

SAPIENS

Newsletter of Save Albert Park Inc. A00409971X

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This beautiful tree lined sports ground is Albert Park's Oval 17, one of the park's 21 grounds which are occupied for grand prix purposes. Oval 17 is used for patron facilities such as toilets and merchandise sales and is unavailable for sports clubs from mid-February to late April. Shown here is the Middle Park Cricket club engaged in a match on January 24.

In this issue...

In this issue of SAPIENS we have focussed in detail on the amateur sport clubs based in Albert Park Reserve and how they have to cope with the annual upheaval created by the grand prix event. This is a very important matter because one of the main functions of the park is to encourage community participation in healthy outdoor sport and to provide the necessary grounds and facilities. Professional sport has always been catered for in the park but within its own separate venues, but professional motor sport at the F1 grand prix level, involving months of eviction of amateur clubs from their grounds is an unacceptable practice for a major inner city park.

Sports clubs in the park

At least 13 different sports are played in Albert Park Reserve: athletics, Australian Rules football, baseball, cricket, frisbee, hockey, netball, rowing, rugby union, sailing, soccer, tennis, and touch football.

Albert Park is home to at least 264 amateur sporting teams, comprising men, women, boys and girls (including some mixed teams). This number does not include the many sports activities not played in teams, such as sailing, tennis, Auskick, Junior Blast cricket, and senior and junior athletics.

Member clubs have about 5,800 registered members/players. Most of these are sports participants, but some clubs have significant numbers of social or non-playing members.

Park Reserve is the biggest collection of sports fields (including the lake) in inner Melbourne. It has been estimated that community sport generates up to 300,000 visits to the Park each year.

Sports clubs' association

The clubs based in the park are represented by the **Albert Park Community Sporting Tenants Association**.

Following are the Association's 'Principles', 'Purposes' and its views on the state of the park, all of which are of significance in relation to Save Albert Park's campaign.

The principles of the Albert Park Sporting Tenants Association

- **Community First:** Looking forward, community-based sports must take priority over professional or elite sports in Albert Park.
- **Support the Park:** The park must be retained as a public space, and no further encroachment from public or private entities can be tolerated.

- **Grand Prix: Albert Park is not the right place for the Grand Prix, which significantly impedes** community access and sporting activities. The event should be re-located elsewhere. While it remains in Albert Park, however, we will seek to work cooperatively with the AGPC to minimize the event's impact on community sport.
- **Members:** We seek to empower the members of the association and foster their growth and development within the park. Our policy positions will be based on consultation with member clubs and will reflect their views as much as possible.
- **Collective benefit comes first:** We will pursue the greatest benefit for the greatest number of clubs and members, putting this above the specific goals or views of individual clubs.
- **Promoting engagement:** We will promote the participation of all sports within the Albert Park precinct to the greater community.

The purpose of the Association is to represent the community sporting clubs within the Albert Park Precinct, in negotiations with external organisations such as Parks Victoria, City of Port Phillip, the Victorian State Government and the Australian Grand Prix Corporation.

These sports clubs are community based, and their members are largely drawn from the suburbs within several kilometres of Albert Park, in the municipalities of Port Phillip, Melbourne and Stonnington. Other teams and community members from all over Melbourne come to Albert Park to compete.

The Association believes that sport is a major driver of community health and wellbeing. The opportunity to come together with other members of the community, to get fit, improve skills, engage in enjoyable competition, and to socialise and identify with other locals and like-minded people contributes massively to the quality (and length!) of life for many thousands of Melbourne residents.

The state of the park, according to the Association

There have been few changes or developments, and little public investment in Albert Park sporting infrastructure since the major reconstruction of the Park in the mid 90s. The existing infrastructure has had limited maintenance, and in many cases both grounds and buildings are deteriorating, to the point where safety is becoming a real issue. This problem has been exacerbated by considerable population growth in the region over the period, driving increased demand for access, and increased pressure on existing community sporting facilities.

The City of Port Phillip has largely turned its back on Albert Park, leaving all management to Parks Victoria.

