

Community Advocate

Keeping the North West informed of the real issues

This newsletter has been produced on behalf of Ryde Liberal Councillors concerned about our community.



REVEALED: REHAB MANAGEMENT SAYS THEY 'NURTURED' SOME RYDE COUNCILLORS

Despite massive community protests, some councillors are said to have been nurtured by Rehab management to approve a changed Deed of Novation for land sell-off and overdevelopment.

An email sent out to staff by the CEO of the Royal Rehabilitation Centre – Sydney (RCC-S), Stephen Lowndes, has revealed the ‘nurturing’ of some councillors in order to get changes to a controversial Deed of Novation approved by Ryde Council.

The approval was supported by Labor councillors including Mayor Michael Butterworth, Clr Jeff Salvestro-Martin, Clr Gabrielle O’Donnell and Clr Nicole Campbell; as well as Labor-aligned Independents Clr Justin Li and Clr Vic Tagg, and Independent Clr Terry Perram, despite massive community opposition.

In his email, Stephen Lowndes said: “We have found many friends and supporters over the last several months, including Councillors, who have been nurtured and kept informed of events over a sustained period by Jim (Towers)”. Jim Towers is the Community Relations Manager for the rehab centre.

In the same email, Mr Lowndes wrongly accuses Liberal’s Cr Bill Pickering of being responsible for the rescission motion that attempted to overturn a previous decision to approve the Deed of Novation. Clr Pickering has been targeted by the RCC-S management for his strong stand on this issue, but in fact, the rescission motion was led by Independent, Clr Ivan Petch, and supported with signatures from Liberal’s Clr Sarkis Yedelian and Clr Artin Etmekdjian.

The new Deed of Novation allows the Putney community to be inflicted with high density units and massive traffic problems through the sell-off of land originally provided for the benefit of the sick and disabled. Funds for the sell-off were believed to be tied to the building of a new rehabilitation hospital, but changes to the Deed separating land parcels could mean this may be difficult to enforce.

ANGER AT 'BACK FLIP'

Putney residents are angry at what they see as a ‘back-flip’ by a Ryde councillor in relation to the overdevelopment of the Royal Rehabilitation Centre - Sydney site.

‘Independent’ Councillor, Vic Tagg, had previously attended rallies organised by local residents, but then did an about-face and supported the Rehab Management with changes to a Deed of Novation. This now allows the overdevelopment to go ahead without imposing any conditions that would protect the local community.

Very Disappointed

“Personally, I am very disappointed at the actions of Clr Tagg,” local resident, Rolf Clapham, said.

“He (Clr Tagg) supported us in public, but then does a back-flip to approve this Deed which we believe will destroy our community with overdevelopment.”

Clr Tagg was elected on the Liberal ticket in East Ward, but resigned from the Party last year when he failed to secure support for a second term as Mayor.

Liberal councillors continue to actively support the Putney community in their opposition to the controversial approval of the overdevelopment by the State Labor Government using Part 3A (Sites of State Significance) legislation.

Ryde Council had previously rejected applications for high-rise development on the site, but was overridden by the Part 3A legislation.

*Authorised by Liberal Councillors Roy Maggio, Artin Etmekdjian, Bill Pickering & Sarkis Yedelian. PO Box 460 Gladesville NSW 1675.

NSW LABOR PLANS RYDE'S DESTRUCTION

Legislation introduced by the NSW State Labor Government to override Local Government planning regulations is having a highly adverse impact of the City of Ryde.

The notorious Part 3A Sites of State Significance legislation has led to the overturning of Ryde Council's rejection of high density development on the rehabilitation centre site at Putney several years ago and a massive social housing development at West Parade in West Ryde.

These developments fail to meet zoning restrictions based on density, height, amenity such as on-site parking, and a plethora of other regulations.

Social Housing

More recently, residents of North Ryde, West Ryde and Eastwood have been targeted by State Environment Planning Policy (or SEPP) on social housing which has led to local regulations being ignored and inappropriate high density developments next door to low density suburban homes.

These developments have been roundly condemned by the Residents Against Inappropriate Development (RAID) group which is made up of local homeowners and social housing tenants who are annoyed at being evicted from decent homes that have been knocked down to make way for what has been termed as 'ghettos'.

Once again, local council regulations have been overridden to build structures that ignore height, density, on-site parking standards, set-back and other restrictions.

