

Friends Of Pymont Point

In June 2003, Pymont residents were distressed by the State Government's plans to dispose of one of the last pieces of publicly owned foreshore on Sydney Harbour.

The land, 1.8 hectares on Elizabeth Macarthur Bay, was the Water Police Sydney base. The Government decided to move the Water Police, and the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA) proposed to sell the site, as a 99-year lease, to property developers. SHFA was widely seen as the unelected, unaccountable development arm of the State. The community believed that this rare foreshore belonged to all the people of NSW.

SHFA set up a 'community consultation process' - a design competition for multi-storey apartments - and public open space was not an option. When SHFA demanded that residents select one of eight designs, all involving buildings up to 15 storeys, residents formed the Friends of Pymont Point to resist the government and reject the plan.

Gandhi's non-violent approach to protest was espoused by one of the members of the committee and was applied to the campaign.

The Friends of Pymont Point was set up like a social club or business, and registered. Executive members acquired their positions due to previous experience. These included: Project Management, Human Resource Development, Architecture, Accountancy, Administration, Conflict Management, Public Speaking and Psychology. Networking added a Town Planner, a Lawyer, a Politician and a Property Developer, as well as the essential 'foot soldiers' who did the petitioning, delivering flyers, copying letters, making signs etc.

An early resolution states: "We are opposed to commercial and residential development on publicly-owned foreshore land. We demand that the land on Elizabeth Macarthur Bay...be a community resource providing usable, public open space." All decisions and actions embodied this resolution – the Friends' mission statement.

The committee's values included integrity and sound ecological practice, being inclusive and democratic, and managing conflict. Rallies were sometimes noisy but always peaceful. Another value was 'playing the ball, not the man': it was not acceptable to criticise on a personal basis. This was sometimes difficult and had to be monitored.

Each rally was addressed by at least two inspirational speakers. The Friends referred to the site as 'our land' – planting the idea of ownership in the minds of our supporters - and opponents. The opponents said they were conducting a 'community consultation': the Friends called it an 'architectural competition'.

Friends of Pymont Point gained wide support. Residents from Public Housing supported the cause, as did trade unions, churches, business people, media personalities, schools and politicians. The cause was popular and the campaign successful.

Marcelle Hoff and Charles Perry