

Resolution of Council

26 July 2021

Item 3.1

Vale John Hayward Mant AM

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

I wish to inform Council of the passing of former City of Sydney Councillor John Hayward Mant AM on Saturday 10 July 2021.

John's term as a Councillor between 2012 and 2016, was his penultimate contribution to a meritorious life of public service that embraced the law, politics, urban planning and public administration and was guided by a lifelong commitment to good governance and social justice.

John was born on 20 October 1936 in Sydney, the youngest child of John Francis and Helen Mant. He would later claim to be one of the "lucky ones", born when the depression was coming to an end, but too young for World War II and Korea and too old for Vietnam.

His father, a solicitor, served as a lieutenant colonel and chief legal officer in the Australian Army during World War II and was a founding and active member of the Liberal Party of Australia. His mother Helen was a kindergarten teacher and the daughter of Justice John Harvey, former Chief Justice in Equity and foundation Chair of Cranbrook School.

After completing his secondary schooling at Cranbrook, John fulfilled his parents' expectations by enrolling in Arts/Law at Sydney University. His contemporaries included Clive James, Richard Walsh and Bruce Beresford. With his childhood friend the late Ken Horler, he became actively involved in the Sydney University Players as its administrator and business manager working with director/producer Leo Schofield and the young actor John Bell, among others. A few years later he was among the many volunteers who helped convert a former stables into the Nimrod Street Theatre in Kings Cross.

After graduating in law in 1963, he worked in his father's law firm, Davenport & Mant (now part of Phillips Fox) from 1964 to 1971. In the mid-1960s, many of his university circle, among them Clive James and Germaine Greer, moved to London to escape the Menzies years to build new lives and careers. John joined them, but unlike them, returned home to drive change.

He was already moving away from the conservatism of his upbringing.

In 1966, he made his first foray into electoral politics, standing as a Liberal Reform Group candidate for the electorate of St George, initiated by Gordon Barton to oppose conscription and Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. Following that election, he recognised only a change of government would achieve the reforms he believed were necessary.

He had also discovered his great personal and professional passion, urban planning, leading to his completing a Diploma in Town and Country Planning and joining the National Capital Development Commission in Canberra as a Town Planner. In his private time, he worked with friends and colleagues developing policies for Labor's urban affairs spokesperson, Tom Uren and its leader Gough Whitlam.

After the Whitlam Government was elected on 2 December 1972, John was seconded to Uren's personal staff. As preparation for this he attended the first meeting of the Whitlam Cabinet, a duumverate comprising Whitlam and his Deputy, Lance Barnard. He later recalled it was an "amazing afternoon" in which a raft of decisions were made including recognising China, ending Australia's involvement in Vietnam and conscription and "a raft of planning matters, urban matters".

John remembered the Whitlam years as extraordinary and extremely turbulent, in which there was a desperate need to "get things done" and only a short time to do them. In early 1975, after serving two years as Assistant Secretary of the Department of Urban and Regional Development, he became Whitlam's private secretary. He was still in this position on 11 November 1975, the day Whitlam was sacked as Prime Minister.

A distinguished career in planning and public administration followed, which took him to Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, India, Vietnam and Mongolia. He served as South Australia's Director-General of the Department of Housing, Urban and Regional Affairs during Don Dunstan's years as Premier, acting Town Planning Commissioner in Western Australia, served on Paul Keating's Urban Design Task Force and pioneered placemaking and place-based planning in Fairfield and Warringah. In India, he encouraged the representatives of many small villages to adopt comprehensive urban planning approaches. He served as Assistant and Acting Commissioner of the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption in 1994.

In between he returned to the law, being admitted to the bar in the early 1980s and working as a solicitor at Phillips Fox from 1987 to 1993, working across NSW, Victoria and WA. It was during these years he took on two of his most significant projects, an inquiry into the NSW Department of Housing, and rewriting and modernising the NSW Local Government Act with Julie Walton.

He was most proud of his work on the social housing inquiry. It led to the management of social housing in NSW shifting away from architects and engineers to on-the-ground staff including social workers. His interest in housing continued with his involvement in Common Equity NSW, the not-for-profit holding company for NSW cooperative housing organisations Aboriginal Housing Trust.

Underpinning his work on the Local Government Act was his strong belief that democratically elected councils should be the government for their areas and not just glorified body corporates concerned only with rates, roads and rubbish. John's and Julie's reforms enabled councils to fulfill this role with more effective management systems and greater transparency.

John had direct experience of these reforms when he served as City of Sydney Councillor between 2012 and 2016. It was a natural extension of his professional and intellectual interests and his active involvement in the Paddington Society and other community organisations.

His advice and contributions to Committees and Council was immensely invaluable and I know Councillors on both sides of the table appreciated his insight, expertise, experience and good humour.

While John was a visionary advocating significant reforms, he also recognised the importance of the small things. One example was his championing the need for a coffee shop as part of our award winning Green Square Library. John saw these as important informal spaces where people can meet and enjoy each other's company. John made good use of this coffee shop when he moved into an apartment just behind the library in the last years of his life.

John didn't stop after he left Council in 2016. Over the last two years of his life he directed his energy and intellect to planning reform in NSW, collaborating with Michael Neustein in writing a proposal for a NSW Better Places Act. This proposal embodied John's core belief that planning should be directed towards creating places for people and not be focussed on individual developments and colour coded maps.

I hope these and many other of his ideas live on and be John's continuing legacy.

They embody John's personal philosophy which he succinctly summarised as: "If there's something wrong, do something about it."

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor), seconded by Councillor Kok –

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of former Councillor John Hayward Mant AM and his significant contribution to planning, the urban environment, good governance and social justice;
- (B) Council express its condolences to John's daughter Julia, his son Jim, his stepdaughter Robbie and his granddaughters Vivienne and Minka; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to convey Council's condolences to John's family. Vale John Hayward Mant AM.

Carried unanimously.

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Note – All those present at the meeting, held remotely, observed a minute's silence in memory of John Hayward Mant AM.