Boarding Houses

A major battle has also erupted in Marsfield over NSW Labor's SEPP on boarding houses which allows these businesses to operate in our suburbs.

The Marsfield Against Residential Strangulation (MARS) group is fighting to protect their suburb against being parked out, problems with refuse, streetscape deterioration and other issues that boarding houses create.



LIBERAL TEAM REMAINS FIRM DESPITE PERSONAL ATTACKS

Public life even for Local Councillors with a commitment to their community can get ugly when 'interested parties' set about trying to quieten their opponents.

"It's amazing the lengths organisations and their supporters have gone to stop me voicing my opinion for a fair deal for the community. I've copped everything from a legal letter to the City of Ryde General Manager, a letter of complaint to the Leader of the NSW Opposition, to personal attacks in a local newspaper and abusive emails and letters," Clr Bill Pickering said.

"While I am fairly thick-skinned and these actions just make me even more determined, it is important that residents must get behind those who are going into battle for them."

Condemned for helping a voluntary community group

Clr Pickering has previously even offered the pro-bono assistance of his firm to those needing a 'voice', but in several instances was condemned for helping out a voluntary community group.

"Ironically, one comment implied I was being paid, so I had to personally set the record straight. Another, a supporter of a certain facility, took issue with my pro-bono support to a community group, when, if it wasn't for the attention this group brought to their issue, they would have been turfed out long ago by the people they are now supporting."

Liberal Councillor, Artin Etmekdjian, explained that Liberal councillors had made a commitment to serving the Ryde community, and that often meant making a stand knowing they would become a target.

"The Liberals refuse to sell out. We all have been targeted by unfair claims and threats, but the one thing we all have in common is our integrity and freedom to make the right decisions on behalf of the community."

Pictures above: Ryde Liberal councillors meet with community representatives of CAPO, RAID and MARS concerned about NSW Labor planning legislation that is changing the face of the community by overriding council regulations. They are pictured outside a social housing development in West Ryde.

COUNCILLORS WALKOUT TO PROTEST 'HIDDEN AGENDA'



A walkout of councillors led by Independent, Clr Ivan Petch, was in response to what they believed was an attempt to clear the public gallery to avoid scrutiny on critical issues.

Due process ignored

Independent, Clr Ivan Petch, who was supported by the four Liberal councillors, said that due process had been ignored by a councillor calling forward a rescission motion (rejecting the granting of changes to a Deed of Novation demanded by the Royal Rehabilitation Centre - Sydney management) that could then be forced into 'confidential session' requiring the public gallery to be cleared.

"We were concerned by this tactic because there were a number of embarrassing issues on the agenda that were critical of the NSW Labor Government, and which had been addressed by members of the public.

"It is highly irregular for the last item on the agenda - a rescission motion - to be called forward in isolation from other matters and notices of motion that members of the public had spoken about on the night," Deputy Mayor Roy Maggio said.

"I think it is right to call forward matters of public interest, but only if they are to be debated openly, not hidden away from the community."

Labor-led council

Clr Sarkis Yedelian, who expressed his contempt at the call-forward action supported by Labor and Labor-aligned councillors before walking out with his Liberal colleagues and Independent Ivan Petch, said Ryde was now experiencing the full impact of a Labor-led council.

Locals not on petition

An analysis of the petition presented to Ryde Council by Labor's Clr O'Donnell in support of the residential overdevelopment of the rehab site has revealed that less than one percent of signatories (or just two people) actually live in Putney.

If the eight people who identified the rehab centre as their place of residence are then added, this still only represents just 4.7 percent of the total 214 signatures on the petition.

Expanding the analysis even further, it can be revealed that 81 percent (including the five signatures where no suburb is indicated) do not even live in the City of Ryde Local Government area.

These are interesting statistics when compared with the more than 3,000 signatures collected in opposition to the overdevelopment by the CAPO group. The O'Donnell petition represents only just over seven (7) percent

"I was angry at what I saw as an attempt to clear the gallery to prevent public scrutiny of voting decisions on the night."

Independent Councillor, Ivan Petch

"Ryde is seeing that a Labor Mayor with a casting vote means it is extremely difficult to oppose 'political' decisions," he said.

According to Clr Artin Etmekdjian, reporting on this issue by one local newspaper also showed a lack of understanding.

"In one edition, they said (Liberal) Clr Pickering was responsible for the rescission motion (similar to claims made by RCC-S CEO, Stephen Lowndes), and then incredibly in another story, they said the rescission motion had been put forward by Clr Vic Tagg.

