



Summary of Middle Park Library Meeting at Port Melbourne Town Hall on Tuesday 13 February

Prepared by JTA Australia



Preamble by Jan Taylor

The following notes have been prepared by Jan Taylor using a composite of notes prepared by Zantea Chulio and Barrie Spring of JTA Australia. They are not verbatim notes but do present a summary of attendee views at the meeting on 13 February.

JTA was asked to do this by the City of Port Phillip Council on the basis that JTA would be completely independent in its facilitation of the meeting and preparation of notes from it. Similarly, Council guaranteed JTA's independence in analysing and synthesising the survey returns and submissions, and the final Engagement Report which will represent an amalgam of all consultation undertaken in relation to proposed changes to services at the Middle Park Library.

JTA appreciates the integrity of Council staff in remaining at arms' length from the exercise while providing all the assistance sought by JTA.

Where any wording in the following notes is in *Italics* that section was provided by Council staff after the meeting. Where answers have not been provided the limited time available made it impossible to collect the information in time. This will subsequently be placed on Council's Have Your Say website.

Public meeting summary – Tuesday, 13 February 2018

Jan Taylor (JTA) Open meeting and Introduction

Explanation of late start time provided. It was to ensure attendees brought across by bus from the original venue were present before the meeting started.

Rules of engagement for the evening discussed.

Apologies from Cr Louise Crawford. All other councillors present.

OH&S representative from City of Port Phillip

Housekeeping matters including safety and fire evacuation procedures.

Carol Jeffs (General Manager Community Development from City of Port Phillip)

Presentation on Council's process/history of proposal

- Presentation on Council's process/history of proposal
 - The Port Phillip library service is centrally managed
 - Council tracks the annual number of loans and visitors to Port Phillip libraries. This information is released in Council's annual report.
 - Middle Park Library was responsible for 1.1 per cent of total library visits and 1.5 per cent of hard copy loans in Port Phillip. Therefore,

Middle Park Library was the library service with the least visits and loans from 2016 to 2017.

- Context of library service
 - We recognise that libraries deliver much more than just visitation and loan figures. They are a service at the heart of our community, a place that everyone is welcome to visit to research, relax, reflect and learn.
- How to make best use of space. It is about transforming/reinvigorating the library – not about closing.
 - The physical space at Middle Park library offers opportunities for creative working spaces that our larger branch libraries just don't have.
 - Middle Park operates as a stand-alone space, at street level not embedded within a larger library footprint. It can be accessed independently of the larger Middle Park Community Centre building but still maintains internal access to toilet and kitchen facilities and to larger meeting rooms upstairs.
- Report to Council late March with results of survey, meeting and submission.
 - In January 2018 JTA Australia was engaged to undertake analysis of the survey and open submissions received, and to facilitate this public meeting.
 - JTA will prepare a community engagement report that will gather all feedback to date for Council to consider. This includes feedback that we hear tonight and any submissions that arrive before close of business this Friday.
 - A Report, including an engagement report, will be presented to Council in late March 2018

Barrie spring (JTA)

Presentation on JTA's preliminary findings from surveys and submissions received to this point:

- 17 November to 17 December (original consultation via online and hardcopy surveys, email and written submissions to council/councillors).
- 17 November – 16 February (extended consultation period)
- Every submission/survey has been read at least once and will be looked at several times in the process of preparing the final Consultation Summary Report.
- Key themes (some sub-themes) include but not limited to:
 - support for areas of proposal
 - survey responses do show support for many of the ideas put forward
 - reasons against the proposal
 - Middle Park the wrong demographic
 - libraries need books
 - alternative proposals
 - Children's Learning Centre
 - Install a pickup/drop off service
 - support for existing service
 - community hub

- elderly residents
- children/families
- existing service – what's wrong?
 - hours limited and erratic
 - service not sufficiently funded
- role of the public library
- consultation process
 - initial survey assumed proposal was going ahead
 - survey did not allow for disagreement or further comment.

Jan (JTA) Open for community questions and comments

Outline of the time limit for speaking as well as start and finish times for the meeting.

Submissions are until close of business Friday 16 February.

Community Questions and Comments

Q: Why wasn't the collection of books at Middle Park Library considered in the proposal? Perhaps a drop off/pick up service?

A: Not included in current proposal due to limited floor space; this is one of the things that may now be considered by Council.

Q: Council received a \$1.3mil State Government grant for libraries, on what basis was it allocated across branches and how much did Middle Park Library receive?

A: Grant is for whole of library service. As such the branch breakdown was irrelevant because the library service is done for whole of library.

C: If there is a State Government library grant allocation, it's only fair to include it in the Port Phillip Library Service Summary table statistics provided tonight.

Q: What is the point/aim of this meeting?

There were two answers to this question.

- Jan (JTA) responded that the primary purpose of the meeting was to gather further community feedback.
- Carol Jeffs (Council) then responded that as a result of the feedback received via the survey, Council needed to do a more in-depth consultation and this meeting was one of the ways to achieve that.

Interruption to proceedings. Facilitator briefly stopped the meeting to ask an attendee to stop using his phone.

Q: I'd like to clarify the thinking of the first proposal. What was the reason? Was it due to attendance, money etc.

A: The Council plan and direction is to change the use of libraries. Data showed Middle Park has the lowest lending rates compared to the other four libraries. It is a small space, we were looking at its use in a strategic way. Not every branch should or can provide every service.

Q: Figures on handout show fewer hours/visits compared to other libraries. Do the numbers on the handout include story time attendees? Could Middle Park be considered a venue to host story time to attract a younger age group (it currently does not)?

A: The figures reflect numbers of users through the door so includes story time in other libraries and branch opening times. Figures are consistent across the board and accommodate different hours, floor space and raw data.

C: Middle Park needs more seating. Will there be more seating/services available in the new proposal? What about the installation of virtual reality computers.

C: Supportive of parts of proposal but why does it need to be at the cost of Middle Park. The issues are muddled.

Two questions

- Will the new proposal be based on study/research that shows more people will be serviced than are through the current service at Middle Park?
- Do you (Council) measure everything simply by a dollar?

C: My children used the library; I do not want to see a move from physical books at the library. Children get joy from learning and literacy.

Q: Calling this a transformation is wrong, it is a closure because you are removing the books. What alternatives may have been considered to the proposal?

A: The Middle Park Library is a small, quiet space and offers an opportunity that other library services might not realise. It is not about closing the library but rather transforming it and we are open to hearing ideas which can be different to the current proposal.

C: Closing the book service/library is the real issue and will affect young families and elderly the most. It is a place of connectedness, community and social interaction for many people.

C: I have a personal history of the library services at Middle Park and Emerald Hill. Most of us understand that a library will always be a place with books. I can remember a time when there were double the number of books at Middle Park. In 2012, Middle Park saw five times the number of visitors. The building has been repeatedly shut and, remodelled; the hours are erratic and there is a lack of continuity in staffing. Less loved branches get less love.

Q: Referring to handout on figures for opening hours, how often are the upstairs rooms occupied while the library is open? Could this space be better utilised rather than close the library?

A: Council's Community Facilities team manages the meeting rooms.

Council will provide this information shortly.

C: Middle Park figures on handout show it should stay open, not be closed, especially the upstairs room to be kept open for library services/mix use room.

C: I sit on a library committee. Discussion on fundamental value of books and a multimodal purpose at library is not supported. There needs to be equity in local access and accessibility by all users especially the elderly. It's not just the dollar value of people walking through the library doors.

C: Referring to the handout, figures for borrowings per hours open would be interesting - different to total 'borrowings'. There is no variation at Middle Park over the last three years. There is a suggestion that Emerald Hill library is to be redeveloped.

