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Sydney Morning Herald

## Labor takes the reins at Parramatta Council after Liberals' retreat



By [Megan Gorrey](#)

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Labor has seized control of Sydney's fastest-growing CBD for the first time in more than a decade, after the Liberal Party deserted a string of councils in the local government elections.

Councillor Donna Davis was elected unopposed as the new lord mayor of the City of Parramatta, in Sydney's west, at a meeting on Monday night. Fellow Labor councillor Sameer Pandey was elected as her deputy.



Labor's Donna Davis represents Epping ward. *CREDIT:ANNA KUCERA*

The council was considered a decent chance of changing hands at December's poll. Bitter factional in-fighting had [triggered the Liberal Party state executive to not endorse candidates](#) in Parramatta and six other councils.

The decision could create a series of political headaches for Dominic Perrottet's government, which faces the prospect of ramped up opposition to Coalition policies from Labor-dominated councils.

Cr Davis, a councillor since 2017, said the mayoralty was a "big, important role" and she was "very excited to have this opportunity".

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Labor won seven seats on the 15-member council, and is expected to form a majority voting bloc with Greens councillor Phil Bradley. Our Local Community party won four seats, two went to independents, and councillor Lorraine Wearne, of Lorraine Wearne Independents, was returned.

Cr Davis is the council's first Labor mayor since 2008, and the third woman to hold the job in the city's 160-year history. She has worked for state and federal MPs and held various roles in the public service.

Cr Davis replaces Liberal councillor Steven Issa, who briefly held the role after being elected in September. His Liberal predecessor, Bob Dwyer, ran second on an independent ticket but failed to win a seat.

Mr Dwyer was a "bit concerned" about the prospect of a Labor and Greens-controlled council, warning frequent opposition to state government projects could drive them to invest elsewhere, such as Liverpool or Penrith.

"It'd be good if they encouraged the state government to continue their great drive in Parramatta," Mr Dwyer said.



City of Parramatta councillors elected Donna Davis as lord mayor on Monday night. Her fellow Labor councillor, Sameer Pandey, is deputy lord mayor. *CREDIT:PARRAMATTA COUNCIL*

Cr Davis said she was "committed to ensuring Parramatta flourishes".

“With a Labor mayor and a progressive council ... we will be advocating for our community, which is something I feel has been lacking in recent years because there’s been a lot more advocating for state government projects,” she said.

“People have chosen at the ballot box, and they want councillors who will represent them.”

She named her priorities as improving community consultation, preserving green space as the city’s population balloons from 257,000 to an estimated 455,000 in the next 15 years, and more affordable housing.



The centre of Parramatta is being transformed by major building and infrastructure projects, including a light rail line.*CREDIT: WOLTER PEETERS*

Cr Davis’ election comes at a critical juncture for the City of Parramatta, which is overseeing an unprecedented wave of public and private investment.

Developer Lang Walker is transforming the centre of the CBD with his \$2.7 billion Parramatta Square project. The council is also pushing ahead with its \$100 million revamp of the Riverside Theatre, and the \$88.6 million Parramatta pool.

The state government has earmarked the area for substantial investment, including the light rail line linking Westmead with central Parramatta, and a new metro rail line.

In addition, the state government is building the \$533 million Parramatta Powerhouse.

Cr Davis has been a vocal opponent of the plan to relocate the historic villa Willow Grove to make way for the museum - a position she said she would not resile from.

“I’ve always said I support state government investment in arts and culture in Parramatta,” Cr Davis said.

“Now we need to ensure that the City of Parramatta can work collaboratively to deliver the arts and cultural precinct that was envisaged by the city, incorporating the Riverside Theatre.”

Last year, the Liberal Party withdrew from other councils they have contested in the past, including Bayside, Blacktown, Cumberland, Fairfield, the Inner West, and Strathfield councils.

[Former Inner West Council mayor Darcy Byrne was re-elected to the top job](#) with fellow Labor councillor Jess D’Arienzo as his deputy, after ALP councillors secured an outright majority on the 15-member council. Cr Byrne will push for a reversal of the state government’s controversial policy to amalgamate Ashfield, Leichhardt and Marrickville councils into one super-council after the majority of inner west ratepayers voted for a de-merger on election day.