

# Rushcutters Bay Youth Recreation Facility: skate park war reignites with Woollahra council motion

A Woollahra councillor has claimed there was more on offer for dogs than kids in the eastern suburbs after a bid was made to delay funding for a highly-anticipated skate park.



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February 24, 2022 - 4:13PM

Wentworth Courier

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## *Video attached to online article*

A police officer showed off his skateboarding skills when he ran into a group of young boarders after responding to a medical call in Arlington, Texas, on August 9. Body camera footage released by the Arlington Police Department shows the officer, named as officer Austin, taking to a skate ramp at Burl L Wilkes Park after he was asked by the group if he could skate. Despite not having been on a board in 12 years, the officer skates down the ramp to applause from the young onlookers. Credit: Arlington Police Department via Storyful

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A move to push back funding for a controversial eastern suburbs skate park due to the “dire financial circumstances” of council sparked a war of words as to whether children were prioritised in the east.

Residents First councillor Luise Elsing put forward a motion at this month’s Woollahra council meeting seeking to defer the \$1.18 million set aside for the Rushcutters Bay Park Youth Recreation Facility from the capital works budget.



Children skate through Rushcutters Bay Park in support of the Youth Recreation Facility. Picture: John Appleyard

Families have been agitating for the facility, which will also include a basketball practice area, for almost a decade.

They have encountered fierce opposition from some residents, most notably those in the Darling Point Society, who use the park for recreation and fear the skate park will encourage anti-social behaviour and take away from their valuable green space.

The project stalled after opponents successfully lobbied to have the entire park heritage listed and council is still waiting on a report to see if they can proceed.

Cr Elsing said she was supportive of the skate park, pending the outcome of the heritage report, but was concerned about council's \$6.8 million deficit.

"It's very obvious that my intention in relation to this is driven by our financial position," Cr Elsing said.

"We are in dire financial circumstances."



Councillor Matt Robertson at the proposed site. Picture: Tim Hunter.

The move sparked a heated discussion with Cr Matthew Robertson, who has championed the facility, decrying the motion.

“What you have done is open a wound or division in our community about the most contentious infrastructure project I think I’ve had anything to do with,” Cr Robertson said.

Cr Robertson said there had been much misinformation circulated about the project which was designed for eight to 14 year olds and took up just 1.6 per cent of the park.

“This is a sneaky move to reopen an issue which has been so incredibly divisive,” Cr Robertson said.

“We provide more for dogs and peoples’ companion animals than we do for kids in this age bracket.

“What this Youth Recreation Facility, which was originally termed a Youth Plaza, was intended to do was say, young people, you have a place in our community.

“We value you and we’re going to make a provision for that, we’re going to give you a space to gather, to commune, to be part of our public domain.

“What your motion does is basically say that is not a priority.”

Cr Elsing, Cr Mark Silcocks, Cr Sarah Swan and Cr Merrill Witt voted in favour of the motion which was lost.

A council spokesman said they were currently engaged in a process guided by Heritage NSW, following the State Heritage Listing of Rushcutters Bay Park.

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The proposal has been divisive. Picture: John Appleyard

“As part of this process, we commissioned specialist consultants to prepare a Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) and Conservation Management Strategy (CMS), which we plan to take to council for endorsement in April/May,” the spokesman said.

“Should these be endorsed by council, a Section 60 Application including the HIS and CMS would be submitted to Heritage NSW for approval to proceed with the Youth Recreation Facility project. This process would involve public exhibition of all documents lodged as part of the application.”