

Will Mark Bennett be Hunters Hill's next fulltime Mayor ?

Hunters Hill will have its first fulltime Mayor if Independent councillor and current Deputy Mayor Mark Bennett is elected at the September 9 local government election.

Cllr Bennett has been endorsed as a Mayoral candidate by retiring Mayor Cllr Richard Quinn and will be a candidate in North Ward.

On his Independent ticket will be the highly regarded Cllr Justine McLaughlin - a former Deputy Mayor - who will stand in South Ward.

"I'm committed to devoting myself, full time, to the role of Mayor of Hunters Hill for the duration of this Council and will focus on understanding the resident's needs," Cllr Bennett said.

"The cornerstone of my policy is effective local Government; the safety of residents and strong financial management and good governance."

As Deputy Mayor, Cllr Bennett has been an integral part of Mayor Quinn's work to ensure Hunters Hill is fit for the future with more than \$20 million in the bank and around \$11 million to spend on community projects.

He has also been a strong part of the Mayor's team to oppose the bullying and undemocratic procedure the Baird and Berejiklian governments have used to try to force Hunters Hill into an unpopular forced merger with Ryde and Lane Cove.

At risk in such a merger is Hunters Hill's heritage and environmental laws, which protect homes from the ugly specter of high rise.

"An important part of being Mayor of Hunters Hill is to promote the importance of the heritage of Hunters Hill," he said.

"Our plans developed over many years may cease to exist and this isn't acceptable to me as it would lead to many high rise developments in residential zones."

Local democracy is also a key issue, he added.

"An amalgamated Council would be tragedy for Hunters Hill as we would have only one person on a new Council to represent our Municipality.

"This election is about maintaining the independence of councillors and Hunter's Hill Council."

Hunters Hill Council is currently in a legal battle to challenge the forced merger process and this Monday night voted to pursue a High Court challenge, if necessary.

"As a result of our action we have been successful in getting to another election whilst many other Councils have already been amalgamated," the Deputy Mayor said.

Mark and his wife Lydia Bennett have lived in the area for 32 years.

Lydia was the Professor of Urban Health at Sydney University and Mark was a Director of a large International company.

"I'm now ready to serve the people of Hunters Hill as Mayor and will work each day to improve our municipality."

For Cllr McLaughlin the key issue is quality of life.

"Despite the State Government doing its best to distract us and trash the image of local government, we have achieved an enormous amount as a Council," she said.

"I can point to the completion of the Hunters Hill Village shops and streetscape, the securing of Bedlam Bay for sporting and recreational use, the Boronia Park Plan of Management which strikes a balance between recreational and sporting users, safety and playground upgrades.

"Our community events and services are the envy of larger Councils because we have such a strong community.

"My focus moving forward is securing the best possible living and working environment for our residents.

"Personally I'd like to

see more playgrounds in areas like Henley and more community meeting points in our villages for the elderly and I'd also like to get some street libraries up and running, particularly around our schools and nursing homes."

Councillor McLaughlin prides herself in getting action taken soon after being approached by ratepayers.

"As a councillor I take an enormous amount of pleasure from being able to improve the lives of our residents even in the simplest ways by providing their link with the various council departments.

"Residents of a nursing home might contact me because the vegetation on Council land has grown up and blocked their view to the river and some residents complain about deep potholes in their street.

"I can action those minor issues sometimes within a couple of days - this can make a simple but real difference to residents.

"Local government is the closest form of government to the community and that's exactly where Mark and I will be .. working side by side with our community each and every day."



Hunters Hill Deputy Mayor Cllr Mark Bennett will be running for the position of Mayor, backed by team mate Justine McLaughlin. TWT on-the-spot PHOTO