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VOL. 95 NO. 39 PUBLISHED 95 YEARS

ESTABLISHED 1921

www.weeklytimes.com.au

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Hunters Hill votes to fight Baird

Five gallant Hunters Hill councillors to oppose forced merger court ruling

HUNTERS HILL will fight Dictator Premier Mike Baird's threatened forced merger with the City of Ryde and declared its intent to appeal last Friday night.



Five gallant Hunters Hill Councillors: Justine McLaughlan, Dr Meredith Sheil, Mayor Richard Quinn, Deputy Mayor Mark Bennett and former SAS commando C/r Peter Astridge will continue to fight the Baird dictatorship's proposed forced merger into Ryde. TWT on the spot PHOTO.

***“The fundamental reason why we are here is to protect
Hunters Hill,” says Mayor***

AN extraordinary council meeting at Hunters Hill Council Chambers voted five to two for lodging a notice of intention to appeal against last week's Land and Environment Court decision to dismiss the council's case against the procedure used to justify NSW Premier Mike Baird's forced merger into Ryde.

The Council also called on Mr Baird not to proceed with a proclamation to dissolve the 155 year old heritage municipality and has since received confirmation of no action prior to seven days after a decision on Woollahra Council's appeal.

Council's decision follows preliminary confidential legal advice that the success of an appeal is "good" and "reasonable", Mayor Richard Quinn told a packed public gallery last Friday.

"The fundamental reason why we are here is to protect Hunters Hill as Australia's oldest garden suburb," Mayor Quinn said.

"We will continue, well into the future, you don't give up now!"



Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn



New Ryde City Mayor Bill Pickering



Hunters Hill Cllr Peter Astridge

Anti amalgamation supporters say Hunters Hill's decision is a slap in the face for proposed forced merger partner the City of Ryde whose new Mayor Bill Pickering last week said a forced merger is now "inevitable".

He also promised to lead Ryde into a new mega council as the City's last Mayor – a promise that failed to rate a mention at the Hunters Hill meeting.

Hunters Hill's five fighting councillors did reject a motion by pro-Liberal Cllr Zac Miles and Gladesville's Gary Bird not to appeal, due to the costs involved.

Retired SAS commando and Independent Cllr Peter Astridge spoke strongly against surrendering local democracy to save money.

"That money will not be here if we are forced to amalgamate, it will go to Ryde, it will all go to Ryde and our heritage will go down the drain with it," he said.

"In Hunters Hill we don't have the political in-fighting they have in Ryde and we don't ever want to be a part of that!"

Hunters Hill hopes to consider the result of an appeal against a forced merger by gallant little Woollahra Council before finalising its grounds for appeal.

"The Woollahra decision will inform our decision, not direct our decision," Mayor Quinn said.

Ratepayers who attended last Friday's meeting were firm in their opinion that Hunters Hill should fight Baird to the last and with every possible means.



Former Mayor Ross Williams spoke about the “depth of arrogance” of the Baird dictatorship.

“Its case relies on lies, it has been punished for its lies and will continue to be,” Mr Williams said.

“If the forced merger goes ahead we’ll all be losers and now we have a manifesto to fight!”

The Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition said grounds for an appeal include Baird’s failure to conduct a fair and transparent public enquiry, the withholding of important financial documents and the lack of a contiguous land connection.

It also urged the Council to fight at all costs, despite the Ryde Liberals surrender.

“We are alone in our fight. The Mayor of Ryde will not appeal, so this is our fight to save our local democracy and our heritage” Coalition spokesman Phil Jenkyn said.



Local democracy and heritage were also the key themes of community speakers on Friday night and Deputy Mayor Mark Bennett warned that a merged council will throw significant heritage buildings and homes to the wind.

The four other fighting councillors agreed.

“I have a mandate to protect the character and the heritage of our community,” Cllr Meredith Sheil said.

“We’ve seen that even a council that went willingly to forced mergers, the Inner West Council, has ended up with the trashing of heritage Haberfield.

“It’s also been said that there has been a denial of our basic democratic rights and I agree. It is certainly not the time to give up now.”

The cost of lodging the intent to appeal is \$750 and the cost of an appeal could be up to \$200,000.

The Weekly Times will be the first to contribute to a fighting fund, if necessary.

“If Woollahra wins and we haven’t appealed, that would be a tragedy,” Cllr Justine McLaughlin said.



Hunters Hill Art collector Ron Kaplan urged the Council to go to the highest court in the land, if that is what it takes.

“I for one would like to see a High Court appeal, if only on the grounds of fighting for the basic democratic rights of our residents,” Mr Kaplan said.

Other ratepayers in the public gallery told The Weekly Times that the “Vichy Ryde’s” betrayal has only served to inspire Sydney’s proudly independent “French Village” to fight to the last.

The Weekly Times September 28, 2016

<http://www.weeklytimes.com.au/the-fundamental-reason-why-we-are-here-is-to-protect-hunters-hill-says-mayor/>



Councillors and residents addressing Hunters Hill Extraordinary Council Meeting