

Speech by Councillor Vincent De Luca OAM
Extraordinary Council Meeting – Monday 29 September 2008

Mr Mayor

I rise to move this Council's first ever Notice of Motion under the new democratically elected Warringah Council. This Notice of Motion is about the most significant proposal ever to come before our community. On 21 September I was declared elected by the Electoral Commission as a Councillor for "A" Ward. Apart from thinking at the time what an honour and a privilege the people of Warringah have bestowed upon me by electing me as their Councillor, as most of you here who know me are aware, I don't stay still for long. I immediately proceeded to draft this Notice of Motion realising just how important this issue is to our community and indeed for our area's future.

I have carefully considered both the merits and disadvantages of the proposal since it was first proposed at the Council meeting of 13 November 2007. At that time, the proposed increase in height was for 20 storeys.

On 6 February 2008 the Friends of Warringah community group held a public meeting. Two of our community's most respected members, Dr Christina Kirsch and Dr Richard Michell gave a comprehensive analysis of the proposal. It soon became clear that the community overwhelmingly opposed the proposal and that meeting passed a resolution saying so. A Petition to the New South Wales Parliament calling for it, the Minister for Planning and Minister for Local Government to ensure the proposal was withdrawn and not dealt with until elected representatives were elected was also signed by hundreds of residents. I thank the Honourable Marie Ficarra MLC who presented this Petition to the Legislative Council on behalf of our community. I also thank Alan Jones AO, who took up our community's fight regarding Dee Why as he also did when the Administrator approved the demolition of Beacon Hill High School. He has been inspirational and I thank him for all his support.

On 8 March 2008 nearly 1,000 residents packed the Dee Why Town Triangle at a Public Rally. Dr Christina Kirsch, Dr Keith Amos and Dr Richard Michell did a tremendous job in analysing and conveying to our community the effects this proposal would have if be passed. I should also like to thank Dr Annette Sammut, Mr Tom Peel and Mr Ian Hehir for their dedication to our community in helping to organise the rally. That public rally unanimously voted to reject the height increases. Acknowledgement must also be extended to long time Dee Why resident and community activist, Jack Tilburn, who continually spoke at Council meetings and the public meetings regarding the proposal. In his mid 80s, Jack has more energy than most of us put together in this Chamber! I should also like to acknowledge the work of former Shire President, Kevin Begaud, I appreciate all the support he has given us.

Unfortunately, the Administrator, regardless of the concerns raised by our community arrogantly dismissed us and on 5 May 2008 approved an increase in height to 18 storeys. Going through the proposal with a fine toothcomb revealed that it is simply unsustainable, is out of keeping with our local amenity and will have an adverse impact for generations to come. Poor negotiation on Council's part and not in the interests of ratepayers was also apparent. In return for the height increase, the developer offered through a proposed Voluntary Planning agreement nothing more than management of the proposed Town Square and the provision of a bus setback off Pittwater Road, which has since been opposed by the Roads and Traffic Authority.

As democratically elected and accountable Councillors we have a duty tonight to respond to our community's concerns and seek that the proposed height increases are stopped. If the Minister approves the height increases it is incumbent upon us as elected representatives to seek legal advice and ascertain whether it is possible to have the Minister's decision overturned by the Courts.

As all Councillors would be aware, if the height increase to 18 storeys is approved it sets a precedent for high-rise development across Warringah. Dee Why is already grid locked by traffic and parking chaos. Such

development will further exacerbate the situation. In Warringah, we simply do not have the infrastructure to cope with high-rise development. We have always been exempt from high-rise development because of this lack of infrastructure. We are devoid of a train line, don't have enough buses to cope with our existing population and people can't even get across the Spit Bridge expeditiously.

Unless the State Labor Government is prepared to inject billions of dollars into the northern beaches for essential infrastructure and services they should not push high-rise on us. We are already far exceeding our quota for residential development and are well ahead of our targets dictated by the Warringah Residential Development Strategy.

No one in this Chamber will argue against the fact that Dee Why needs cleaning up, however, high-rise development is not the answer and will only make the situation worse. We need a Master Plan consisting of a Social and Environmental Impact Study and full community consultation to formulate a proper strategy to make Dee Why the paradise once enjoyed. Council can also undertake immediate action to improve the situation in Dee Why, such as increasing street cleaning, rubbish collection and graffiti removal, introducing landscaping and beautification works, better lighting and community facilities. This has worked in places like Harlem in America and we have to inject in the Dee Why community a sense of ownership, pride and worth.

We also need to tackle the parking and traffic mess and explore innovative ways to alleviate these problems. I also support residents' suggestions about building a cultural centre in Dee Why and exploring making the Strand either a one-way street and extending the recreation and dining strip or closing off parts of the Strand to facilitate greater recreation. It was actually former Mayor John Caputo OAM, who spearheaded the initiatives on Dee Why Strand and paving and landscaping adjacent to Dee Why Beach and I acknowledge his presence in the public gallery tonight. I think this part of Dee Why has become one of the northern beaches' best attractions and we should do all possible to make it the best for residents and visitors to enjoy.

I ask Councillors for your support and commend my motion to you for your favourable consideration.

I table my speech and seek leave for it to be incorporated into the Minutes of this meeting.

Thank you.