

ITEM 5.3	MAYORAL MINUTE NO 8/2014 - VALE - MR JIM SOMERVILLE AND MR DENNIS PECOVER
TRIM FILE REF	2014/156118
ATTACHMENTS	NIL

BACKGROUND

The Warringah community lost two of our outstanding citizens last week – Mr Dennis Pecover, OAM and Mr Jim Somerville, AM.

I believe it is fitting that as a Council we recognise these gentlemen here tonight in this Chamber.

Around the Forestville community, the name of Dennis Pecover is well loved and well respected. In the early 1950s, Dennis was integral to the cause of fighting to protect a large area of vacant Crown Land that had previously been known as “The Common”. This area was now facing being lost to development as the suburbs of Forestville and Killarney Heights were being developed.

As a member of the local RSL Sub-branch, Dennis and other members fought hard to save that land. Although half of it was indeed lost to development, they successfully saved all of that green space we now enjoy. Dennis and his cohort didn't just stop at saving that land. They subsequently approached Warringah Shire Council with a proposal that the Sub-branch administer a portion of the saved green space and develop some much needed sports fields for the community. Council agreed, and a strong and productive partnership between these two groups was established.

For the next fifty years, Dennis held the position as Secretary of the community group that helped manage those fields and oversaw the addition of the clubhouse, the playground and a skate park and enhanced its status as a living War Memorial.

In 2012, the Sub-committee celebrated its 50th Anniversary and it was fitting that Dennis, as a foundation member, was presented with a certificate acknowledging this terrific accomplishment. For five decades, Dennis dedicated his time attending meetings, liaising with Council and State Government agencies, fighting against developers, and maintaining those fields – not for his own enjoyment but for the benefit of the community he lived in.

Now when I'm at the fields and I see the footballers, the netballers or the locals walking home from the Skate Park, I doubt they would be aware of the tireless efforts of Dennis and his colleagues over the years.

Dennis often reminded me that the reason he was so passionate about the sports fields was because of their status as a living War Memorial. For all those men and women that fought, for all those injured or killed – these sports fields were for them – a space for today's young people to experience the simple joy of running outdoors, of appreciating the natural beauty of the bushland, for enjoying the Australian lifestyle that those men and women were fighting for. In the history that Dennis compiled for the 50th Anniversary, he concluded with an extract from Jim Percy's 1970 President's Annual Report which sought to summarise the work that the sub-committee did:-

“..In short, it is to provide the Forest Community with a War Memorial that is worthy of the sacrifice of many Australian Servicemen & Women who have died in all theatres of War and yet a Memorial that can be used by the present generation and generations to come”.

I honestly believe that through five decades of hard work and determination, Dennis honoured this vision with humility and grace and his family can be rightly proud of his accomplishments.

The other gentleman I seek to honour here tonight is Mr Jim Somerville AM.

Jim Somerville was passionate about the environment. He was passionate about the environment long before it was fashionable to be so. He was a regular volunteer at our magnificent Stony Range Regional Botanic Garden in Dee Why and in the 1970s lent his hand to the campaign to save our State rainforests – many of which are now classified as World Heritage Areas*.

But here in Warringah, Jim will always be remembered fondly for his unwavering dedication to Narrabeen Lagoon and his steadfast determination to see the completion of the multi-use trail that encircles it.

I first met Jim when I was elected Mayor in 2008. I think it was only a matter of days after the election when he came knocking on my door. His passion and enthusiasm was infectious and he wouldn't let any obstacles get in his way. One of my proudest days as Mayor was when Jim and I turned the first sod on construction of the trail after securing significant Federal Government funding.

The Multi-use trail is one of Council's most significant accomplishments – one that our community is rightly proud of. It really has become a favourite destination for locals and visitors alike.

This Council has already resolved to investigate naming a bridge on the circuit in honour of Mr Somerville and it's right that we press ahead with that resolution. Over the course of his campaign Jim worked hard to bring many parties together for the good of the project, so a bridge is a most fitting tribute to this great man.

I think it's important to note the motivation for Jim's efforts over all those years. His dedication to improving access to Narrabeen Lagoon was not for personal gain or commercial venture – he simply wanted as many people as possible to be able to enjoy the stunning area which was his and our local environment. We are so blessed that Narrabeen Lagoon is located within our region and he wanted as many families, locals and many visitors to see it, to enjoy it, to appreciate it.

In 2012, Jim authored a publication entitled "Narrabeen Lagoon Circuit" – a summary not only of the project but of Jim's personal vision and dedication to the cause. As Pittwater MP Rob Stokes noted in Parliament last year, the book is a "...terrific example of grassroots community activism and the rewards of perseverance".**

In the foreword to Jim's book, we find the following lines:

*"For the Cause that needs assistance,
For the wrong that needs resistance,
For the future in the distance,
May I help to make a difference."*

These are powerful words that I dare say influenced his life. They are words that all of us would do well to live up to and they are words that appropriately summarise the lifelong efforts of both Mr Dennis Pecover and Mr Jim Somerville.

* <http://www.kythera-family.net/index.php?nav=117-118&did=22207>

** <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA20130221058>

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- A. Council note the sad passing of Mr Dennis Pecover OAM and that the Mayor write to Mr Pecover's family expressing the Council's condolences and gratitude for his years of service and dedication to the community.
 - B. Council note the sad passing of Mr Jim Somerville AM and that the Mayor write to Mr Somerville's family expressing the Council's condolences and gratitude for his years of service and dedication to the community.
 - C. The Mayor and Council staff work with relevant community groups and, in consultation with the families of both men, find fitting tributes recognising their long standing contributions to the Warringah community.
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Michael Regan
MAYOR