



MERRICKS BEACH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION INC.

Registration no. A0021120U

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Funding request to Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Merricks Beach Tennis Courts Renovation Project

1. Background

Merricks Beach is located in the Red Hill ward, on the coast of Westernport Bay. Its residents and visitors prize its low-key seaside ambience and they work assiduously to preserve and protect its natural environment, including native flora and fauna, both on their own properties and in the wider village area. Almost all of our streets are unmade, and, aside from the Merricks Yacht Club, there is no built infrastructure or commercial development at all in the village.

Merricks Beach Residents Association Inc (**MBRA**) has around 160 member households, representing two thirds of the 240 or so dwellings in the village. The vast majority of those dwellings are used as holiday houses, although there is a modest but increasing number of permanent residents. Members pay an annual subscription, currently \$115. These subscriptions (totalling about \$18,500) are the MBRA's only source of income, apart from irregular, small donations. A copy of the MBRA's 2016/17 accounts is **annexure 1**.

In 1939, at the time of the original subdivision, land was set aside at the corner of Surf Street and Foam Street for the construction of tennis courts. Since 1991, the MBRA has been the registered proprietor of the land. It is unencumbered, and represents the MBRA's only real asset. A copy of the certificate of title is **annexure 2**. The MBRA pays annual rates of \$1,130 to the Shire, from members' subscriptions.

Under its constitution, in the event that the MBRA were to be wound up, its surplus assets must be given to the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

Apart from the Bill Carroll Reserve (Palmers Hill Road), which is on Shire land but is maintained by volunteer residents, the tennis courts are the sole facility for community recreation in Merricks Beach. They are in near constant use during the holiday periods and on weekends throughout the year. During the May and September school holidays, tennis lessons are provided to residents' children by a professional coach. The courts are also the venue of the 'Davies Cup', an annual tournament for residents which was first conducted (under that name) in 1984.

2. Current state of the tennis courts

Given their importance to the Merricks Beach community, the MBRA has, within its limited means, sought to maintain the condition of tennis courts as best as it can. Over

the past few years, work has been undertaken to improve the surrounding grass areas and to replace fencing and nets and net posts.

It is unclear when the present courts were built, but it is known that the last time that major works were done on them was in 1968. The courts consist of four reinforced concrete slabs with an expansion joint under each net. In recent years the playing surface of the courts has deteriorated to the point where the steel reinforcing on the western court is becoming visible, and the eastern court has been subject to heaving and cracking.

Rusting of the reinforcing mesh will lead to continued concrete degradation, and further cracking is likely as water infiltrates the surface. The heaving evident on the eastern court, if left unattended, may ultimately become a tripping hazard for players.

In addition, there are several trees either overhanging or pressing on the fence. These cause a significant amount of twig and leaf litter to be deposited on to the court surface which interferes with play and leads to a build-up of slippery organic moss and slime. This needs to be regularly removed with a high-pressure washer (a full day exercise). One tree in particular has been deemed responsible for the problems associated with the eastern court.

The fences themselves are in generally poor condition. An inspection in 2016 revealed that sections of the bases of a number of the corner posts were entirely corroded away, so that the upper sections were supported only by the cyclone wire, rather than the other way around. These posts were then replaced, but this was no more than a band-aid solution.

In addition, in most sections, the base of the fence is detached from the ground and badly rusted, representing a constant hazard when retrieving balls. Some work has been undertaken to reduce this risk by the installation of treated pine sleepers. Another band-aid.

3. Options considered by the MBRA

The MBRA has considered the following options for the courts:

1. do nothing;
2. fill the uneven areas and cracks in the courts with self-leveling compound and grind down the step created by heaving;
3. resurface the courts either with a cushioned acrylic surface or synthetic grass.

Doing nothing is not really an option, as the situation will continue to deteriorate. The second option is very much a (further) band-aid and will, at best, defer the problems for a couple of years. Moreover, it will not address the issues with the fences.

Accordingly, the MBRA has determined that it should pursue option 3, including also the replacement of the fences and associated tree removal and pruning.

