



By George Stavroulakis

VICTORY WOULD HAVE QUICKLY OUTGROWN FOOTSCRAY SAYS MAYOR

Melbourne Victory's controversial plans for Footscray Park didn't allow any room for expansion, says the local mayor...and the club would have quickly outgrown it.

Victory have been sent back to the drawing board after Maribyrnong City Council refused to grant them space for their Academy at their preferred Footscray site.

The grounds for the training Academy, intended for the club's women's and youth teams, was meant to exist as a non-profit facility in an area to be shared by other community groups and the general public in Melbourne's inner-western suburbs.

However, Maribyrnong city councillors, after hearing from residents' groups and other users, rejected the MVFC's proposals for the West Lawn area – located on the opposite side of the Maribyrnong River across from Flemington Racecourse – by a 5-2 vote during a highly-charged council meeting that saw some community groups ejected from the council's chambers.

During the meeting, councillors acknowledged certain community benefits would be gained from the MVFC proposal, as 47.9 percent of the Maribyrnong population is female and 30 percent of the council district's 91,347-strong population are under the age of 24.

Despite the strong demographic evidence that appeared to favour the club's bid, the council ultimately decided the MVFC project was of "no community benefit", citing issues of traffic strategies and access for participants of other sporting codes.

Previously, a 12-person panel concluded in August that the facility and grounds would be more of a "private business operation" that would benefit the club more than the Footscray community.

And the panel was also concerned the facility, over the course of its planned 21-year lease, would not be made available to the public whenever the MVFC would not be using it.

Victory officials have rejected those claims and the club said it would be "considering all of its options in light of [the Maribyrnong] Council's decision", calling it "disappointing and surprising".

The project had received a \$10 million grant from Victorian State Government towards the \$19 million proposal and the club had been working with Maribyrnong Council for the last



Park site within its proposed 21-year lease.

"Footscray Park would not have been a great location for them into the future, because of it being a passive open space, they would outgrow the three-pitch facility, and the nature of that site would not have allowed us to construct a fourth pitch, and so forth," she told FTBL today.

"We have to plan for an area that is the gateway to the fastest-growing region in Australia," Mayor Carter added, referring to the communities around her district and elsewhere, citing that Maribyrnong's population is set to double by 2040."

She added: "Melbourne Victory is certainly a part

four years.

The club also claims the council had been "contractually committed" to delivering the project under a deal with the club and the state government.

Now club is reconsidering all locations in any area of Melbourne – and not just within the western suburbs.

The MVFC's Footscray Park proposal and project would have seen the construction of three regulation-sized football pitches – one of which would have been a field-turf mixture of natural and artificial surfaces and another fenced off and used for Victory's competitive W-League matches – 10 light towers, a two-storey pavilion and associated structures.

An elite state junior academy would have also been established and housed on the site.

But Maribyrnong Mayor Sarah Carter feels determined and hopeful that the MVFC will look elsewhere around her district, such as at McIvor Reserve in nearby Yarraville as well as Barret Reserve, the Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre, and the Maribyrnong Sports Academy, all located around the Highpoint shopping centre, to build the facility.

Mayor Carter cited that the MVFC would benefit from those other locations around Maribyrnong in a greater fashion, given the club's growth and ambitions, and the club would have eventually encountered limitations with the Footscray

of that plan."

But now the club is left to ponder whether other sites, within the borders of the Maribyrnong council or elsewhere, would provide the necessary land required for such an ambitious endeavour.

Trent Jacobs, the MVFC's CEO, remains adamant that any Academy deals can be struck within the trinity of the club, the Maribyrnong City Council, and the Victoria State Government, with nearby Victoria University playing a side role as well due to the university's athletic training facilities and its sports science department.

"The obligation of the council was to provide the site... That leaves us to consider our range of options, but it is too early right now to advise what to do next," Jacobs said on Wednesday afternoon.

"We have an existing relationship with Maribyrnong Council, because our [women's and youth teams] training site is at Robert Barret Reserve. All options are being assessed at the moment.

"Footscray Park was a very strategic site for us due to the proximity to Victoria University, and our relationship with them."

He added: "Within that, we wanted to work with them, and we will continue to work with them."