This information is displayed in the table below.

Total Visitors

	2015-2016	2016-2017
Albert Park	133,278	127,980
Emerald Hill	64,039	71,038
Middle Park	6,875	7,870
Port Melbourne	121,683	117,016
St Kilda	344,304	363,661

Opening Hours

	Per Week	Per Year
Albert Park	56	2,912
Emerald Hill	40	2,080
Middle Park	24	1,248
Port Melbourne	48	2,496
St Kilda	62	3,224

Visitors Per Hour

	2015- 2016	2016- 2017
Albert Park	45.8	43.9
Emerald Hill	30.8	34.2
Middle Park	5.5	6.3
Port Melbourne	48.8	46.9
St Kilda	106.8	112.8

Assumptions

This does not take into account public holidays or when individual libraries are closed.

C: I'm also here to represent young families who love the library although they couldn't be here (due to meeting time). There needs to be a consultation process that suits everyone.

Q: Will there be another 'Have Your Say' survey for the people who couldn't attend tonight's meeting?

A: Submissions are open until Friday 16 February, followed by an engagement report by JTA Australia to be presented to Council late March when it will decide what happens going forward.

Q: Request was made for a new survey due to the bias in last survey and for those not able to attend tonight.

The consultation period was extended to include a public meeting. The independent consultants are currently reviewing all feedback received. The final consultation summary report will be presented at the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 21 March 2018, and the Councillors will determine the next steps for the Middle Park Library. Any further engagement, if any, will be included in the Council decision

Q: Has a projection been done on the \$47,000 budget for the redevelopment of Middle Park? Does the projection include the figures included in handout?

A: A budget of \$47,000 was allocated to this project. This was to be put towards refurbishments.

Q: Is it a flexible fund?

A: Further funds might be needed if there are variations to the original proposal.

C: Agreement with other points about service being ceased as part of original proposal. Re the perceived lack of space to retain the collection service there is a currently a 120cm reserve shelf at Middle Park. Suggest the investigation of 'book reserve lockers' outside the lift/meeting room (University of NSW system).

C: Story provided around childhood and use of library. Reiterated the value of browsing books in libraries. Older generation need the access/exercise that the library offers.

C: Attendee uses the library with his grandchildren but must drive to other libraries for story time service as Middle Park doesn't have one. Does not believe the upstairs computers five) are used – maybe that space could be used for the proposal. There is a Tai Chi teacher at the Middle Park community centre and it is used a lot. We pay rates to continue and improve the service at Middle Park

C: I represent families who use the Middle Park Library and don't understand why collection/services need to stop. Door numbers are not a good barometer if the hours are limited. I use the library at least once a week and it offers a quieter space than other libraries in the district. Lots of people use it to engage. It will be hard to engage the local community if you take away the library.

C: The target audience for the proposal (18-25 years) is already using digital platforms at home (this area is very affluent) and will not be encouraged by a dedicated space. The area still needs to cater for all ages (seniors and young children who can't drive). The current hours are not good and need to be extended as well as a dedicated staff member appointed rather than casuals. There is a need for the entrance to be relocated to the exterior of the building as it is impossible to see when the library is open and improve the signage which is non-existent. Book collection is woeful. Move the toy library to upstairs and expand library with more desk space.

C: I have daughters who are 21 and 23 (who went regularly when younger to Middle Park) and they do not support the proposal as they feel they have enough online resources at their university libraries and at home. Digital resources don't need physical space, but books do.

Q: The information about the engagement process and tonight's meeting will only be sent to people who have registered but there has been a lack of communication. Should not be limited to just current users of the library, rather expand to all community so all people are informed. Can the meeting summaries be distributed elsewhere?

A: Distribution is only limited by your imagination. It is encouraged that the meeting summary be sent/forwarded to others and it will go on the Council website. It can also be made available at libraries and Council offices.

