

# District Northern Times

news local

**Case rejected:** No surrender as Hunters Hill launches appeal

# MERGER WAR NOT OVER

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John Besley and Steven Deare

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WHILE the dismissal of Hunters Hill Council's legal challenge against its forced amalgamation with Ryde and Lane Cove was a setback, it has determined that the war is not yet over.

Hunters Hill Council has lodged a notice of intention to appeal Justice Timothy Moore's decision, with Cr Meredith Sheil declaring the fight is about "the worth of protecting the integrity of Hunters Hill".

The council voted 5-2 to lodge the notice of intention to appeal and seek agreement from the State Government not to take any further action until seven days after Woollahra Council's appeal determination.

Hunters Hill Council will also seek an injunction to stay any action should the State Government not agree to an undertaking.

The council now has three months to formally act on the notice.

To date, Hunters Hill Council has spent more than \$230,000 on its legal action and has also been ordered to share the government's legal costs with Lane Cove.



Hunters Hill councillors (from left) Gary Bird, Justine McLaughlin, Meredith Sheil, Mayor Richard Quinn, Mark Bennett, Peter Astridge and Zac Miles. Picture: John Besley

Councillors Zac Miles and Gary Bird opposed the motion. Cr Miles said continued action was “throwing good money after bad”.

“On a whim we threw \$500,000 of the community’s money at this,” he said. “For a community this size, that is an astronomical figure.

“The things we were elected to do in this community aren’t being done.”

Cr Sheil, who put forward the motion, said the council would be in a much better position to proceed with a formal appeal once the Woollahra Council decision had been determined.

“It is not the time to be giving up now,” Cr Sheil said.

“The Woollahra finding is a vital thing to have factored into our case. This is the most prudent way forward.”

Meanwhile, Ryde Council on Tuesday night held what could prove to be the final meeting in its 146-year history.

Councillors met at a new chambers, above Ryde Library, following the closure of the ageing Civic Centre in Devlin St.

Mayor Bill Pickering said that while Ryde faces what seems an inevitable amalgamation with Hunters Hill and Lane Cove, councillors remained opposed to the carve up of Ryde.

He said he respected the right of Hunters Hill and Lane Cove to challenge the merger proposal, but Ryde chose not to as the cost would be borne by ratepayers.

Lane Cove is now thinking long and hard about continuing its challenge.

Mayor Deborah Hutchens said that the council remained still preferred the Joint Regional Authority model in which the three could share resources but retain their identities.

She said the cost of the challenge was substantial, with the government's costs still to be added to the total.

"We have to seriously consider whether mounting an appeal is justified, given the huge cost to ratepayers so far," Cr Hutchens said.

Lane Cove Council also has until October 18 to lodge an intention to appeal Justice Moore's rejection of its case.

"We won't be holding an extraordinary meeting to discuss the situation as the next scheduled council meeting is October 10, leaving plenty of time to decide our position," she said.

### A few voices of dissent greet 'keep fighting' call

THERE was standing room only in the Hunters Hill Council gallery as dozens of concerned residents gathered to hear the future of their historic suburb.

As the scent of fate punctuated the room, it was clear that most of the nervous, yet excited, crowd shared the same message – fight on.

Phil Jenkyn from the Save Our Councils Coalition was the first to take a stand.

"Our position is clear, council should appeal," the former barrister said as a chorus of "here, here" rang through the gallery.

"We are alone in this fight, but the community perspective is that the KPMG report was not independent.

"And there was no proper public inquiry."

Mr Jenkyn's sentiments were echoed by other speakers.

Jim Sanderson said: "The Baird Government is indeed looking very tired."

"If we give up now, we'll let this community down."

While a clear majority in the room were ready for battle, there were a few who swam against the tide, urging the council to give up.

"The fight has been fought," said Chris Schofield. "The result is in, the fate of this council has been decided.

"This is not the time to throw good money after bad. "It was an inevitability."

With that, it was time for councillors to have their say.

## *BIG MOVE ACROSS THE ROAD*

RYDE Council is meeting in new chambers – across the road from the Civic Centre, which had served as its headquarters for 52 years.

Mayor Bill Pickering officially opened the venue and said it was the next step in the council's history.

“The inadequacies of the old Civic Centre mean we've got to keep up with building standards and technology,” he said.

“These changes bring Ryde into the 21st century with a modern, sustainable facility.”

The chamber could accommodate 32 councillors, which Cr Pickering said was “going to be important when the other two councils are merged, inevitably, with Ryde.”

He believed this would ensure Ryde was the administrative centre of any merged council.

The council had moved into the Civic Centre after a final meeting on August 4, 1964, at the Blaxland Rd chambers.

That building was occupied in 1823, accommodating meetings and the council's 10 administrative and technical staff.

Mayor C M Cutler declared at that last meeting in 1964 that there had been “tremendous advances in the municipality”.

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