

'Fiddling while Mosman burns': Residents' fury erupts at council

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A Sydney North Shore council has decided against joining a landmark court case that challenges the NSW government's plans to get more apartment blocks built to improve housing supply, after a sometimes fiery meeting in which residents lobbied hard for councillors to take the government on.

Instead of voting on a motion on whether to join NIMBY resident Judith Pearson's case against the Minns government's housing plan

[<https://www.afr.com/property/residential/mosman-council-could-join-landmark-nimby-case-20251007-p5n0qi>], Mosman council instead amended it and approved the council applying to become a friend of the court in the case.



Judith Pearson, in white jacket, and other Mosman residents at Tuesday night's fiery council meeting. **Lucy Slade**

The watered-down motion approved on Tuesday night means the council, if the court agrees, would be able to help mediate the case if it were to reach that stage.

The outcome heads off what had been shaping as the most serious challenge yet to recent Minns government reforms to intensify and speed up mid- and high-rise development in existing suburbs, which have triggered waves of pushback from residents in Mosman and Sydney's inner east, including Woollahra, and in the inner west.

At a tense and fiery council meeting on Tuesday night, residents and councillors vigorously debated the government's housing policy after independent Simon Menzies moved a motion proposing that the council join Pearson's case. Mosman resident Pearson is suing the government in the NSW Land and Environment Court, claiming new residential blocks will ruin the character and value of the neighbourhood, which includes some of Sydney Harbour's most prestigious waterfront property.

If the council had supported Menzies' motion, it would have been the first time a Sydney council had legally challenged a policy that limited its power to make planning decisions in its local government area.

Mosman Council includes some of the most prestigious property on Sydney Harbour. **Jeremy Piper**

Mayor Ann Marie Kimber told the meeting the council had obtained legal advice on the reforms and considered the implications of taking the state government to court.

“Council should not initiate or join litigation, including proceedings proposed by private residents,” Kimber said, to loud groans of disappointment from the public gallery.

“You are making a legal argument that just doesn’t exist, it’s like you made it up,” Menzies said, after the mayor’s speech.

When she walked into the Mosman Council chambers on Tuesday night, Pearson was greeted with applause from more than 100 residents who attended the meeting. The crowd, many of them wearing matching purple t-shirts with “Mosman matters” printed on the front and “village not pillage” on the back, was big enough to spill out of the room.

“The current council have failed to recognise what is going on before their very eyes,” Pearson told the meeting. “They will go down as the council who fiddled while Mosman burned.”

Kimber told the meeting that residents should prepare for the reality that Mosman will look different in the years ahead.

“We must accept that increased housing and the LMR framework are here to stay,” she said, referring to the government’s low- and mid-range housing policy. “Our focus should now be on minimising the impacts as much as possible.”

“We need a long-term strategy to manage these developments ... at the very least to be prepared for inevitable increased density.”

The NSW government’s policy allows development of between three and six storeys within 800 metres of a town centre. Mosman is one of more than 100 locations across the state where the policy applies.

More than 90 submissions were made to Mosman Council over one of the first development applications under the new policy, which proposes to build a six-storey luxury apartment building on Awaba Street

[<https://www.afr.com/property/residential/postcode-2088-welcome-to-ground-zero-in-the-nimby-debate-20250805-p5mkdx>]. Pearson’s action challenges the policy.

Menzies’ motion had asked the council to “take full advantage” of the Pearson case “to advocate against the low and mid-rise housing policy” and for an alternative plan for Mosman.

Prior to the meeting, NSW Planning Minister Paul Scully urged councillors not to support Menzies’ bid to have Mosman join the Pearson lawsuit.

“While I’m not surprised, I am very, very disappointed,” he said. “I hope that enough councillors have the good sense to vote against this motion.”

The government is also facing strong community opposition to higher density development in Woollahra and Edgecliff in Sydney’s inner east, where it has announced plans to recommence development on a once-abandoned train station to allow for up to 10,000 more homes nearby [<https://www.afr.com/politics/10-000-new-homes-for-woollahra-more-to-come-in-sydney-s-inner-west-20250824-p5mpbz>].

EDITOR'S PICK



Development outrage [</topic/development-outrage-1mj9>]

How Mosman became ground zero in the NIMBY debate

<https://www.afr.com/property/residential/postcode-2088-welcome-to-ground-zero-in-the-nimby-debate-20250805-p5mkdx>



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<https://www.afr.com/property/residential/nimbys-on-notice-mosman-neighbours-sell-for-mega-apartment-site-20250905-p5msmh>

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