

District Northern Times

Backflip: Hunters Hill, Lane Cove win legal battle with state

\$621k MERGER FIASCO

WHEN Premier Gladys Berjiklian gave up on the government's battle with Hunters Hill and Lane Cove councils to force them to merge with Ryde the legal bill stood at \$621,473.67.

While all three councils are happy that their amalgamation has been called off – and that the cost of the legal

challenge is being reimbursed – they are anxious that legislation be put in place to prevent any forced mergers in future. The legislation being discussed tomorrow will at least require councils to hold a referendum to ask residents whether they want to merge.

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Death to merger celebrated

Three councils, anti-amalgamation lobbyists 'ecstatic' over state government's backflip on legal fight

Steven Deare

HUNTERS Hill, Lane Cove and Ryde have succeeded in their five-year battle against amalgamation and will continue as stand-alone councils.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian last week abandoned the government's court battle against the councils contesting amalgamation.

She said the court proceedings had become lengthy and costly, and the government's merger policy was about putting ratepayers first.

Critics of the mergers were elated, particularly at Hunters Hill, where many residents backed the council's expensive court challenge.

On Monday, the NSW Court of Appeal ordered the government to pay the costs of five challenging councils, including Hunters Hill and Lane Cove.

Latest estimates put Hunters Hill's costs at \$375,748.32, while Lane Cove's were \$245,725.67.

Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition co-convenor Ross Williams said: "We're

was also equally pleased.

"Ryde has strongly held the position – unanimously among councillors – that we're opposed to forced amalgamations," he said.

"I'm pleased to see our city will remain as is.

"We're kicking goals in Ryde and it will be good to see that continue."

Ryde chose not to join Hunters Hill and Lane Cove in the courts.

Mr Williams and Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn said they hoped a merger proposal would not return.

This is not the first time Hunters Hill has had to fight to continue as a stand-alone body.

Mr Quinn and Mr Williams want the government to formally pass the bill which would require a referendum be held for any proposed merger and allow residents of merged councils to vote on whether the amalgamations should be reversed.

A statement from Lane Cove Council expressed relief that Ms Berjiklian's decision confirmed that the government's proposed merger of Lane Cove with



Save Hunters Hill co-convenor Ross Williams, Mayor Richard Quinn, Save Hunters Hill co-convenor Phil Jenkyn and Cr Justine McLaughlin.
Picture: Colin Kerr

Cove community and staff who have endured the drawn-out process which

September 9 local government elections.

Some were cautious about

ecstatic. It's a great victory for local communities over the state. It's a wonderful vindication of what we've been fighting for."

Ryde Mayor Bill Pickering

Hunter's Hill and Ryde can never proceed without legislative changes.

"This marks the finalisation of a four-year process of uncertainty for the Lane

has ultimately resulted in the retention of Lane Cove Council," the statement said.

Ms Berejiklian's decision also gives certainty to voters and candidates ahead of the

their plans to stand for election to a council which was still facing dismissal by the government.

At Ryde, a major issue facing a newly elected new



council is the future development of the Civic Centre and Civic Hall.

The council had selected a preferred design for the site – recently named Ryde Central – but had been restricted from major building construction work.

Ms Berejiklian's decision ends a merger saga that has dragged on since former local government minister Don Page appointed an Independent Local Government Review Panel in March 2012.

Twenty council mergers went ahead in May last year.