

A local asset - Te Aroha and District Community Hospital

After more than 25 years in limbo there has finally been some positive movement over the land in Te Aroha where a hospital has sat since 1961.

The hospital, which was originally a maternity unit, was owned by the Waikato Hospital who closed it in 1994 and planned to sell it.

People in Te Aroha and the surrounding district who were passionate about keeping the hospital open formed a group which became The Te Aroha District and Community Health Services Trust Inc. in December 1996.

Since then, the hospital has been funded primarily by contracts with the Waikato District Health Board, the Ministry of Health, other Government agencies, private resident's fees, GP beds (i.e. people referred to the hospital by Te Aroha doctors), Day Club, donations, community fund raising, and bequests.

The facility is a source of pride to a town which has managed to retain its hospital when so many rural towns have lost theirs.

On 19 October, Trust Chairperson Julie Ann Hallett, along with members of the Hospital's Property and Lease Committee Steve Davey and Kate Smyth, welcomed Jill Taylor, General Manager of our local iwi, Ngāti Tumutumu.

At an outdoor meeting the Facility Manager, Gaylene McMenamin and some long-standing members of staff were addressed by the Chairperson who explained the reason for the

gathering.

For many years the Hauraki Collective (Iwi of Hauraki) and the Government have been in negotiations over the ownership of the hospital land under the Treaty of Waitangi Settlements and for this reason it was land banked under the initial ownership of the Office of Treaty Settlements.

During this time the trust has been leasing the hospital land and buildings but without the ability to significantly change the facility. Colliers, a professional services management company has been representing Land Information New Zealand (LINZ,) a government department.

Colliers has now advised the Hospital Trust of the intention to transfer the head lease of this property to the Treaty claimant, Ngāti Tumutumu, one of the twelve iwi who make up the Iwi of Hauraki, until such time as they finally get their settlement and become the owners.

The hospital board members then met with Ngāti Tumutumu Chairman, Daniel Braid, and GM Jill Taylor to discuss this happening and how this new arrangement could work best for both entities going forward.

There were many questions to be asked and answered from both sides, but it was eventually agreed that they could work together in the future to achieve the best outcomes for the community.



ABOVE: From left, Trust Board's Steve Davy and Kate Smyth; Ngāti Tumutumu GM Jill Taylor; Hospital CFM Gaylene McMenamin, Board Chair Julie Ann Hallett, Te Aroha District & Community Hospital.

Consequently, further confirmation came through from Colliers that the lease had been signed by both the Government and Ngāti Tumutumu, and back dated to 01 July 2021 which is the start of the hospital's financial year.

A further meeting was held in the Ngāti Tumutumu office at the historic Te Aroha Railway Station. After further discussion both parties agreed they had waited long enough for some action and there had been many 'lost opportunities' on both sides during the 25 years in limbo.

As Julie Ann Hallett said, "We can now move forward together to continue to provide the first class care that Gaylene and her team bring to our community."

Jill Taylor then spoke on behalf of Ngāti Tumutumu, agreeing that

the hospital is a great asset to the community. "The heart and Kaupapa of Ngāti Tumutumu are in the plans for the future," she said.

"This maunga or mountain is the ancestral home of the iwi, and they are proud to be a part of the vision that offers huge opportunities for the hospital to be bigger and better."

Julie Ann reassured staff that they would be kept up to date on any plans or changes and thanked them for taking time out of their busy day to meet with the Board. Because of Covid restrictions the group could not enter the hospital but went on a tour of the extensive grounds and gardens.

Story by Eileen Joyce

