



7.1 Petition- Prioritise urgent upgrades to Port Melbourne Soccer Club facilities

A Petition containing 964 signatures, was received electronically via change.org.

The Petition states the following:-

Mayor and Councillors of the City of Port Phillip,

We the petitioners are members and supporters of the Port Melbourne Soccer Club community. We petition you to prioritise the upgrade and development of JL Murphy Reserve on which our players – most of whom are children and youths - train and play the game they love.

JL Murphy Reserve facilities are unsafe and inadequate to provide for the needs of the PMSC community. Our players endure poor lighting and uneven, unsafe and overcrowded pitches for games and training. Our clubroom facilities have been neglected and overlooked by you for too long.

We urge Council to:

- *Urgently upgrade lighting for pitch 2 and its surrounds*
- *Prioritise the comprehensive permanent resurfacing of pitch 2 over pitch 3 on the basis of higher need and usage*
- *Grant permission to use adjacent grounds to alleviate pressure on pitch 2*
- *Upgrade clubroom facilities, in particular the canteen*
- *Provide adequate storage solutions for equipment*

The above – particularly the resurfacing and upgrade of pitch 2 – have been promised by you, then reneged and delayed multiple times over many years. It's time to fulfil these promises. They're necessary, consistent with your own master plans and long overdue.

Every week our 400+ players use these facilities to play the world game. They are investing in their physical and social wellbeing, gaining skills they will use for life and contributing to the health of our community. They deserve your support to do this safely and well.

We call for the urgent addressing of these issues in the Council's 10 Year Plan and 2023/24 budget and request a meeting with Councillors as soon as feasible.

OFFICER COMMENT

Background

Usage at JL Murphy

JL Murphy is one of the largest sporting precincts within City of Port Phillip. It features:

- 3 soccer pitches
- 1 baseball diamond,
- 2 ovals AFL/cricket grounds



- and associated infrastructure such as sporting pavilions, lighting, storage, and significant open space for other recreation activities.

Port Melbourne Soccer Club (PMSC), utilises the three soccer pitches and associated facilities at the western end of the reserve under the following arrangements:

- Pitch 1 (sportsground and full pitch lighting) – exclusive use for training and competition under a seasonal permit arrangement
- Pitch 2 (sportsground and half pitch lighting) - exclusive use for training and competition under a seasonal permit arrangement
- Pitch 3 (historically labelled 'community pitch'; sportsground and full pitch lighting) – shared use arrangement for training under a seasonal permit arrangement. Middle Park Junior Football (Soccer) Club also has allocated use of pitch 3 during the winter sporting season (April to October). This is the only sportsground used by this club.
- Sporting pavilion – exclusive use under a lease arrangement for 12 months of the year. In addition, a shipping container provided to offer excess storage opportunities.

Across the rest of the municipality, with the exception of North Port Oval, all other sporting clubs utilise community facilities on a season licence that requires them to share facilities with other sporting clubs. The main reason for the lease arrangement at JL Murphy Reserve is to support PMSC in meeting the Football Victoria requirements for competing in the National Premier League (NPL) competition. This is the top competition in the league.

PMSC have competition from Mini Roos (Under 7 – Under 11) through to State League Women's Competition and NPL Men.

Sports grounds across the municipality are at or near capacity, due to a significant amount of use and population growth and the increased participation from juniors and females. This is compounded by many of our fields having poor underlying drainage and reaching the end of their functional life which limits their 'carrying capacity'. This is being addressed through our sports field upgrade program funded in our Ten-Year Plan. Increased usage of fields by dogs is also an issue - particularly for JL Murphy Pitch 2.

Recent renewals, upgrades, and maintenance at JL Murphy Reserve

Since the end of the last winter sporting season the following upgrades have occurred to Pitches 1, 2, and 3 and associated infrastructure:

- extensive maintenance on Pitch 1 to bring it to NPL level for the 2023 season;
- upgrade to the main changerooms in the JL Murphy Reserve Soccer Pavilion to provide female friendly facilities;
- cleaning, bulb replacements and repositioning of sports lighting on Pitches 1, 2 and 3;
- trimming of trees to improve lighting on Pitch 2;
- additional maintenance on Pitch 2 and 3 including renewal of turfed areas (unfortunately due to the underlying conditions of these fields - including drainage - the maintenance has not been able to address all ground issues);



- improved security lighting in the reserve carpark;
- fixing the ball netting at the ends of Pitch 1 (further work has been scheduled to address further repairs).
- temporary fencing repairs to address gate maintenance issues at the entrance to Pitch 1 and enable the club to continue to meet NPL requirements. Officers are currently seeking quotes to undertake permanent repairs to this fencing; and
- upgrades to the team bench seating on Pitch 1.

This aligns with the commitments made to the PMSC in August 2022.

