

Council mergers: Hunters Hill loses court case against amalgamation

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*Community advocate Phil Jenkyn and Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn.
Picture: John Appleyard*

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- [KPMG documents could prevent Hunters Hill merger](#)

RYDE'S merger with Hunters Hill and Lane Cove councils could begin in seven days, after the Land and Environment Court dismissed challenges to their amalgamation.

Hunters Hill and Lane Cove suffered a huge blow when the Land and Environment Court's Justice Timothy Moore ruled that the State Government's assessment and proposal to amalgamate the three councils was conducted fairly.

In announcing his decision, Justice Timothy Moore told the court: “I am satisfied that all the common complaints are without foundation and that the various grounds pleaded by each of the councils concerning them fail”.

He ordered the two councils to pay the Government’s legal costs.

The organisations have seven days to decide whether they will appeal.

Hunters Hill, the smallest local government area in NSW at only 6sq km, has already spent \$234,162.93 on challenging the Government bid to merge it with Ryde and Lane Cove. Its budget for the legal action was \$250,000.

While Ryde also opposed amalgamation, it chose not to join the court challenge.

The court’s decision means Ryde Mayor Bill Pickering, elected only last Friday, will likely be the city’s last in its 146-year history.



Ryde Mayor Bill Pickering. Picture: Virginia Young

Friday’s meeting was also the last to be held at the ageing Civic Centre, which has stood at Devlin St since 1964 and is slated to be demolished and the site redeveloped.

Hunters Hill Council will hold an extraordinary meeting — and possibly its last — to decide whether to appeal a court decision that gave the state government’s merger plans a resounding victory.

Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn, who hopes see his council continue to standalone, said he was very disappointed.

“We will have to consider the decision in some detail,” he said. “We’ll await further advice before we decide what to do next.”

The councils have seven days in which to lodge their notice of appeal.

Mr Quinn said there would definitely be an extraordinary meeting to consider that question.

A date is yet to be set.

The court’s dismissal of Ku-ring-gai’s challenge has implications for residents of Beecroft, Cheltenham and North Epping.

The government plans to merge Hornsby Council with Ku-ring-gai once the latter has exhausted its appeals.

Hornsby Mayor Steve Russell said he was looking forward to being able to contribute “in whatever way” to a new council.



Hornsby Mayor Steve Russell. Picture: Adam Ward

“I think it was inevitable, they’ve always known the State Government is entitled to amalgamate us if they see fit and I see benefits in merging for

ratepayers, not necessarily with Ku-ring-gai but reducing the number of councils from a ridiculous 151 to a more manageable number,” Cr Russell said.

“It’s a shame that so much money has been wasted in legal proceedings.”

There was better news for other councils.

The court found defects in reports on the proposed mergers of Mosman, North Sydney and Strathfield councils.

The state government announced its council reform agenda in 2014.

Called Fit for the Future, the government said this would ensure more councils were financially sustainable.

It set criteria for stand-alone councils and asked them to show how they would successfully stand-alone or merge.

IPART assessed these submissions and found Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove councils financially unfit.

The government then appointed delegates to oversee merger proposals, conduct public hearings and write reports assessing them.

Delegate Robert Lang found there would be significant financial and social benefits from a merger.

The government in May then announced a raft of mergers.

While some proceeded immediately with the appointment of administrators, others were postponed pending legal challenges.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/northern-district-times/council-mergers-hunters-hill-loses-court-case-against-amalgamation/news-story/9e591d42db2dd7f5a3a6a1b575096813>