"Now this same newspaper claims the walkout was pre-determined, and that we tried to stop public observance of proceedings.

"Why would we want to stop the community from witnessing the actions of Labor and Labor-aligned councillors. The whole walkout was due to our desire to bring about public scrutiny of council decisions. Think about it!"

of the size of the CAPO petition, and a reported nearly 90 percent of these CAPO petition signatories actually live in Putney.

Redundancy Rumors

Staff at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre - Sydney have reported feeling pressured by the prospect of possible job losses if the sell-off of land to an overseas developer didn't take place.

However, there are still concerns about whether a 60-bed Rehabilitation Hospital will ever be built given the NSW Labor Government's reduction in recurrent funding, and redirected support for the new facility at Ryde Hospital.

This would impact on the future viability of the Weemala facility for the disabled, which if built, may not have a Rehabilitation Hospital nearby. Redundancies are rumoured to still be on the management agenda.

PROUD RECORD

Ryde Deputy Mayor, Roy Maggio, said the Liberal councillor team had produced a record of achievement they could point to with some pride.

“Despite often having substantial opposition from Labor councillors, we have still managed to get things through that are real wins for the local community or best represent their interests,” Clr Maggio said.

He said in just over 18 months, the Liberals have:

- Frozen fees on sports grounds for 12 months.
- Secured an annual youth sports grant for local kids.
- Implemented a program of sports field lighting.
- Secured goalpost installation at council’s cost.
- Achieved amenities upgrades for Morrison Bay and Bill Mitchell Parks.
- Helped get approval for a school safety lights program throughout Ryde.
- Initiated a major review of usage of sporting facilities.
- Backed resident opposition to inappropriate high density social housing developments.
- Backed residents opposed to new State boarding house legislation.
- Backed community opposition to State Labor’s Part 3A legislation responsible for the overdevelopment intended at the rehab site.
- Supported approval of a new Eastwood centre.
- Supported the Top Ryde redevelopment.
- Helped guide council through the GFC when investments failed.
- Made Rotary’s graffiti removal project possible.
- Ensured the sale of a costly unneeded hall to return funds for the public benefit.



BENNELONG WELCOME FOR LEADER

Liberal councillors from left, Bill Pickering, Artin Etmekdjian, Sarkis Yedelian and Deputy Mayor, Roy Maggio, joined with the Patron Senator for Bennelong, Senator Connie Fierravanti-Wells, to welcome the leader of the Federal Opposition, Tony Abbot, recently.

COMMUNITY THANKED FOR BACKING WALKOUT PROTEST

Councillors who walked out of chambers in protest against what they saw as an attempt to prevent public scrutiny of several motions before council including a Rescission Motion (see Page 3 story) wish to thank the many residents who have spoken out in support of their action.

Many residents have also expressed concern about the coverage of this issue in the Northern District Times newspaper that was critical of the councillors’ stand.

Letter to the Editor

The following letter to the editor of the newspaper, Colin Kerr, by Putney resident, Susan MacGregor, is printed with her permission:

Colin,

Further to the article in today’s edition, I am asking if you think it is fair publishing only one side of the story regarding the Royal Rehab issue.

I know that people are writing to the NDT and although I understand you can’t print every letter you should at least print a fair number from both sides of the case.

I think those brave Councillors who left the recent Council meeting are to be congratulated – they are doing their job and representing the majority of the community. I think the local residents should know that.

Please remember that 3000 local people signed against this overdevelopment and

the ongoing traffic issues.

Please remember that not one resident wants the rehab or any other group to close – the land was given to the disabled and should be used as such. Every local resident supports this.

Please remember that local residents supported Weemala residents – each and every one of them and it’s a pity RRCS moved quickly to get many to leave in the initial stages.

Please remember that Riding for the Disabled was forced from the site.

Please remember that the RRCS had no hospital on their original plans and surprise, surprise, the Board had more than one developer in situ. Please remember that the facilities have been deliberately left without repair for many, many years.

Please remember the RRCS have never approached Federal or State Government for further funding – I certainly know the CAPO group have tried on many occasions to offer to help them in their fight for funding – we want the Rehab to stay and commend the fine work they do.

Please remember the Centre once had 200 beds and it has dwindled now to around 64. Are they expecting people not to get injured in the future? Unless of course these beds are saved for compensable clients which would make the Centre very profitable but God help the man in the street without insurance!