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Submission to Future Melbourne Committee

City of Melbourne, Melbourne Town Hall,
18 March 2025, 5.30pm – Meeting No.4
Agenda Item FMC Agenda item Agenda item 6.3 Miles and Dodds Reserve Expansion - Outcome of
Community Engagement

Southbank Residents Association (SRA) is astonished with the process council followed for this project which has now lead to the proposal before you to not proceed with the project.

Open space is critical to Southbank and we feel our needs have been neglected for decades. There was an open space plan in the Southbank Structure Plan 2010 providing significant provision from the City Link decking, some 7,000 sqm, only for this to be arbitrarily taken from us last year in an FMC motion.

While this was an expansion of an existing reserve it was still expected to provide an additional 1278sqm of open space. Still a valuable contribution to our community.

We are particularly concerned with the process council adopted for the consultation, which, in our opinion, was poorly planned and/or executed as demonstrated by the poor response rate of only 113 contributions.

In particular, for past open space projects, the officers would specifically engage SRA for guidance, suggestions and advice on the best way to engage the community. Apart from being advised the project was on Participate Melbourne, no such effort was made from officers to reach out to SRA.

When addressing this with Fiona Finlayson, Acting Director Parks and City Greening, the report presenter, we were advised officers made a conscious decision to not engage as they were fearful the views of the residents surrounding the park may be drowned out by the wider community. I reminded Fiona that SRA doesn't represent specific pockets of Southbank, but rather the entire Southbank community, and we would have respected the wishes of the officers and could have provided more localized advice. Instead, we were overlooked, which we believe the response rate obtained is testament to councils' failure to engage us.

In any case, it is bewildering that council is proposing to discontinue the project because a mere 60 people objected, albeit a small majority.

The City of Melbourne employ some of the best urban designers, testament to the many awards received. Surely, rather than simply cancelling the project, the urban designers can go back to the drawing board and redesign the space to address areas of concern in search of a win/win.

During the recent council election the current Lord Mayor, Nichlas Reece, and his candidates spruiked the this specific site and that he will be delivering this as part of his open space commitment to Southbank. There were no caveats put on this promise. We expect this promise to be honored and delivered.

We respectfully request councilors reject the recommendation from officers and request they reconsider the design and engage SRA with future community engagements of such importance.