

Councillor Question Time

Question from Councillor Pearl:

Can Council officers please provide an update to Councillors on developments to remove community gardens in Port Melbourne based on safety concerns, specifically at the Fishermans Bend Community Centre? What arrangements are being made to support the gardeners, and can you provide further background? Councillor Pearl further asked if there were any concerns raised by Council regarding contaminated soil or other contaminated items in the gardens?

Tony Keenan, General Manager Community Wellbeing and Inclusion advised that the removal of community gardens at this location was a decision of the Committee of Management who are responsible for running the gardens. The Committee felt it was too difficult to run the two sites and I understand they are liaising with gardeners as spaces become available at the other site.

Councillor Pearl further asked if there were any concerns raised by Council regarding contaminated soil or other contaminated items in the gardens?

Response:

Soil Contamination

Specifically in relation to the matter of soil contamination, Council's Soil Contamination Officer has advised no inspections have been carried out on the site and no orders relating to soil contamination have been lodged.

Information has been provided to SouthPort Community Centre in relation to minor / contained asbestos within the building. This was provided as information only, it required no action and did not directly relate to the garden beds nor any contamination issues.

Decision to remove community garden

Further background on the decision of SouthPort Community Centre (SPCC) to end the licence for the community garden to that provided at the Council meeting is as follows.

On January 25 2022, Council's property team were notified by the manager SPCC of the decision to not pursue a license for the Fishermans Bend Community Garden. There are nine garden beds at this location.

The manager has advised this decision was based on:

1. Dig In Committee's capacity to manage two settings
2. The impact of Covid 19 on both the group and the organisation
3. The ongoing assessment of priorities due to the impact of Covid 19 on services, and
4. The offer of garden beds in the other setting for gardeners impacted by this decision.

As the Auspice agent for the Property Licence, SouthPort Community Centre management advised Council that they would not seek to renew the licence for the site.

Council were also advised that the Dig In Committee would make contact with all existing gardeners at the Fisherman's Bend Community Centre site and offer each member a plot at the main site at Williamstown Rd. We are however aware that some members are not happy with the decision.

Council does not have a role in membership matters at Community Gardens.

Council Officers have raised the matter of the deadline on current gardeners to finalise matters proposing that Dig In extend the timeline for finalising matters by a minimum of a month (end of March). This would also offer time for Council to inspect the setting with regards to the remaining assets.

The previous garden arrangements were dependant on a property license between Council and an Incorporated Community Garden Group or auspice agent. Local gardeners could consider this as an option if relocation is not preferred. Details of pursuing such an outcome are contained in the Community Garden Guidelines. This information has been provided to some members who have contacted Council.

**Please note: answers to any questions in Public Question Time and Councillor Question Time which were answered at the meeting are included in the minutes of that meeting.*