In December, Council appointed an Open Space and Turf Management Officer. This new position now provides in-house expertise and is focused on improving the condition of all our sports grounds, including JL Murphy Reserve.

Capital Upgrades at JL Murphy Reserve

In line with the Asset Management Strategy and associated priorities, the following projects are scheduled to be undertaken at JL Murphy within the next 2 years. This will see a significant investment by Council of at least \$5.5 million in JL Murphy Reserve.

PROJECT	PROJECT DETAIL	TIMING OF DELIVERY	BUDGET
Full upgrade of Pitch 3	Conversion of natural turf pitch to synthetic pitch; including upgrade of sportsground lighting and drainage	October 2023 – March 2024	\$2.5 million
Full upgrade of Pitch 2	Sportsground redevelopment including irrigation, drainage and turf; and upgrade of sportsground lighting (to increase to full pitch).	October 2024 – March 2025	\$1.5 million
Installation of Baseball Diamond Lighting	Installation of new lighting on the baseball diamond (currently no lighting exists)	Installation 2023/24	\$1.1 million
Upgrade of Baseball Diamond Infield	Replacement of natural turf on the infield of the diamond, upgrading the baseball fencing and addressing drainage	December 2023 – April 2024	\$350,000



In the current 10-year plan Council also has these other sports grounds following grounds scheduled for upgrades, which will improve the condition of the grounds and increase the carrying capacity and therefore participation levels:

1. Lagoon Reserve Sports Field and Pavilion
2. Elwood Park - Head St A and B
3. Peanut Farm Reserve

The timing of upgrades to JL Murphy Pitch 2 and 3 aligns with the commitments made to the Club in August 2022.

Response to Petition Requests

The Petition listed five specific requests for Council to address, as follows:

Urgently upgrade lighting for pitch 2 and its surrounds

The existing infrastructure on Pitch 2 consists of two light towers which provide lighting across the northern length of the pitch only. This configuration does not spread the lighting adequately lighting across the entire sportsground, restricting night-time training to one side of the sportsground.

A full upgrade of sportsground lighting on Pitch 2, to provide lighting of the entire sportsground, is scheduled to occur in line with the sportsground redevelopment in 2024/25.

Pitch 3 lighting will be upgraded in time for the 2024 season and the newly upgraded ground to a synthetic surface will increase the opportunities for usage. The baseball diamond lighting will also provide additional training opportunities at JL Murphy Reserve once installed in 2024. As with all our grounds, allocations will need to consider all users.

Short term lighting solutions for all pitches were completed in early May - including cleaning, repositioning, and changing globes. These works have improved the lighting on all pitches, however have not addressed the lack of lighting on the southern side of Pitch 2.

Further to this, feasibility has been undertaken for other options to provide temporary improvements to lighting on Pitch 2 prior to the upgrades scheduled for 2024/25, including:

1. Attaching additional lighting arms to the two current light towers on Pitch 2. This cannot progress due to weight-loading and wiring compatibility within existing poles.
2. Inclusion of additional lighting infrastructure to the light towers at Pitch 3 to light the southern end of Pitch 2 for the 2024 season. This is not feasible due to both the distance between the light pole locations and Pitch 2 and the location of the existing Gumtree.

Placement of temporary lighting poles. This lighting is usually for events or construction sites where lighting is required in a concentrated area. This means that the poles are set at 8.5m high, in comparison to permanent sportsground lighting that stands at 25m. Therefore, they would only meet Australian Standards in a small area directly in front of the light tower, making them unsuitable for sport usage. Quotes received to provide this type of lighting from June 2023 to September 2024 (winter months only) was \$150k. The anticipated cost to undertake the lighting upgrade to



Pitch 2 as part of the redevelopment is \$275k – providing lighting of the entire sportsground to Australian Standards.

Prioritising Resurfacing of Pitch 2 over Pitch 3

Upgrades for both Pitch 2 and Pitch 3 at JL Murphy are included in Council's budget over the next two years. Planned timelines for works are detailed in the table in the *proposed upgrades* section above.

Community engagement began on upgrading Pitch 3 in 2022. At that time this ground was prioritised for upgrade prior to Pitch 2 due to:

- This ground is used by a variety of community groups and the upgrade would improve the response to increasing demand for ground allocations. Allowing Pitches 1 and 2 to remain exclusive use for PMSC.
- The upgrade of the ground to synthetic provides higher carrying capacity and the opportunity for multi-lines and multi-sport usage
- This ground could be used as an alternate site for PMSC when Pitch 2 and other grounds are being upgraded. As a synthetic pitch it will be able to take a higher load than if Pitch 2 (turf) was upgraded first.

