

ITEM 3.1. VALE ROBYN KEMMIS

FILE NO: S051491

MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR

To Council:

On Sunday 27 December 2015, Deputy Lord Mayor Robyn Kemmis unexpectedly and tragically passed away.

Robyn was a Glebe resident for over 35 years and an active member of the local community. She was passionate about preserving the area's heritage, character and community.

Robyn was a key member of the Sydney women's movement in the early 1970s. In 1974 the group broke into two cottages in Westmoreland Street in Glebe, they claimed squatters' rights and opened the houses up to women and children escaping domestic violence. Elsie's Refuge was the first modern women's refuge of its kind and, over the next decade, feminists followed their lead and started hundreds of other refuges around Australia.

It was not, however, the first time Robyn had been involved in the creation of a safe space for women. Years earlier, while living in London with her partner Lynne, she broke into a vacant house in Earlham Street, Covent Garden. After Lynne managed to do the electrical rewiring necessary to make the place habitable, the house became the base for the first Women's Liberation Workshop Forum in London.

Robyn was an experienced administrator who was previously the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration) at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). Prior to joining UTS, Robyn held senior management positions within the NSW public service. She studied and worked at the University of New England and the University of Essex as a researcher and tutor, and worked in publishing and tourism in London, most notably with Time Out magazine.

In 2002, Robyn was awarded an honorary doctorate by UTS in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the University's mission. In 2003, she was awarded a Centenary Medal for service to Australian society in business leadership.

Robyn was a City of Sydney Councillor for eight years, from March 2004 to September 2008 and again since September 2012. She had been Deputy Lord Mayor since September 2012 and was also Deputy Chair of Council's Corporate, Finance, Properties and Tenders Committee.

I met Robyn in 2004, when I had three weeks to put together an Independent Team for the newly created City Council.

Our first term was tough.

In 2004, the former Labor State Government had sacked South Sydney and City Councils, and crashed them together with Glebe - part of Leichhardt Council - without any planning preparation or consultation. We had multiples of everything – two General Managers and other staff performing the same roles; we had three sets of planning controls, different categories of rates and 20 IT systems.

Robyn played a critical role as we turned the ship around and we got the right people and set the policy direction.

As a Councillor, Robyn contributed enormously to work of the Independent leadership Team. Her administrative expertise and commitment to community participation were central in setting the direction of the new Council and laying the foundation for the wonderful results we are now seeing in the city.

Aware that the Council was close to bankruptcy in the early 1990s, we made a strong commitment to prudent financial management. Robyn's work as long-standing chair of the Finance Committee was pivotal in setting the direction for us to achieve our strong financial position and ability to deliver the facilities and services our city needs.

And on the Audit Risk and Compliance Committee, Robyn maintained a strong focus on high standards of governance and financial responsibility.

Robyn was a brilliant Deputy Lord Mayor – she was tireless – at home helping evicted Millers Point tenants; sorting out community problems for residents, dialoguing with the big end of town or addressing academia. She had a unique skill of being able to listen to all sides of a problem and pursue it until a solution was found that had broad endorsement.

The many messages of sympathy I have received are a testament to her skill and dedication, and the enormous love and respect that she earned from our residential and business communities. I have included just a few of those here:

Barney Gardner, Millers Point, Dawes Point & The Rocks Public Housing Tenants Group:

"We will always remember and love Robyn as a champion of our cause to remain here in Millers Point as public housing tenants! In fact those of us, and there are many who were fortunate enough to become good friends with Robyn, knew of her steely resolve to fight any social or moral injustices that cast their dark shadow upon our city and its people."

Yimmy Seifert, Chair, Ultimo Village Voice:

"We are all very saddened by the news of Robyn's passing away. On behalf of Ultimo Village Voice, please accept our sincere condolences to you and the City for such a loss. Robyn had been attending our meetings this year and we are all very grateful to her for her time and taking up various issues on our behalf. She was such an inspiration and we admire her dedication and passion, and she showed that she really cared for people."

Karen Soo, Executive Officer, Haymarket Chamber of Commerce:

"As one of the most inspiring, passionate and innovative community representatives, Robyn was very much respected and valued by our Executive and members, with her endearing support, insightful advice and vision for Sydney's CBD growth. As the Deputy Lord Mayor, Robyn attended many of our events and built many strong relationships with our members and stakeholders. Robyn will be remembered for her honesty, integrity, humour and deep regard for the many voices our local community represent and mostly for her unique character, contribution and commitment to Sydney and Haymarket."

Janine Barrett, Ultimo Public School P&C:

"She was truly a great friend to our community, her contribution was immeasurable, her loss incalculable and I wonder how anyone will ever fill her shoes."

Robyn worked with all our communities on local government decisions that affected their lives, and she had a very particular interest in supporting local village economies and programs for young people.

She was an advocate for social justice and equal opportunity, especially for women's rights and for all our social housing communities.

She loved the work and she got great outcomes.

Her passing is an enormous loss. I am going to really miss her, as will Councillors, Council staff and all the people in the community she worked tirelessly for. She was such a 'good' person in the true sense of the word; she was such fun.

Councillors, I am sure you join me in also expressing our support and sadness for Lynne, Robyn's loving life time partner.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council observe a minute's silence to mark the passing of Robyn Kemmis; and
- (B) an application be made to the Minister for Local Government to dispense with a by-election to fill the casual vacancy created by the sad and sudden passing of Councillor Robyn Kemmis.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor