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'People over politics' movement grows in Melbourne lord mayor race

A lord mayoral candidate for the Melbourne's community ticket says the city's future can't be left in the hands of fly-in fly-out candidates or "cashed-up celebrities" as discontent grows among grassroots voters.

[Ian Royall](#) and [Laura Placella](#)

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23 comments



Megan Stevenson, Greg Bisinella, Mary Masters and James Robertson from the Voices for Melbourne ticket.
Picture: Ian Currie

A line-up of "opportunists, phantom candidates and cashed-up celebrities" has overrun the City of Melbourne election campaign, according to the lord mayoral candidate for the city's community ticket.

Greg Bisinella from the Voices for Melbourne ticket said residents had been forgotten amid the campaign frenzy,

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claiming the current line-up was not representative of the community.

“Melbourne’s future cannot be left to the hands of FIFO (fly-in fly-out) candidates and developer donations,” he said.

The stinging attack comes amid growing discontent among grassroots voters, with a new study revealing that Victorians, more than any other state in Australia, were the most dissatisfied with their councils.

The “people over politics” movement is now sweeping Melbourne where community candidates are expected to poll strongly as voters resist party political agendas in their neighbourhoods.



Greg Bisinella from the Voices for Melbourne ticket says residents have been forgotten amid the campaign frenzy. Picture: Ian Currie

Teams of independents have emerged in the inner-city councils of Yarra and Port Phillip, organised in a Teal-like action raging against party machines and career politicians.

In Melbourne, Mr Bisinella, who is running for lord mayor, said Town Hall was being “reduced to a playground for opportunists”.

He said residents had local knowledge and his team regularly attended council meetings.

“How many of the other candidates say they have actually seen a meeting, much less understand how the council works?” he asked.

“And I can’t tell you how many days I’ve spent in VCAT fighting inappropriate development applications on behalf of the community.”

Mr Bisinella’s ticket includes running mate Megan Stevenson and lead councillor candidate Mary Masters, who have both spent years advocating for their communities in Carlton and West Melbourne.



Lord Mayor Nick Reece – with his running mate, former Liberal candidate for Aston and current councillor Roshena Campbell. Picture: Supplied

The contenders in the mayoral race include Carlton legend [Anthony Koutoufides](#), former Labor adviser and current [Lord Mayor Nick Reece](#) – with his running mate, former Liberal candidate for Aston and current councillor Roshena Campbell – and former deputy lord mayor Arron Wood.

Meanwhile, discontent over the controversial Greens-led Yarra council has prompted the Yarra For All coalition of independents.

Even for independents not part of the Yarra For All alliance, the overarching sentiment has been “anyone but the Greens”.



Yarra for All candidate and current councillor Stephen Jolly says the Greens' policies over the past four years have created restlessness in the community. Picture: Alex Coppel

Yarra for All candidate and current councillor Stephen Jolly said the Greens' policies over the past four years had created restlessness in the community.

"People just want a council that they are not embarrassed about, that they can be proud about and not at war with," he said.

In response, the Greens are running candidates in all nine wards, have been advertising heavily and have even drafted in national leader Adam Bandt to try to shore up support, especially in Mr Jolly's Fitzroy-based ward of MacKillop.

Another independent Brielle Pope hit the national spotlight when she and other mums in Collingwood protested against Yarra's makeover of the Cambridge St park.

The new look – complete with a \$191,000 artwork and only one swing – quickly gained notoriety as ["Australia's saddest playground"](#).



Brielle Pope is one of five independents contesting the Hoddle ward in the City of Yarra.

Ms Pope, one of five independents contesting the Hoddle ward, said it was that sort of political dogma that drove her – and others such as fashion lecturer Tony Lee and Sharon Harrison – to run for council.

“I was probably a bit ignorant of what was going on at council, but then we had the whole Cambridge St issue and I realised how little the council wanted to work with residents. It highlighted how politics can be detrimental to what people want,” she said.

In the inner south, the People Empowering Port Phillip team of seven candidates is pushing back against party affiliations in the St Kilda-based council.

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Tony Lee is also contesting the Hoddle ward. Picture: Supplied

One of the candidates, Beverley Pinder, a former City of Melbourne councillor, described the movement as an “independent onslaught”.

“We are striving to bring about real positive change to Port Phillip minus the political affiliations that seem to stifle prudent decision-making,” Ms Pinder said.

Research by technology provider Datacom showed just 44 per cent of Victorians were satisfied with their council services, the lowest rate nationwide.

Datacom software products managing director Peter Nelson said candidates had a challenge to win over voters and then to deliver services.



Sharon Harrison is also contesting the Hoddle ward. Picture: Supplied

Monash University political expert Zareh Ghazarian told the Saturday Herald Sun that first-time candidates may have been “emboldened” by the results of the 2022 federal election, which saw a move away from traditional political parties.

