

Councillors vote for rates to rise in Hunters Hill

RATES will rise in Hunters Hill by 9.7 per cent next year.

The rate rise was endorsed at last Wednesday night's Extraordinary Council meeting with independent councillors Ross Williams, Justine McLaughlin, Jim Sandersen and Elizabeth Krasso voting in favour of the rise with Deputy Mayor Ben Collins and his Liberal colleague Zac Miles voting against it.

The rate rise will see a home valued at around \$1 million dollars

charged an additional \$3.40 in rates per week.

The rate rise motion was put by Mayor Mark Bennett (Ind) who stressed that Hunters Hill Council's survival depends on it, because the State Government has previously threatened to merge it with the City of Ryde if it is not financially sustainable.

"If we don't raise rates we risk our independence, regardless of what

you think about forced council amalgamations" the Mayor said.

"Living week to week, hand to mouth from the state government is not an option."

Mayor Bennett blamed cost shifting by the government onto councils for the rate increase as well as need to maintain ageing assets and pay increased legal fees alongside the financial pressure of increased

community demand for services and place development commitments.

"The rates we generate have not kept pace with our costs and in the last 12 months we have been burdened with additional costs such as the independent planning panel and audits," he said.

"We also have a lot of unrateable housing and public housing."

Deputy Mayor Ben Collins blamed poor management by councillors for what he de-

scribed as the "dire financial situation" the council found itself in.

"We have failed the community and here we are asking them to bail us out," he said.

"We haven't even been able to balance the budget and we should be thinking of ourselves as a board of directors, not as a committee planning a party."

The Deputy Mayor singled out the \$359,000 Hunters Hill pays the City of Ryde each year to share library services as an example of a "rip off" endorsed by other councillors.

"This is a fact and a proven fact," he said.

Councillor Miles said increased government fees and charges should

not be blamed for the rate rise and he proposed an unsuccessful amendment to the rate rise motion to have councillor wages cut by the same 9.7 per cent being charged to rate-payers.

"We cannot assume that people can pay this 10 per cent rate increase on top of the taxes they already pay," he said.

"The answer to our problem is not to increase rates but to look at how we can raise money from other sources."

Independent councillors noted that a recent phone poll of 400 Hunters Hill residents approved of a rate rise as preferable to cuts in services, as long as they

know how and where their money is being spent.

Councillor Williams stressed that the financial pressures on Hunters Hill are the same pressures faced by councils across Sydney which are being squeezed by "obscene and absurd" government cost shifting policies and new fees and charges.

It was also stressed that a well maintained council will increase property values.

The Hunters Hill Council website has a calculator to help residents determine the amount of extra rates they will pay, based on the value of their property and their location.



Councillor Jim Sandersen, Cllr Ross Williams, General Manager Lisa Miscamble, Cllr Justine McLaughlin, Mayor Mark Bennett and Cllr Zac Miles are pictured beside the Hunters Hill Christmas Tree at the Town Hall on Thursday night. TWT on-the-spot PHOTO

Christmas Greetings to all from Mayor and councillors

HUNTERS HILL Mayor Mark Bennett sent this Christmas message to readers of The Weekly Times.

"On behalf of our councillors and staff, we wish you all a very happy Christmas."

"It has been a busy year with former General Manager Barry Smith leaving a new General Manager Lisa Miscamble starting with us.

"The enthusiasm Lisa Miscamble has shown gives us great confidence for a very bright future.

"An important legacy of the previous term of Council is that all of our councillors live in Hunt-

ers Hill, the same area they make decisions about at each council meeting.

"I also thank those of you in our community who attended committee meetings and council meetings during the year because you have better informed our decision making.

"Our volunteers continue to contribute their time and expertise to the community and we are very proud of them and appreciate their service.

"We are also fortunate

to have many amazing and talented citizens in our creative arts and cultural communities and others who care for our heritage, our young people, our senior citizens and our natural environment.

"I further extend our best wishes for Christmas to the citizens of our Friendship Pact municipality, Le Vesinet in Paris, France: Joyeux Noël!

"I hope you'll enjoy Christmas and the opportunity to catch up with your friends."