The status of the two projects is as follows:

Pitch 3

- The first round of consultation has been completed for this project and the detailed design is due to go out to the community in the coming weeks.
- The project is due to begin construction later this year and is expected to be completed prior to the 2024 winter season. As a synthetic pitch construction can occur outside the peak grass growing season.
- [JL Murphy Reserve community pitch upgrade | Have Your Say Port Phillip](#)

Pitch 2

- Community engagement to develop the concept plan is due to start on this project in July 2023
- Construction is due to begin in October/November 2024, after the soccer season is complete.

Preferred timing for redevelopment of a natural turf pitch is September to March to ensure sufficient establishment times for the sportsground to be playable in the winter season (and impacting only one sporting season).

It is not possible to consult, create detailed design, undertake a tender/procurement process and appoint a contractor for Pitch 2 in time to construct the ground over the 2023/24 growth period.

Middle Park Junior Football Club Junior teams use Pitch 3 as their home ground and are very supportive of Pitch 3 construction timeline.

Council is continuing to work with the State and other funding parties on a potential collaboration to fund further upgrades at the reserve.



Permission to use adjacent grounds at JL Murphy

Prior to each season, clubs complete an online seasonal allocation application to outline their needs for the season. Grounds are then allocated across the municipality based on these requests. An online application was not received from PMSC for the 2023 season, so the allocation was based on the allocation provided by PMSC in 2022.

Pre-season PMSC were allocated usage at Lagoon Reserve and Buckingham Reserve. Options to use grounds at Elwood were also provided prior to Christmas 2022, after 1-2 weeks use the club stopped the use at this site - preferring to play from their home base at JL Murphy.

Once sites are allocated the club manage their game and training requirements on those grounds. Information on the specific training for each team has not been supplied to council, however it is our understanding that Pitch 1 usage is predominantly for the NPL men and under 21, while Pitch 2 and 3 are for the women and juniors. It is officer understanding that NPL men also have priority use of the main changerooms within the soccer pavilion.

Sportsgrounds across the municipality are at capacity as participation numbers increase within all sporting codes. JL Murphy Reserve is a highly utilised site, with five tenant clubs across the six grounds during the winter sporting season – including Port Melbourne Colts Football Netball Club, Port Melbourne Colts Junior Football Club, Middle Park Junior Football Club, Port Melbourne Baseball and Port Melbourne Soccer Club.

Due to the required use of sportsgrounds by the other tenant clubs at JL Murphy Reserve, there is no other availability at this location.

The carrying capacity of the JL Murphy grounds will be increased as grounds and lighting are upgraded over the next two years (soccer and baseball).

The club are encouraged to consider how they manage their allocated time on their allocated grounds to support equitable training access for their members.

Upgrade Club Facilities

Council completed an upgrade to the primary changerooms at JL Murphy Reserve Soccer Pavilion this financial year, to ensure they meet the needs of women and girls. These works included significant bathroom renovations to update showers to cubicle design. These works were at a cost of \$170k.

There is no allocated budget for the second changerooms (which are primarily used by female/junior teams) or for the canteen facilities. Further information on the projects as follows:

Change rooms:

- Officers have been working with PMSC regarding this request, and works would include new flooring, painting, and additional bench seating.
- Quotes are being sourced and if supported the works are expected to cost \$80k.

Canteen facilities:



- The current facilities have been assessed and are considered appropriate for the needs of a community sporting club and are at a higher standard than many of our other sports pavilions.
- As per their lease, PMSC can apply to conduct self-funded improvement works in line with the conditions and approvals process outlined within their lease agreement.

Provide Adequate Storage solutions

PMSC have a lease and exclusive access to the JL Murphy Soccer Pavilion and all its storage areas. In addition, Council has approved the addition of a shipping container used for storage at the rear of the building.

Additional external storage for goals will be included in the design for the Pitch 2 redevelopment. Storage options will be confirmed with the club during the concept design phase planned for July 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Receives and notes the Petition.
2. Thanks the petitioners for their Petition
3. Notes the identified need from Port Melbourne Soccer Club to upgrade the sportsground lighting for Pitch 2; but declines investment in temporary lighting measures as upgrade works are due to commence in 2024.
4. Continues with the current timing of delivery for the redevelopment of both JL Murphy Reserve Pitch 3 (2023/24) and Pitch 2 (2024/25).
5. Declines the request to permit use of adjacent grounds at JL Murphy Reserve due to sportsground capacity; but notes future use will be considered through the seasonal allocation process.
6. Declines the request to upgrade the canteen facilities within the JL Murphy Reserve Soccer Pavilion.
7. Approves \$80k to upgrade the second changerooms within the JL Murphy Reserve Soccer Pavilion to further support female and junior participation in sport (noting this would be prioritised within the budget and project management capacity of the minor capital works program in 2023/24).
8. Notes that additional storage facilities will be included in the upgrade to Pitch 2 and therefore declines the request to provide additional storage facilities onsite outside that project.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil