



7.1 Petition Response – Fishermans Bend Gymnastics Club (FBGC) Seeking Urgent Funding For Long Term Facility

A Petition containing 1350 signatures was received via change.org and received and noted by Council at the 4 October 2023 Council Meeting.

The Petition states the following:-

Why we urge the City of Port Phillip (CoPP) and the State Government to co fund a long-term venue for Port Melbourne-based Fishermen’s Bend Gymnastics Club (FBGC):

Not-for-profit FBGC has an outstanding reputation of providing invaluable year-round services to the local community for over 70 years and is the only dedicated gymnastics club in the City of Port Phillip.

FBGC has the largest child participation rate amongst community sporting clubs in Port Phillip with over 650 weekly members and thousands more actively participating in holiday programs, events and Kinder/School incursions; over 25,000 visits per year.

Children from diverse backgrounds and all ages and abilities participate in FBGC programs from grassroots to competitive state level – its ALP3 squad won the Victorian Championships last year. FBGC is held in high esteem in the gymnastics industry having previously been awarded Gymnastics Victoria’s Club of the Year (Medium Category) for two consecutive years.

Through careful management, FBGC is in a strong financial position but commercial rent in Port Phillip continues to rise and FBGC will be priced out of the market, resulting in an imminent closure if a more permanent venue is not secured.

Most other sporting clubs in Port Phillip pay only \$100-\$3K per annum rent (*CoPP Register of Leases) on council facilities whilst FBGC pays close to \$200,000 per annum as we do not have the benefit of being accommodated in council facilities. Our rent should be going back to Council and the local community and not a commercial landlord.*

Each relocation of FBGC costs the club close to \$80,000. We have already been forced to relocate three times over several years due to rent increases/facility works. The last rent increase was \$30k during Covid and forced our club to find an alternative premises. This is a huge financial and emotional burden on FBGC and a waste of resources which would be better spent upskilling staff, investing in equipment, and further developing programs for our community. The lease at our current premises in Salmon Street is secured until mid-2025 and thereafter apartments will be built on site, necessitating another relocation of FBGC.*

FBGC members are local residents (Port Phillip and City of Melbourne including Southbank and Docklands), and it can be disheartening seeing funding go towards clubs that pay players from outside Port Phillip to play professional sport whilst FBGC struggles to pay rent to provide children with life-long skills.

*Gymnastics is a crucial foundation sport that every child should ideally participate in from a young age; it has the second highest participation rate (behind swimming) in Australia from 1-8yrs of age and the third highest rate from 9-11yrs of age (*Ausplay 2022). Gymnastics sets children up with skills that are transferable to any other sport and life in general.*

FBGC is asking for an urgent and equal level of support that other clubs and sporting codes have when it comes to allocation of crown/council land and funding for capital works. This is

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particularly important when FBGC has the largest community club participation rate of children in the municipality. Predominantly female youth sporting clubs and sports like Gymnastics continue to be disadvantaged when there isn't a level playing field in terms of funding.

FBGC prides itself on its inclusiveness and accessibility and has forged excellent working relationships with various community stakeholders including South Melbourne Community Chest, Launch Housing and Team Sports 4 All. Collectively, we subsidise fees and offer classes for marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and offer one on one and all abilities sessions for children with special needs. FBGC also provides employment/coaching opportunities for all ages and our local youths particularly benefit from being mentored as part of our Leadership Program.

FBGC can further accommodate more senior groups, special needs groups and school groups if a long-term purpose-built facility is secured. City of Port Phillip would hugely benefit from a purpose-built facility that is a community hub, with FBGC running alongside an adjoining maternal health centre/kindergarten/school and meeting rooms/wellness space as population growth will further increase demand for these services.

People want their rate dollars to deliver quality services at a local level and FBGC is exemplary of the type of service that delivers long lasting physical, mental, emotional, and social benefits for local children and subsequently, better health outcomes for them as adults and a more engaged and thriving local community. A purpose-built facility will ensure that FBGC is sustainable and can continue to provide affordable programs that set children up with skills for life whilst also improving accessibility for people of all ages and abilities to improve their physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. FBGC has been overlooked for too long and is deserving of a long-term home.

We urgently ask you to please sign and share our petition via email and social media.

Please also contact City of Port Phillip Councillors and Mayor, Heather Cunsolo, and local MP, Nina Taylor, as they have the power to rectify this inequality of funding and invest in facilities that will provide FBGC and the local community with a long-term solution.

References:

**Ausplay 2021/22*

**City of Port Phillip Register of Leases*

**\$80k includes the storage, re-location and re-installation of equipment and cost of shutting down classes for weeks/months, and refurbishing toilets that are fit for purpose etc.*

OFFICER COMMENT

Council tabled the petition from Fishermen's Bend Gymnastics Club (FBGC) at the Council Meeting on Wednesday 4 October 2023.

Background

FBGC have been in operation for over 70 years and are currently reporting over 25,000 visits per year.

They are the only dedicated gymnastics club within the municipality.

FBGC are currently located in a commercially owned property in Salmon Street Port Melbourne, with the lease secured until mid-2025. They have been notified that this facility is



being repurposed into apartment buildings and therefore they need to find new accommodation.

FBGC are looking for a long-term 'home' and asking Council to support them in this request.