“I suspect that many people would be ... thinking that if an independent (Monique Ryan) can knock off the treasurer (Josh Frydenberg) in a seat that has been seen to be so safe by a major party for such a long time, then I’m going to have a go,” Dr Ghazarian said.

“I would expect candidates who may be political novices, who may not have contested elections in the past, who may be interested in them, thinking that they can provide the solutions to the issues they have lived experience with.”



Melbourne lord mayor candidate Arron Wood. Picture: Supplied



Melbourne lord mayor candidate Anthony Koutoufides. Picture: Jake Nowakowski

And Dr Ghazarian said these candidates had a headstart when it came to their campaign.

“It is all about the local community (and) if these independents have local connections and local profiles that does go some way to establishing their support base,” he said.

In Melbourne, one well-known community advocate even has the endorsement of former lord mayor Sally Capp.

Elvis Martin, 29, who is running to become a Melbourne councillor, has rallied together a team of candidates to “champion the voices of all Melburnians”.

“Elvis is already a great leader in our city in many ways and he’s been brave enough to put his hand up — and I think that

'People over politics' movement grows in Melbourne lord mayor race | Herald Sun
deserves support," Ms Capp said in August.

All councils except for Melbourne have changed to ward representation, meaning more local accountability.

One municipality where community candidates are struggling for traction is in Brunswick-based Merri-bek where independents face strong party representation from the Greens, Labor and even the Victorian Socialists.

Usual disgruntled ratepayers ... or a quiet revolution?

Let's face it, most of us really care about our local council only when the rates bill arrives or when the bins have not been emptied. Neither brings much joy.

When things go wrong, we get angry for a while and then move on.

But for some residents, a stoush with the council can be the catalyst to step up and contest a local election.

People are fed up with ... draws breath ... political agendas, poor decisions, councils not listening, career politicians, inefficient use of resources ... the list goes on.

Speaking to candidates who are out knocking on doors this election campaign, the most common feedback from residents is usually around parking changes, the fortnightly rubbish collection, the state of play equipment in the local park, or that the local library ceiling leaks when it rains.

Palestine or gender politics? Not so much.



Could this spate of people power rein in a new era at Town Hall? Picture: Ian Currie

Sure enough, the Teals' success at the 2022 federal election has shown that you can get elected without being a party member.

Perhaps the Covid-driven shift to online council meetings — rather than meetings being hosted behind closed doors at town hall on Tuesday nights — has provided useful insight into the world of local government.

And perhaps residents watched those meetings and thought “I can do that”.

Or even: “These guys are idiots, I can do better.”

The result is that, in central Melbourne in particular, people power seems to be gaining momentum.

Whether that translates into electoral success later this month is yet to be seen.

But the major political parties, especially the Greens, are feeling the heat from the independents because that party has always looked to build its power base from the local level.

What is certain, though, is that the parties' bigwigs will be watching this year's count with more than just a passing interest.

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Les

1 day ago

Nick Reece has removed e-scooters from our streets and has worked hard at successfully getting the live stock trucks off City Road under a 12 month trial. 2 very big wins for locals. So he has my vote.

👍 1

↩ Reply

Mr. Grumpy

1 day ago

Teals in disguise. Put them just above the Greens at the bottom of your ballot paper

👍

↩ Reply

Len

1 day ago

Just watch out for "community candidates" who are only there to harvest preferences for the major parties, in particular labor and the greens. Not just in the City, but every council this election. Research their backgrounds, their policies and their affiliations.

👍 3

↩ Reply

Paul

1 day ago

Labor and the Greens are wrecking everything, they are environmental vandals.

👍

↩ Reply

Drew

1 day ago

Greens is disguise again !

👍

↩ Reply

Richard 1 day ago

What dam and forest in the City of Yarra needs saving? after all the greens did get a start saving the Tassie wilderness from concrete

👍 3 ➡ Reply

David 1 day ago

It's simple if you are a member of a political party you cannot run. If you are a member, make sure you put Greens last as they are only in it for a political agenda.

👍 8 ➡ Reply

Larry 1 day ago

As a city of Melb resident and ratepayer, give me access to councillors who are working for me rather than portfolios.... like Creative Melb, Health wellbeing & belonging, Sustainable buildingand it goes on 13 portfolios! that have nothing to do with DIRECTLY looking after the needs of residents and ratepayers!!!!!!

👍 7 ➡ Reply

Mick 1 day ago

It's time for the Greens to be obliterated from the political landscape. They have lost their identity...instead of caring for the greater good and the environment they now stand as a self centred and for 'violence within the community' party.

👍 ➡ Reply

Teresa 1 day ago

I want someone that will remove the bike lanes, restore evening and Sunday free parking, only have one flag, will not have welcome to country ceremonies before meetings and will hose down all sidewalks in the CBD each morning to move the homeless on

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