The sporting interests of local communities are being threatened by corporate interests (including both government and private entities), political point scoring, increasing competition for access to resources, and limited financial support. We find ourselves needing to continue to lobby and defend our interests in processes that are supposed to recognise and support our communities.

Parks Victoria released a new Master Plan for the Albert Park Reserve in 2019, after a very drawn-out and compromised process. The plan does little to clarify concrete steps to be taken to maintain and improve the Park and its facilities in the face of ongoing long term increase in demand. The Association is pushing Parks Victoria and the Government very hard to prepare detailed development plans – and fund them.

We note that all our dreams could be fulfilled for the foreseeable future for less than the cost to the taxpayer of a single Grand Prix event!

Sports clubs not consulted on November date for 2021 grand prix

On January 12 it was announced that the Melbourne 2021 F1 grand prix event had been postponed until 18-21, November. This announcement has caused great concern within the sports clubs based in Albert Park Reserve. The clubs' Association president, Hugo Armstrong, has issued the following statement on the matter:

The Association and its member clubs maintain ongoing working relationships with the Australian Grand Prix Corporation (AGPC), primarily to minimise the impact of the grand prix on Club activities and resources. Despite periodic speculation (mainly in the overseas motorsports media) about the impact of the pandemic on the 2021 Melbourne event, and the possibility that it might be postponed, the AGPC consistently advised clubs that nothing had changed regarding the 2021 event.

As recently as the week before the announcement, the AGPC told the Association that 'no decision had been made about any change of arrangements, and that it would consult with clubs if any decision was made. The Association pointed out that discussions after any decision could not be classified as consultation – only one-way communication!

The Association was advised only hours before the public announcement of the change of date. The postponement of the 2021 GP from March to November 21 is clearly good news for Clubs playing winter sports, including including AFL, hockey, rugby union and soccer. However it is of great

concern to Clubs playing sports in summer. These include cricket, baseball, athletics, rowing, and sailing; as well as clubs whose activities take place all year round, such as frisbee and touch football. The actual impact on these clubs is likely to vary greatly, according to the nature of their sport and their competition, and also according to their location within the Park, and the nature and level of GP activity taking place on their fields, lake or buildings. Some clubs will be largely unaffected; others could have their sporting seasons effectively ruined. Clubs will also be looking closely at the impact of the change on their membership, recruiting and finances. Again, this is likely to vary from club to club. As the new 2021 grand prix date has only just become known, clubs are currently working to analyse its impact.

We are also particularly concerned by the possibility of another GP in 2022 being held on or around the original March date – which would mean two grand prix events four months apart. The prospect of infrastructure being left on sports fields for this period is completely unacceptable.

The Association has had public assurances from both the Victorian Government and the AGPC that they will consult with clubs to minimise the impact. We welcome these assurances – but will continue to push strongly to see that these promises are actually kept.



This is Oval 21, unavailable for sports clubs for the past 25 years of grand prix events. The oval is used for a gravel run-off from pit straight (background) and is the site for the 'Chicane' corporate pavilion. At the left, the picture shows cricket being played on Oval 16. This oval is commandeered for grand prix purposes for two months.

Motor sports events: 'public pain, private gain'

Christine Everingham, the fierce opponent of the Supercars event, a leading light of the Newcastle community group NERG (Newcastle East Resident's Group) and the co-author of the book 'Wrong Track', has had an article, headed 'Grand Prix, Supercars 500, public pain, private gain', published on the 'West Report' website.

This article summarises the way secret agreements between governments and private corporations operate to mislead the public as to the economic value of motor sport events. The spending by event visitors is a crucial factor in determining the economic effect of the event, and attendance figures are used as the main indicator of this spending. However, event promoters are not required to count the actual number of patrons who pass through the gates, and highly inflated estimates of 'attendees' are published and quoted by government agencies in order to justify the public funding of the events and the use of public land.

The article notes that the South Australian government has admitted that the annual Supercars event is no longer economically viable and has moved it to a permanent track, but that there is 'no such economic honesty from the Victorian and NSW governments...'

