Burswood racetrack's biggest neighbour backs controversial project

By Hamish Hastie
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Controversial plans for a $217 million racetrack and amphitheatre on the Burswood peninsula have the blessing of neighbour Crown Perth, with chairman John Van Der Wielen describing the project as "really exciting".

However, it is still unclear whether the state government will need to purchase any land off Crown to fulfil its election promise – now dubbed the Perth Entertainment and Sporting Precinct.

Crown Perth chair John Van Der Wielen. CREDIT: HAMISH HASTIE

Van Der Wielen, who also spent two years on the Burswood Park board, invoked Perth's much-maligned Bell Tower as he pledged Crown Perth's support of further development on the peninsula.

"I think this precinct, regardless of what goes on, it can be Australia's leading sports and entertainment venue," he said.

“Personally, I hear Perth people still arguing about the Bell Tower, and have a look at it – now it should be three times the size it is.

“I think development should continue. I think this can be an amazing precinct ... I think the future of the peninsula could be really positive, no matter what goes on it.”

The group of companies that built the Boorloo Bridge was selected on Monday to design and build the racetrack and a 15,000 to 20,000-person amphitheatre, which is expected to open by 2027.
Much of the project will be built on land owned by the Burswood Park board, which is a state-owned entity, but opponents of the project have queried whether the government will need to purchase land to the south of the precinct, where Crown’s assets sit, to accommodate the track and facilities.

Transport Minister Rita Saffioti brushed aside questions on that topic in budget estimates hearings last week and, when asked on Tuesday, Van Dier Wielen said it was just “too early days” to say.
In estimates, Saffioti said the government was “very confident” it would not need to purchase any land but needed to confirm the final layout and finish detailed planning.

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“Of course, the configuration of that project will have an impact in relation to land assembly. That is why we are going through a detailed assessment at the moment,” she said.

“Burswood Park board had some bold plans as part of its vision, including creating an inlet in front of Crown casino and an amphitheatre.

“We are working across government, looking at the site. This is why we are out for consultation.”

During estimates, Opposition Leader Basil Zempilas questioned how confident the government could be of the $217 million figure if it hadn’t factored in land purchases.

Save Burswood Park co-convenor Robin Harvey was unsurprised at Crown’s support of the project.

She criticised the secrecy surrounding the project between the WA Government, Supercars Australia and Crown.

“This is without any consideration of the destruction of a significant urban green space, flora and fauna, indigenous heritage, the local community and over 200,000 members of the wider community who enjoy this park each year,” she said.

“We are appalled that the government continues to support multimillion-dollar businesses such as Crown and Supercars Australia with taxpayer funds.”