

Hunters Hill seeks Plebiscite to allow Public to decide!

BY OUR CIVIC ROUNDSMAN

Hunters Hill Council voted on Monday night to hold a plebiscite on the proposed forced merger with neighbouring Lane Cove and City of Ryde Councils.

The non compulsory plebiscite would be conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission at a cost of \$100,000 to be paid for by either the Federal Government or the Council after 28 days notice.

Expected to be held on the July 2 Federal Election Day it will ask: Do you support the merger of Hunters Hill Council, Lane Cove Council and the City of Ryde. YES or NO ?

If the plebiscite is approved by the Commission, the Council will seek a stay of its current legal action against the Baird Government which recently announced the forced merger.

The vote for a plebiscite was carried five to two with Councillors Gary Bird and Zac Miles voting against it.

Councillor Miles said he opposed spending \$100,000 on "a whim" when the Council could be Proclaimed and placed under administration within weeks.

Mayor Richard Quinn said he would be surprised if the Baird Government did not accept the plebiscite's outcome and argued it is better to spend \$100,000 now than spending millions on future de-merger costs.

The plebiscite can be held under the provisions of John Howard's 2007 Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill which the former Prime Minister introduced to challenge what he described as "the arbitrary jackboot fashion" of forced council mergers proposed by the Beattie Government in Queensland.

The Hunters Hill vote calls on support from North Sydney MP Trent Zimmerman who opposes forced mergers and Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts who is Energy Minister in the Baird Government.

If a plebiscite is agreed it could be held in Councils across Sydney opposed to forced mergers accompanied by a significant government pro-merger advertising blitz.

Councillor Mark Bennett said the plebiscite will answer the "sham process" the Baird Government has used to impose and justify forced mergers.

"I for one am happy to spend \$100,000 in defiance of the Baird Government, if nothing else," he said.

Councillor Dr Meredith Shiel said the plebiscite is a matter of principle, democracy and people's rights because the Baird Government failed to give the Council time to hold a referendum on the issue.

Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition spokesman Phil Jenkyn addressed the Council in support of the plebiscite and argued that Baird can't hide from its outcome.

"What a gutless government this Baird government is", he said.

"Now there is a Federal election coming up Baird can't avoid it and Malcolm Turnbull should do what John Howard did".