The article concludes:

'Promoters push for street events primarily to secure advertising dollars. Lucrative deals are done with broadcasters: \$200million over five years in the case of Supercars and Foxtel. The circuit's fencing around public streets and parks also serves as extensive billboards for promoters to entice the sponsorship advertising that is shared by the promoters and broadcasters.'

Unfortunately, the lack of transparency afforded to public private partnerships ensures race promoters avoid any real requirement to prove value for money and it is a perfect cover for an endemic culture of cronyism.'

The 'West Report' is Queensland based. The article can be accessed by searching for 'West Report -public pain private gain'.

Nine months of disruption for the park?

With a November date for this year's grand prix, SAP strongly suspects the Grand Prix Corporation is going to pull a 'con job' on Victorians by leaving the race infrastructure in place for the next race in race in March 2022. This This may be in breach of grand prix legislation and would certainly cause up to nine months' disruption for Albert Park Reserve.. This has a precedent. In 1958, the last year of motor racing in the 'old' era when there were two race meetings, in March and November, and the infrastructure was left in place.

The public's displeasure went as high as the Premier, Henry Bolte, who saw an opportunity to rid the park of car racing. He announced Sandown Park would be the new home of motor racing and that's what happened. This year Sandown was called in as soon as the grand prix date was changed and will host a Supercars round in March 2021.

Another con job

The Grand Prix Corporation, has a long history of 'con jobs' related to attendance, economic benefit and TV audiences and has, predictably, adopted a concept that encapsulates an environmental 'con'.

Here's a major piece of spin from the AGPC chairman's 2020 report:

"Sustainability is a key focus of Formula 1® with Formula 1® cars now featuring some of the most energy efficient engines ever made, which drives innovation for sustainable technology for road users worldwide. AGPC provided input to Formula 1® on the development of Formula 1®'s global sustainability strategy in relation to the involvement and importance of the local community, public transport and the usage of parks and nature."

F1 cars use an internal combustion engine, consuming 110kg of fuel (that's 150 litres) per race. This equals a fuel consumption of around 50 litres per 100km. A light family car uses as little as 5 litres per 100km but even that level can't be called a 'sustainable' level.

The financial report on the cancelled 2020 event

The Grand Prix Corporation's 2020 Annual Report was issued just before Christmas, and it received little media attention which is surprising considering the unusual circumstances of the cancellation and the substantial amount of public funds involved. Because of the covid-19 pandemic, the US-based Formula 1 organization cancelled the event on March 13 after one day of racing. It appears that the \$34-35m cost of building and removing the temporary circuit in the park has been borne by the Corporation (using public funds of course) but the race hosting fee, normally paid in advance to Formula 1 (\$60m plus) has not been applied. Perhaps this fee is being held by Formula 1 to cover the 2021 race.

The Annual Report quotes a 'government investment' (ie operating loss) on the cancelled event of \$39.772m, plus \$4.168m in capital costs of the following works in the park: track and race infrastructure, event and services equipment, customer experience and engagement, event presentation, computing and ICT infrastructure.

The event was cancelled and the loss of public funds was substantially less, but every little helps to push the cumulative cost on this event towards its second billion

The Victorian government really likes parks

The Victorian government has announced that it intends to spend \$15m to create 13 new pocket parks and five off leash dog parks across Melbourne's suburbs. This is part of the government's ongoing \$154m *Suburban Parks Program*.

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio, has issued the following statement: ***"The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the importance of open green space close to home and these new parks will deliver just that – building on our reputation as one of the world's most liveable cities."***

"These parks will create local jobs while they're being built, boost surrounding local businesses and provide social, health and wellbeing benefits for families and their pets for years to come."

SAP agrees with all of that but wonders how the same government that talks along these lines acts as the promoter of car racing in one of Melbourne's most important parks.

SAP Members update We remain deprived of our office and meeting room in the South Melbourne Town Hall. Our next meeting will be the 2020 AGM postponed to March 2021. Date and venue will be advised. The SAP Park Volunteer Group continues to operate in the Ngaree Tree area on Wednesday mornings.
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