

NEUTRAL PRECINCT MINUTES
Tuesday 10 June 2025, meeting commenced at 7:00 pm

1. Apologies – BH
2. Additional items added to the Agenda
 - i. Planning Proposal 2023-699. 183-185 Military Road, Neutral Bay (See item 7)
 - ii. North Sydney Oval – SMH Article. (See item 8)
 - iii. Domestic Waste Management Charge (See item 9)
3. Business from minutes of meeting held 13 May 2024:
 - i. The May 2025 minutes were proposed by CB and seconded by SL.
 - ii. Council responses to Precinct motions:
Precinct Motion (February): Ilbery Reserve
The Council consider:
 - i. installing low level LED /non spillage lighting in the Ilbery Reserve similar to other lighting that has been installed in public places in Neutral Bay
 - ii. Asking AUSGRID to sponsor/provide the lighting for Ilbery Reserve**Council response:**
In order to move this forward, the Precinct will need to find a way for this to be raised as a Notice of Motion at a Council meeting. It's unlikely that we'll be able to consider the request in the current situation. The other option is for the Precinct to put forward a submission to the DP/OP, as this is where Council adopts its Capital Works Program for next year.

Discussion points:
 - There is a lack of lighting in Barry, Westleigh & Anderson Streets bordering the Reserve giving rise to a security issue.
 - The area has a dense population. Many people use these streets and the Reserve to access the Neutral Bay Club, St Joseph's Church & the 'Only About Children' Day Care Centre.
 - It was noted that the Council meeting of 26 May 2025 unanimously agreed that *".....Council prepare a report on actions that can be taken to increase the utilisation and capacity and safety of sports fields, parks, and other public domain/open space areas for safe, passive recreation through increased hours of lighting."* And that *"the report also include details of the responsible entity for lighting infrastructure in parks, pathways, and in other public areas."*

MOTION

Neutral Precinct requests the Council specifically include Ilbery Reserve in the proposed report on actions that can be taken to increase the utilisation and capacity and safety of sports fields, parks, and other public domain/open space areas for safe, passive recreation through increased hours of lighting.

VOTE: For:(16); Against: Nil

4. Updates:

- i. Warringah Freeway Upgrade.
GC reported that the Merlin Street to Falcon Street walkway is close to completion and could open to pedestrians in 4-6 weeks, earlier than originally planned. The Ridge Street walkway is currently usable but not completed.
- ii. DA258/2023 – 41-53 Grosvenor Street, Neutral Bay – Coles.
The meeting noted that the DA was approved by the Northern Sydney Planning Panel on 14 May.

The approval includes the Concept Development Application for a public plaza over Grosvenor Lane, demolition of existing supermarket and Grosvenor Lane car park. Construction of a 7-storey mixed use and shop top housing development with supermarket loading dock, liquor store and retail premises, public community space, 72 apartments, 4 basement parking for 267 public and 84 private parking spaces, signage, associated civil and landscaping works and associated subdivisions. The application is accompanied by a letter of offer to enter into a VPA for delivery of public domain works and facilities.

Coles has now submitted a Planning Proposal to increase the building height from 21.6 metres to 31.6 metres. Further details can be viewed at:

<https://masterview.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/application/ApplicationDetails/009.2025.00000001.001/>

Noted that expressions of Interest have closed for the development of the Grosvenor Lane Public Carpark. As Council owns the Carpark a third party is managing assessment of the expressions of interest.

5. IPART decision on Council Special Rate Variation and the Council's Revised Draft Delivery Program 2025–2029 and Draft Operational Plan 2025–2026.

Sarah Koh, Co-Convenor Harrison/Bennett Precinct presented her analysis of the IPART decision and Council's Revised Draft Delivery Program.

Background

- Six Councils applied for an SRV this year. Four got their SRV proposals fully approved, including Federation Council (69.94% increase over 2 years). Northern Beaches Council secured a partial approval (25.2% over 2 years). NSC was the only Council to get its SRV proposal of (87.05% over 2 years) rejected in its entirety.
- There are approximately 40,375 rateable properties in the North Sydney LGA. There are 36,890 residential assessments and 3,485 business assessments.
- IPART received 1,648 responses to their feedback form and 322 submissions. Of the 1,648 responses 90.8% were opposed to the proposed SV, 4.6% partly supported it, 3.9% supported it and 0.6% were undecided.

IPART Decision

As is now widely known, IPART rejected Council's application for a special rate variation in 2025-2026. Council was granted the 4% rate peg increase.

Sarah identified that the Council submission had met only two of the six IPART criterion - *Integrated Planning and Reporting documentation*, and *Other relevant matters that IPART consider relevant* (including prior SRV compliance) and two of the three Office of Local Government minimum rates criteria (*Community awareness and Rationale for increasing minimum rates*). The criterion not satisfied were:

Financial need not demonstrated due to:

- Lack of transparency on reserve accumulation and SRV fund usage. (*Data provided by NSC to IPART showed that NSC had planned to use SRV funds to accumulate \$97 million of unrestricted reserves by FY35*).
- Misunderstanding in the community that SRV was primarily for Olympic Pool.
- Alternatives to an SRV not adequately explored.
- No baseline provided during consultation.

Community awareness not demonstrated due to:

- Community engagement materials did not provide sufficient information to enable the community to be fully aware of the need and extent of the proposed SRV.
- Lack of transparency around internal reserves accumulation.
- Need for SRV not disclosed during May–June 2024 Informing Strategies consultation - the community were asked for input on new initiatives without being told an SRV would be required to pay for them.
- Results of community consultation not appropriately considered.

