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News

Calls for a revamp to Emerald's Puffing Billy playground space

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Community members gathered at Emerald's Hills Hub on Wednesday 22 February to discuss future plans for the park and playground space next to Puffing Billy Railway in the town. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

By Tyler Wright

There are calls for the park at Puffing Billy Railway Station in Emerald to be revamped, with a meeting at the Hills Hub organised by the Emerald Village Exercise & Recreation (EVER) group drawing Puffing Billy Railway CEO Peter Abbott to the consultation with around 30 community members.

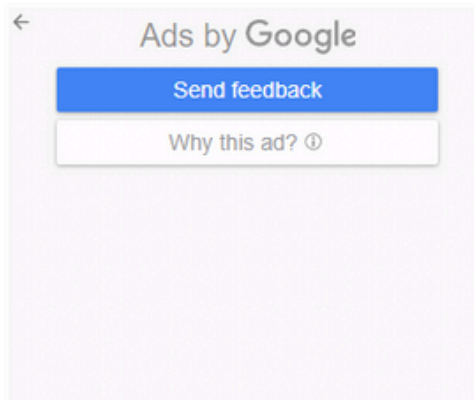
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"If I can do it, you can too"
Sharon Strzalecki, CEO/Founder

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EVER founder and Emerald resident Vanessa Kewish said a survey distributed through survey monkey in 2020 saw 270 people share that they wanted the park to be revamped.

"It's a bigger project, and it wasn't something that I thought I could sink my teeth into alone," Ms Kewish said.

"I don't think it's something that just the EVER group and just the EVA (Emerald Village Association) can do alone. I think that we're going to have to have rotary on board, the lions club, the real estate agents. I think it's a full community project or else it's not going to get the uptick that it needs."

Ms Kewish said concerns raised by the community at the meeting was the old equipment, lack of drinking fountains or taps, and the maintenance of the bathrooms.

"This is a playground where when you have a kid's birthday and during Covid you couldn't be inside, that's where everybody went to have their kids birthdays," Ms Kewish said.

"There are two picnic tables, so that would be really cool to have some more facilities and some more interesting playground equipment.

"The park at this stage needs to be multigenerational; we've got to have every age group satisfied."

Puffing Billy Railway CEO Peter Abbott said one of the clear messages from the meeting was that passing the Puffing Billy train is a true highlight for park users.

"We want to work with the community to see how the heritage listed Emerald Station can link more directly to the area," Mr Abbott said.

"We are doing some initial planning around how we can store additional rolling stock securely to help us manage vandalism that we continue to experience at Emerald Station, as well as general maintenance and vegetation maintenance to improve the appearance and security of the area.

"Working collaboratively with Cardinia Shire, who operate the park, will support the Emerald community's efforts to redevelop the park into a well-equipped, community-centred open space that encourages people to enjoy nature. We just want to ensure that any future plans for the park also incorporate how it can link to Emerald Station."

Ms Kewish said the next stage of the revamp is community consultation.

"This park is the "front garden" of Emerald and is a very important place for locals and tourists alike and we have an opportunity to help steer the creation of a true community space," she said.

"If we simply replace the play equipment we're doing the community a disservice in the long run."

A Cardinia Shire Council spokesperson told the Star Mail Puffing Billy Park Reserve is crown land, with Puffing Billy Railway the assigned land manager.

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“Cardinia Shire Council has an agreement with Puffing Billy Railway for council to maintain the reserve, including the playground and toilets,” the spokesperson said.

“Reserve grounds are maintained on a regular schedule, and any community requests related to maintenance can be made to council.

“The council is currently preparing its draft 23/24 budget, which will outline any funding for parks and open spaces. The draft budget will be available for community consultation prior to council considering it for adoption (expected to be in June).”

To have your say on the park via the EVER group, visit

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfloBvjGhLIT4fxsRORHvhDwUqZCIq1D4opGfKx5wYTXVc-u8A/viewform>



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