4. Project Proposal

There are several elements to the project each of which are discussed below.

4.1 Trees

An arborist, Paul Whittington, has advised that the trees on the eastern, southern and western sides may readily be trimmed. There are two eucalypts on the northern side one

of which is pushing over the fence while the other, Paul feels, was responsible for the cracking and heaving on the eastern court. The root system of these trees extends 1.5 times the canopy size, which is consistent with the pattern of cracks. He recommended removal, as root barriers are not considered an option due to destabilization of the tree.

Paul Whittington quoted \$2,860 for this work, including the tree removal.

4.2 Fence Works

A quotation for replacement of the fences was obtained in 2015. The amount quoted was \$21,918. An up-to-date quotation can be obtained, but for present purposes, it is assumed that the cost of this work will be approximately \$24,000.

4.3 Tennis Court Surface

Proposals have been obtained from 3 tennis court builders:

1. Grassports;
2. ASTE; and
3. Pro Court.

Two treatments were discussed, cushioned acrylic and synthetic grass. Acrylic is a “rubberized” paint system comprising some 9 layers to achieve a smooth and relatively forgiving surface. Court speed is medium to fast. Synthetic grass is a 19mm cut pile “carpet” with infill sand. The amount of sand dictates the speed of the court that can range from slow to medium.

The general consensus amongst the contractors was to recommend synthetic grass over acrylic for the following reasons:

1. there will be a considerable amount of surface preparation for the acrylic due to the current poor state of the courts’ surface thus adding considerably to the cost;
2. the acrylic cannot hide any further cracking or movement, whereas the grass simply covers it up;
3. there doesn’t appear to be any plastic membrane under the concrete, which may cause failure of the acrylic surface due to water seeping up through the concrete;
4. the area between the courts can be covered with synthetic grass to give one continuous surface which will drain better, be more visually appealing and not require mowing; and (last but not least)
5. synthetic grass is somewhat more forgiving on ageing legs.

The scope of the works is to:

- remove approx 90m² of earth and the existing steel box from between the courts and replace with compacted crushed rock;
- install a box drain at the southern (central) end of the courts to discharge into the external eastern drain;
- install synthetic grass over the entire concrete court and centre area; and
- fill with silica sand and level.

The grass to be utilised is a medium duty club quality product known as Club 40 (or equivalent). It is guaranteed for 7 years and has an expected life span of 12 to 15 years.

Cost of the work has been quoted as follows:

- ASTE: \$34,364
- ProCourt: \$32,242
- Grassports: \$40,590 (excludes central area and drainage)

By way of comparison, ASTE quoted acrylic re-surfacing at \$39,974. The increased cost is due to the extensive surface preparation required prior to the application of the acrylic coatings.

5. Funding Proposal

On the basis of the above, the total funding requirement for the renovation of the Merricks Beach tennis courts is:

Tree works	\$2,860
Fencing works	\$24,000
Resurface courts	<u>\$32,250</u>
	\$59,110

The MBRA recognises that public funding is necessarily limited, and that the co-funding of infrastructure work by those who most directly benefit is both appropriate and mutually beneficial. It has taken this approach over many years with respect to works done on behalf of the Shire by its contractors to maintain and improve the roads and drains networks in Merricks Beach, regularly contributing 50% of the cost of such works.

Accordingly, the MBRA seeks funding from the Shire Council of **\$30,000** to enable these works to be undertaken.

The balance would be funded by MBRA members and other Merricks Beach residents, including by a voluntary levy on members which is expected to raise approximately \$15,000, from additional donations and by depletion of the MBRA's cash reserves (up to \$14,110).

6. Conclusion

Merricks Beach is a largely self-reliant community, and makes little call on the Shire's resources or funds, almost the only exceptions being for road maintenance works and waste collection. On this occasion, however, the amount required to ensure the ongoing availability of this important community asset is too great for the MBRA or its members/residents to cover without a contribution by the Shire.

The Merricks Beach community respectfully requests the Shire Council's favourable consideration of this funding request.