

# Planning panel not accountable, Deputy Mayor, councillors claim

A State Government endorsed panel to decide development issues in Hunters Hill is secretive and unaccountable to ratepayers, Deputy Mayor Ross Williams told last week's council meeting.

The planning panel was recently imposed on Hunters Hill by the Berejiklian Government – despite the strong objections of councillors – and has the power to determine many local, civic, commercial and residential development proposals.

Deputy Mayor Ross Williams recently attended a planning panel session and said he is shocked by the perceived lack of accountability and democracy.

“There was no opportunity for the community to hear why decisions were made because these decisions were just proclaimed,” Cllr Williams said.

“The panel did not allow any input from the public gallery and did not take into account the feelings of the public gallery, which I think is important to be able to understand how the community feels about a development proposal.”

Councillor Jim Sanderson backed the Deputy Mayor's concern.

“The chairman simply announced decisions and I have great difficulty with this and I have great concerns not just with the performance of this panel but with the government legislation behind it,” he said.

“Even if there are no public speakers, there was absolutely no interaction with the public gallery.”

General Manager Barry Smith said he has taken

steps to ensure the planning panel is more open and accountable.

“As from this meeting, the next Local Panel meetings will be live streamed,” he said.

“I have also spoken with the chairman and I've been assured the meetings will be quite well run in future.”

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**A HUNTERS HILL** resident has been hit with a \$48,000 fine for illegal tree removal.

The Land and Environment Court found Yueling Liu of 22 Barons Crescent, Hunters Hill, guilty of the illegal removal of two cheese trees on her property without Hunters Hill Council approval.

In her defence, Yueling Liu said the trees were “sparking electricity during storms” and were dropping leaves into her pool.

Deputy Mayor Ross Williams congratulated the court on the verdict.

“This is an important statement by the court that this council needs to be responsive and I would like to bring this matter to the attention of the community,” he said.

General Manager Barry Smith expressed concern about the amount of fines being an adequate deterrent to property developers.

“What's one hundred grand in a five million dollar development?” he asked.