Unreasonable Impact on Ratepayers due to:

- Capacity-to-pay assessment based on 2021 data (year of Covid pandemic when interest rates, inflation and rents were at an all-time low), and not reflective of current economic conditions and higher cost of living.
- Scale of increase over a short 2-year period was found not to be reasonable; significant burden on fixed-income households.
- Hardship policy ineffective; eligibility criteria almost impossible to meet – Council records showed that no one was eligible in the last 5 years.
- Impact on business ratepayers was not adequately considered.

Productivity and Cost Containment Inadequate due to:

- Cost savings presented by NSC found by IPART to not be “genuine cost savings” (E.g., \$2.3M saving that Council stated it achieved via an organisational restructure was found to have been reallocated to another area within Council and hence not truly a saving)
- No clear productivity or cost containment strategies identified.

The full IPART Report can be accessed through the following link:

https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/cm9_documents/Final-Report-North-Sydney-Council-Special-Variation-and-Minimum-Rate-Application-for-2025-26-May-2025.PDF

Sarah identified that there is no appeals process for the Council against the IPART decision. Council can again make a case for a special rates increase in 2026.

The Council has responded with a revised Draft Delivery Program (2025-29) and Draft Operational Plan (2025-26) which defers new projects and initiatives and reduces the infrastructure renewals

Consultation is currently open for the community to provide feedback on proposed ways to reduce costs and increase income.

Council will consider and vote on the revised Plan at an extraordinary meeting on 30 June. Submissions to Council on the Revised Delivery Plan close on 24 June.

TM thanked Sarah for her informative presentation.

Discussion

- TM recalled that the Precinct had expressed concern in May that the original Delivery Program may not proceed if the full extent of Council's proposed special rates increase is not approved by IPART and had agreed that the community needed to be consulted again when the special rates decision is known.
- Noted that the *Local Government Act 1993* mandates Councils to create a Delivery Program and for activities within a Council's Delivery Program to identify project costings and for costings to be within the resources available under the resources strategy.
- The Informing Strategies (projects) in the Revised Delivery Program should be removed until the proposed new financial modelling and community engagement takes place in the first half of 2025-2026. This will allow the community to provide feedback on priorities in the full knowledge of costings and funding sources.
- The timeframe for re-consultation should include time for Council to fully consider the community feedback.

MOTION:

Neutral Precinct cannot support the Revised Draft Delivery Program 2025–2029 because the costs and funding sources for identified projects is not known.

The Precinct urges Council to remove these proposed projects from the Revised Draft Delivery Program and revert to the previously approved Delivery Program. This will allow time for proper collation of alternative funding and the proposed community consultation, through to 2026 to then establish priorities.

VOTE:

For: 15; Against: Nil

Residents were encouraged to make their own submission to Council by 24 June through: <https://yoursay.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/revised-dp-op-2025>

6. State Government Review of Dog Laws

- It was noted that Public consultation has now closed for the NSW State Government review of its companion animal laws.
- CB and GC spoke to the increasing number of filled dog excrement bags not being binned but left on footpaths, roads and in green spaces.
- CB recently took a 1600 metre walk through the Precinct and identified 9 bags left in open spaces, many squashed by a foot or a car tyre. This figure if multiplied throughout the LGA on a daily basis, amounts to a growing problem.
- GC spoke to positive message signage, to keep streets and parks clean from dog bags, that he has seen in Bankstown.
- GC will do more research and advise a future meeting on ideas to recommend to NS Council.

7. Planning Proposal 2023-699. 183-185 Military Road, Neutral Bay

- Noted the Exhibition of Planning Proposal 2023-699 183-185 Military Road, Neutral Bay (Andrews House). The PP seeks to facilitate a mixed-use residential development up to 12 storeys on the site (44 dwellings).
- Copies of the PP Fact Sheet were handed out.
- Residents were encouraged to make their views known to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure by 5pm on 8 July through the portal:

www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/ppr/under-exhibition/183-185-military-road-neutral-bay

8. North Sydney Oval

GC drew attention to a recent SMH article which quoted the ground is in disrepair and how the denied special rate increase would have raised \$25M next year. The article said Council was going to spend \$7.8M on the ground next year and then \$12.M the year after to get the Oval ready for NRL matches. This appears to be misinformation as it was unlikely that Council would have spent a third of the special rate increase, if approved, on the oval next year, then half the year after. What about the commitments to NS pool?

GC commented that people love NS Oval because it is small and quaint, and a contrast to an Allianz or similar stadium. It needs a maintenance but it seems disingenuous that NS ratepayers should help the NRL manufacture a connection between Perth Bears and North Sydney. Given the Perth Bears paid the NRL \$65M for the privilege of existing They shouldn't expect a subsidy, of the magnitude quoted in the SMH article, from NS ratepayers.

9. Domestic Waste Management Charge

Noted that 31 of 34 Councils have a waste rate for garbage collection. The Precinct is pleased to see that NS Council restricted its increase to \$14 from \$471 to \$485. The Precinct would like to commend Council on prudent financial control of this cost when many ratepayers are experiencing cost of living pressure.

10. Residents were reminded to have their say on the 2025 Australian Liveability Census. The Survey **closes Monday 30 June 2025**

<https://www.placescore.org/2025-australian-liveability-census/>

11. The following upcoming meetings were noted:

- i. Neutral Precinct – 8 July www.neutralprecinct.com
- ii. Council – 23 June www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au

The meeting ended at 8:50 pm.