

Michael Barnett (Auckland Business Chamber) submission on Eden Park Trust's resource consent application to secure up to six music consents a year at Eden Park.

November 4th 2020 at the Eden Park Concert Resource Consent Hearing

I am Michael Barnett, CEO of the Auckland Business Chamber which represents the voice of thousands of small and medium sized businesses across our region.

Right now, our business community is pulling out all the stops to recover from the damage of shutdowns, lockdowns and closed borders.

Covid has changed our lives. We're learning to adapt and live with the anxiety and uncertainty the pandemic inflicts to survive and thrive.

We're realising that we have to work together to seize opportunities that bring benefits for the greater good of all.

I shifted to karaka about 18 years ago. As I turned off at Papakura and turned right to karaka I would go past the fields of strawberries and a little tin shed where you could pull in and purchase fresh strawberries.

Today the strawberries fields are gone; instead of my little tin shed there are over a thousand houses; across the road is a petrol station and more recently to my disappointment, a MacDonald's.

I submitted against the narrow roads and lack of green space, but I understand that this is change which is not about me, it's about an opportunity for those who make up a changing Auckland.

To this end, the chamber strongly supports the application for Eden park to be given the go ahead for six concerts annually.

Our most recent survey, taken only last week, shows 91 per cent of our members are in favor of the resource consent so Eden park can get on with rebuilding a sustainable future. Local support is even higher with only a marginal group saying no to change.

Our members expect me to vigorously represent their views to fulfil the chamber's purpose of strengthening Auckland's position as New Zealand's economic, commercial, industrial powerhouse and collaborating with the private and public sectors to make our region a great place to live, work and visit.

And it is in the spirit of continuous enhancement, improvement and realising potential that I am representing my constituency.

Eden park should have the opportunity to fulfil its purpose, earn its financial independence and long-term viability and help us build a better future. It cannot standstill and stay the same.

For over a century Eden park has drawn in the fans to be a part of our social, sporting and entertainment history, adding new events and demonstrating that it has the reach to continue to add attractions for the benefit and betterment of all.

It is New Zealand's national stadium, a pre-eminent Australasian event venue sought after by impresarios and known around the world for delivering memorable experiences as one of the best entertainment and sporting arenas anywhere - or as one Australian commentator described it "a cathedral for the fans".

But its contribution runs deeper than that. Eden park with its professional management, world class event organisation, promotion expertise, community citizenship and local support is a critical contributor to the wealth, life and vitality of our city, region and nation.

A full house at Eden park delivers millions of dollars to local businesses and to the wider region attracting visitors from around New Zealand and when our borders open once again, from overseas.

The Dominion road business association's independent research indicates that around half a million dollars is pumped into the local economy on event days. For hundreds of hospitality outlets along that strip, so badly wounded by Covid, it is the difference between saving livelihoods and jobs or closing shop.

I do know from the recent major rugby game that there was a huge boost for the wider community with bars and restaurants in central Auckland full, accommodation hard to get including at b and bs across the city and a wave of positive energy not experienced for a long time.

Research on the financial benefits of adding six concerts to Eden park's annual calendar estimates an additional \$25 million would be generated from direct flow on effects, creating almost 400 new FTE roles and another 140 plus jobs downstream while supporting existing and new businesses to add life and energy to our city.

Can Auckland really afford to reject the opportunity to give Eden park the chance to grow for the good of all? Can Auckland live with the sound of silence when our event industry and attractiveness as a premier visitor destination need to light up brighter and wider. Can we

really allow the minority to shout down the 94 per cent of locals and 91 per cent of business who all support approval for the concerts?

If ever Auckland needed a boost it is now when our recovery is predicated on drawing in visitors in droves willing to spend, stay and have fun.

Events at this venue benefit the whole of Auckland which is why all of the ratepayers meet the cost when the venue produces a shortfall.

Instead, we are here, again, arguing the case again for Eden park to be allowed to hold entertainment events beyond sports as allowed under its deed without going through the exorbitant cost and time in preparing applications each time.

And every time an application for a new event like a concert or a night game goes in, the minority comes out to out shout down the majority.

They cite unsuitability of Eden park as a venue, inadequate analysis of impacts, the impossibility of ever mitigating any issues to their satisfaction - and of course there's the health impact of noise pollution from concerts being as bad as smoking in public - so is it noise from all concerts that is the problem or just noise from any future concerts at Eden park in their back yard?

I don't want to get into personalities, nor discuss the characteristics of nimbysism, but of course there will be noise. It is an entertainment space and it always has been.

The objectors are entitled to their peace and quiet but are they saying it's ok for there to be noise in someone else's back yard but not mine? Would they transport their prejudices downtown too if there were outdoor concerts, or perish the thought, another stadium, located near hotels and apartments?

An observation I would make is that if this small but entitled group puts paid to Eden park's revenue earning ability to bring in more events, be financially strong and repay its ratepayer loan, then any shortfall should be a part of their rate costs. All of Auckland should not lose from having progress denied by a minority who cannot see over their own quarter acre paradise.

Eden park management has been diligent in trying to accommodate and find solutions to address the naysayers' concerns to no avail. This is despite investing in new technologies including erecting sound barriers, putting a 10.30pm curfew on night events and managing traffic, parking, crowd flows, set ups, pack downs and clean-ups.

It's a model citizen with exemplary neighborhood and community engagement, events and communications programmes running for the locals.

It opens the venue for social projects and use for a wide range of community events from hosting kapa haka contests to celebrations marking the end of the Muslim fasting month to the public funeral and honor guard for one of our young police officers tragically killed.

It enjoys the support and respect of the vast majority of not just local residents and businesses but the wider community and should be allowed to go for growth to be the best it can as part of the change to build a better Auckland.

Accordingly, the chamber considers the resource consent application to secure up to just six concerts a year a reasonable 'middle ground' that deserves to be approved.

Eden park is a treasured community and national asset that adds value to our lives, livelihoods and wellbeing. Let it live, let the music play six times a year.