Q: Why did the Council engage us now, rather than at the start during the concept/proposal stage. Seems like it is the wrong way around.

A: Good question. Sometimes difficult to decide which way to go. It was good to get direction first (Council plan), then engage. However, I acknowledge (as supported by the number of people here tonight) that maybe things could have been done differently but good engagement takes budget and time so can be difficult to balance expectations.

A: No such thing as perfect engagement. This is a learning process for everyone – all views are invaluable.

C: In referring to the handout, why can't we change the figures to a 'happiness/enjoyment scale' rather than costs? And to add a frivolous comment "as the cost per visit for the library is declining, they will soon be paying us".

C: I believe the engagement process is fake and that Council has already made the decision. Middle Park is the smallest suburb, has the smallest library and it is the thin end of the wedge.

Community member became heated, made threatening comments and so was escorted out of the meeting.

Five-minute break

Jan (JTA) Councillors were invited to provide short comments.

Return to attendee Questions and Comments

Q: I'm a member of the monthly book club at Middle Park. Did the Council do any business case to repurpose the library as part of the original proposal? Can Council demonstrate how many would use it, have 18 – 25-year-olds been asked? Has the Council budgeted for ongoing costs? Older generation have not been properly consulted. Is this proposal happening or are we here so you can feel like you have heard us?

A: Mayor/Council are keen to be part of the engagement process and will review the final report by JTA Australia and are open to new ideas.

C: I do not believe that a \$47,000 budget will be enough for the redevelopment project/proposal. I do not believe the library service needs to shut down, and think the two issues have been "stitched together" (e.g. if you want this, you will have to lose that). The main problem is how it has been put to the community rather than overall purpose of transforming it. "Don't throw away the baby with the bathwater"

C: Young mothers could not get to the meeting and are not represented. Referring to the handout, should there be an opportunity to change the low usage rates, how did this happen? The current opening hours only match with the kindergarten service for one hour a week. Middle Park Library is 400m away from local primary school however it is shut three afternoons a week. I have sent a ten-point plan to Council today which outlines ways to redevelop the library and make it a success.

C: Proposal should not just be driven by attendance rates. Council appears to be trying to meet a certain demographic who don't use the library?

C: Consultation process is a concept from USA called 'push-polling'. How will community engagement happen in the future? There is no public transport at other libraries and I enjoy walking to Middle Park Library with grandchildren. I'm a former school principal, libraries were always at the centre of schools – an important part of kids becoming good adults. Digital cannot replace physical books.

C: Acknowledged the world is changing; has been in the community for 53 years and am also a grandparent. Have watched the battle by my daughter to get grandchildren off screens; she needs the books to stay at library.

C: Point of view of a teacher. What exactly is a creative space? Is it just about bean bags and coffee to create entrepreneurs? There also needs to be effort, knowledge, mentorship that only a library can give. Not sure how the librarians will cope with managing all the young people.

Q: Can I get a commitment by Council that it will not do anything until the issues have been fully looked at and settled?

A: I can commit that Council will not be proceeding with anything until the final report goes up to Council in late March.

C: A way to attract more 18 – 25-year olds would be to increase the number of science fiction books. There are 2,700 titles available in the library service, currently only 18 on the shelf at Middle Park. It would save a lot of money rather than changing the whole use of the library.

C: I have been advised today via Parliamentary Friends of Australian Books and Writers) that tomorrow (14/2/18) will be National 'Love your Library Day'.

C: I'm disappointed that the meeting has not put forward a serious case for a new proposal. We need to know how it's going to be changed for the better? We need another meeting to hear a serious proposal backed up by running costs and opening hours statistics.

C: How will this process be different and not take away the book service from Middle Park? There will be existing resources, hours and staffing – just no books.

Jan (JTA)

In the absence of further comments or questions I'll bring the meeting to a close now. Many thanks to all attendees, councillors, and staff. In finishing let's remember James' comment re tomorrow being "Love your Library" day.