

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, 31 July 2015 11:46 PM

To: IPART Mailbox

Subject: Ryde Community Alliance submission - Fit for the Future

Ryde Community Alliance formed in 2010 to campaign against proposals by Ryde Council to rezone and sell our memorial Civic Centre for two 24 storey residential towers, despite the absence of a heritage assessment of the Civic Centre and Cenotaph which were conceived in the post -World War II years as a memorial to those who served in wars. Construction was completed in 1964. More than 3,000 submissions to the development proposal and then 3,400 objections to the rezoning were ignored, firstly, by the Council and then by the then Minister for Planning.

The circumstances of the Council progressing the rezoning by utilizing then Mayor Artin Etmekdjian's casting vote has never been examined, despite the community publicly raising this issue repeatedly. The rezoning was completed in record time. In stark contrast, the planning proposal to rezone the Civic Centre for Community and Civic uses resolved by the incoming council after the 2012 Local Government Election was subject to excessive delays both within the Council and then by the NSW Department of Planning insistence upon the Council justifying the rezoning no less than two times, adding unnecessarily many months to the processing time. A local council should not ignore the stated wishes of its own constituents as Ryde Council has done. The provisions of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 specifically require that submissions be taken into account in making a decision on a local environmental plan. And yet this occurred with the Civic Centre rezoning in 2010-2011. Again in 2015, with the narrowest of margins, Ryde Council has again determined to ignore the community and commence an International Design Competition at a cost of \$1million. Despite having wasted \$5million on the previous speculative scheme, the bare majority of councillors voted to spend another \$1million on a Design Competition to breathe life into the failed Civic Centre development proposal.

Ryde Council has no expertise as a developer. At least \$5million of ratepayers funds were expended previously on a highly speculative project which was halted by community opposition. The Council has no demonstrated experience in highly complex, high value development projects which require high level legal knowledge to protect the investment of public funds and assets. And yet we see the current Council embarking on this activity without any public scrutiny. One councillor on 14 July 2015, stated that the predicted returns were "beyond belief". If this is indeed the case, then the documentation should be made available for public scrutiny. There is ample evidence in Australia's recent past of proposals being "too good to be true".

The community has little confidence in Ryde Council's capability to take on greater responsibilities. The pro-development approach of the current council ignores the reality facing local councils. Ryde Council is ill-equipped to deal with the demands of the current population let alone a doubling or more likely a tripling of the population in the foreseeable future arising from State and Council decisions to massively increase the residential development potential across the local government area.

Basic services and facilities are trailing way behind the needs of the population. Schools, open space, cultural facilities and recreational opportunities are simply not being provided to meet community needs and yet all public lands controlled by the Council have been included in a Property Investment Portfolio to be prepared for disposal. Funds (\$150,000) are allocated in the Council 2015-2016 budget for this purpose. These lands are needed for the public purposes for which they were acquired. These are not surplus lands! And yet the community is bearing witness to the disposal of public assets against its objections which have been repeatedly disregarded.

The Council has disregarded its traditional responsibilities for the monitoring and regulation of development and building conditions for several years during which its senior officers were redirected to become focussed upon entrepreneurial activities despite their lack of expertise. Similarly, the councillors determining that the council should become a developer have themselves no experience or specialist knowledge that equipped them to succeed in such a venture.

As a result the basic functions of the council have been generally overlooked. For example, critical documents such as the s94 Contributions Plan have not been updated, resulting in the Council on 14 July 2015 accepting a development agreement prepared on behalf of a State government agency, Urban Growth, for the North Ryde Urban Activation Precinct (former M2 lands) which will include more than 4,000 dwellings or potentially 10,000 people, which is only 50% of the potential s94 contributions under the Council's outdated s94 Plan. The UAP population increase was not anticipated in the Council's s94 plan. Similarly, the demands of major population increases in Meadowbank, West Ryde, Gladesville, and Macquarie Park have never been taken into account or the Council's decision given effect in September 2014 to permit separate titling of dual occupancy on any property above 580 m<sup>2</sup> across the entire local government area.

The Alliance requests that the IPART have regard to the matters that we have raised in reaching its recommendations having regard to the consequences for the community of the failure of the local council to exercise its authority for the benefit of the community. If required, documentation of the matters raised can be provided, on request.

Sincerely,

Ryde Community Alliance.