

# Mayor warns compulsory planning panels are undemocratic

HUNTERS Hill Council has blasted the state government's mandatory planning panel laws as undemocratic and warned they will take civic development applications out of the hands of democratically elected councillors.



*Hunters Hill Deputy Mayor Ross Williams (left) and Mosman Mayor Carolyn Corrigan (right) at a Save Our Councils Coalition Local Democracy Rally.*

The new Mayor of Mosman and well-known figure with the Save Our Councils Coalition – Carolyn Corrigan – said the Bill for compulsory panels was rushed through the NSW Parliament without giving the community a say.

This has been a major concern by the majority of Hunters Hill councillors who fear that the Bill strips them of their role to determine development applications across the unique municipality, which has traffic, heritage and environmental issues.

Mayor Corrigan stressed that Mosman's non-compulsory planning panels were only introduced with the support of the local community and do not deal with applications that involve civic and community sites.

“The Bill was rushed through Parliament, preventing essential and meaningful public and local community consultation,” Mayor Corrigan said.

“This Bill represents one of the most significant shifts away from elected local representatives having responsibility in their local planning and development arena.

“I will be seeking a resolution from Councillors at our November Council meeting that the Mosman Council delegates to the Conference endorse the motion approved by

Local Government NSW calling for the NSW Government to revoke legislation that mandates IHAPs for all councils in Sydney.”

The majority of Hunters Hill Councillors also share a concern that the government’s Bill imposes a “one size fits all” approach to all councils and could see Hunters Hill subject to the same controls that apply in neighbouring Ryde.



***Hunters Hill Deputy Mayor Ross Williams (left) and Mayor Mark Bennett (right) have expressed deep concerns over compulsory panels.***

Mayor Corrigan also expressed concern over the “one size fits all” approach.

“To answer the question why not “a one size fits all” approach, it is because over time we (Mosman Council) have fine-tuned the process, listened to the community and responded.

“Regular meetings are held between the Chair of our panel and the Councillors to continually ensure the planning guidelines and the development applications are consistent and are administered consistently.

“Councillors feel involved and are involved.”

The Mayor said that councillors who live locally are best placed to decide development applications on land owned by the community they represent.

“I believe, as do all other six elected representatives, that democratically elected councillors are best qualified to represent the community interest on the use of public land in their Local Government Area.

“Council conducted extensive public consultation in 2013 and the public generally approved of our panel and its charter.

“The community also wanted elected councillors to still remain involved in the Development Application process.

“To achieve this and provide transparency, the public and Councillors can view the Officer’s Report two weeks before the public meeting.”

Lane Cove MP and Planning Minister Anthony Roberts will play a key role in the panels, including the selection and appointment of chairs and experts drawn from a government scrutinised talent pool.



***NSW Planning Minister and Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts is the Minister who is responsible for local planning panels.***

“The Planning Panels and Enforcement Bill makes the NSW Planning Minister, central to local planning processes,” Mayor Corrigan said.

“The Minister will now elect the Chairperson and approve two other expert Panel members.

“That means three of the four panel members will be, in effect, chosen by the one Minister.

“The remaining community member will be chosen by the Council.”

Mayor Corrigan said Mosman’s experience with the panel, before the new Bill, has been a positive.

“Our current panel works well and has an extremely experienced and esteemed Chairperson in Justice Paul Stein, a former Land and Environment Court Judge.

“Council and community’s experience with the panel process has been positive.

“Council conducted extensive public consultation in 2013 and the public generally approved of our panel and its charter.”

For all the success, Mayor Corrigan said the community has a role.

“The community also wanted elected councillors to still remain involved in the Development Application process.”

The Weekly Times October 24, 2017 as edited.

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