FBGC Facilities

Fishermen's Bend Gymnastics Club have moved location throughout City of Port Phillip a number of times. After a long history at Fishermen's Bend Community Centre, in 2016 the club moved to a warehouse in Boundary Street due to a significant increase in membership numbers. Another growth, combined with increased rent, has seen the more recent move to their current home in Salmon Street. Council supported the club's last move in 2021.

Both the current site and previous site are privately owned with the club paying commercial rent (total amount unknown). At the Salmon Street location, the available active space measures 950sqm, with 256sqm being sublet to Port Phillip Community Group (PPCG). Council is subsidising the rent paid by PPCG.

The club have been informed that the Salmon Street property is being repurposed into apartment buildings.

FBGC have now approached Council requesting a purpose-built facility. The request includes:

- minimum floorspace of 1000sqm
- roof heights of 6-7m (as per Gymnastics Australia Guidelines).
- sprung floor,
- apparatus and equipment set in place (i.e. cannot be packed down between use),
- suitable storage space and offices.

The club have also been informed that given time required for options and feasibility assessment, budget allocation, and then concept design, public consultation, land acquisition (if required), detailed design, procurement, and construction it is unlikely we would have a purpose built, permanent solution by 2025 even if Council determined to fund this in 2023/24 budget process.

Council's Property Portfolio

There is not a suitable facility within the current Council Property portfolio. The footprint of the original home to FBGC, the Fishermen's Bend Community Centre, measures only 255sqm. The largest space Council has in its portfolio is the auditorium at the St Kilda Town Hall, which is approximately 550sqm.

Melbourne Sport and Aquatic Centre is the main provider of community indoor sporting facilities within City of Port Phillip. Albert Park Indoor Sports Centre and South Melbourne Primary School also provide alternative indoor facilities.

Open Space

Port Phillip has limited open space and as we are a land-locked municipality there is little opportunity to access new land for open space. Due to increasing population density and more residents without access to private open space, there is an increased reliance on the City's public open spaces to provide for both passive and active recreation.

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As such access to our open spaces is highly contested and valued by the community for many activities including dog walking, community events, formal sport, informal sport and recreation. Many of Port Phillip's sports grounds are at, or over-capacity with the number of sport club participants and teams currently training and competing, and clubs are requesting greater allocation to sports grounds and facilities to accommodate present demand and future growth. It is a continual challenge for Council to provide opportunities for participation growth across many sports.

Every year we have a number of community groups requesting support from Council. Some are current and other new. In the last 6 months this has included gymnastics, climbing, padel tennis, diving, and netball/basketball facilities.

We are currently undertaking municipal-wide sport service planning will guide the future provision of sports facilities in the municipality. This Service Planning work is currently considering the provision of existing outdoor sporting grounds and associated infrastructure. This is the first step of developing a prioritisation framework to guide decision making for what council can and should provide for our sporting community. Further work to extend this framework to all requests relating to sporting funding applications will be undertaken as part of the Sport and Recreation Strategy review and update in 2024.

Fishermans Bend Planning

The Fishermans Bend urban renewal precinct is a unique opportunity to create a connected, liveable, healthy, and environmentally sustainable home to 80,000 new residents and provide 80,000 new jobs. The future needs across these new communities are significant and work is currently underway to understand the various sport, recreation, and open space requirements in response to such substantial growth. This work is currently focused on determining the location of key activities across the proposed open space network in Port Phillip. As a result, the demand for several recreation and sporting activities such as Gymnastics has yet to be explored. As planning continues to progress across Fishermans Bend it is envisioned these activities will be investigated further in the future.

OPTIONS ANALYSIS

The current building leased by FBGC will be coming to an end in 2025. Regardless of next steps from Council, there are no current opportunities for use of an existing or construction of a new building to facilitate the operational needs of the club by this time.

Council can consider the following long options.

Option 1: Advocate to the State Government to include a facility within Fishermans Bend

Cost: \$0

Council conducts high level advocacy and government relationship building on behalf of our community with the Victorian and Australian Governments.

Council has a range of funding requests and advocacy priorities across the municipality and many of them can be found on our website. Our priorities have been identified through Councillors, extensive community feedback, council officers and aligning State and Federal Government funding commitments. The Fishermans Bend Gymnastics Club could be considered for broader advocacy by City of Port Phillip to State and Federal Governments.



Option 2: Undertake Feasibility for a potential new site for FBGC.

Cost: \$120k

Timeline: 8 months (from inception)

This would include eight months resourcing, project scoping (minimum requirements, benchmarking), stakeholder engagement (inc. club and Gymnastics Victoria), partnership opportunities, professional services (surveys etc), detailed report, options and recommendations. To prepare a full Business Case report including project scoping, detailed design, cost plan and would cost an additional \$200k

The project would include consideration of an extension to Fisherman's Bend Community Centre and look at other potential sites across the municipality, particularly focusing on Fisherman's Bend.

If a new site was found funding for the project would need to be considered through future budget processes.

Recommendation

It is recommended that both advocacy is partnered with the development of a feasibility plan, with Council providing \$120k in funding. This will provide a clear understanding of the opportunities to support the FBGC.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Thanks the petitioners for submitting their petition.
2. Notes the benefits that gymnastics and the Fishermans Bend Gymnastics Club provide for our community
3. Continues to advocate to the Victorian Government to support a new facility for the FBGC within Fishermans Bend.
4. Provides \$120,000 in funding for a Feasibility Study, investigating options for new site for a dedicated gymnastics venue within the municipality.
5. Notes that funding to build a new gymnastics facility would need to be considered through the Council budget process.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil