so you can pass it on to future generations.”

Tauranga resident Aroha Ririnui said she’d like to see the history and cultural significance of the land celebrated more, and supported Bayly’s suggestion of a cultural centre.

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Fellow resident Andrew O’Neill also supported Option C and liked the suggestion of a cultural centre, botanical gardens, or more investment into the existing equestrian facilities.

“If we lose this, we won’t get it back,” he said.

“I really enjoy the races, my kids enjoy the races, friends enjoy the races. My colleagues use the golf course. Regardless of what you do with it, if it’s not green space - if it’s houses or a hospital - it’s a waste, for me.”

The hearings have now concluded. Deliberations for the project are expected to take place from May 1. From these, the commissioners are expected to eventually make a decision. The next step will be to make a recommendation to the Crown, as the Tauranga Racecourse Reserve land is owned by the Government (Crown) not the council.