

We The People  
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We the People 251 David and Goliath



Good day to you. One of the most influential speeches ever made was by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 at Gettysburg. It is an outstanding piece of writing and is memorable for its brevity and power. Every word is measured and yet it is the language of the people and there is a compelling grandeur that consecrates the words. Lincoln concludes his oratory with the concise and moving description of democracy being "*government of the people, by the people and for the people*". The acutely important reference here is the word **people** which is also reflected in their Constitution in that great phrase "*We the People*". Australia would do well to hold precious, freedom of expression and on open and transparent government which nurtures and protects true government for the people. This begins at community level and we should distinguish those who take up the cudgel for freedom of speech. It is in this context I introduce the Gold Coast's Main Beach couple of David and Lia Hutley as they instigate people power.

Quite recently Mayor Tom Tate suddenly and apparently without notifying other Councillors or the State government released the plan for tram routes through Main Beach. It appeared to be just another mayoral thought bubble but to the Hutleys' it was a predictable example of push politics in destroying the Main Beach area and in particular the Spit. In their view the tram would bring noise, destroy property values, business and general amenity and was simply a Trojan tram designed to create high rise on the Spit thus forever changing the place by confusing **growth** with **progress**. In fact the tram creates a 1.6 Km wide corridor of high rise and high density wherever it goes. Being aware of the perceived secrecy of Gold Coast Council, they and a small group including Sue Donovan had started the Main Beach Association to give residents a voice and to bring pressure to bear on Council to listen to the people. Many have asked why the Council and the Mayor are fostering high rise on the Spit when the City Plan limits the height of buildings to three storeys. The Council's own town planners oppose the construction of high rise and yet the relentless drive to ruin the Spit propels companies like Sunland and ASF to initiate the development phase for their towers and casino on public land. A number of independent surveys show unambiguously that a majority of Gold Coast people are against the development of high rise on the Spit and the loss of public land. The Palaszczuk State Government, desperate for revenue, appears to quietly go along with these governance aberrations while the Minister for Local government seems unwilling to step in and return the power to the people, regardless of the evidence at hand.

The Main Beach Association has just 225 members so it's a David and Goliath battle although David insists it is a team effort including Main Beach residents and business. The Association researched the matter and found the public consultation process deeply flawed and that there may be a breach of the Local Government Act. David wrote a strong insightful letter to the Minister for Local Government formally complaining that due process had been deliberately circumvented. Now this is where the chronology of events is engaging. In the Sun newspaper on Wednesday May 10, Tom Tate was quoted as saying that those groups that opposed the development and the tram were "selfish". David Hutley's letter of complaint against Mayor Tate was sent shortly after to the State government. In an internal memo to councillors Tate now says he has reviewed the research and so believes Council should not pursue light rail through Main Beach or the Spit. I don't believe this is the whole story and in any case why is Tom Tate making what appears to be unilateral decisions. So at this time and with a huge effort the Main Beach Association has won this battle against all the odds and the autocratic Goliath. However they must be on guard as history indicates that the developers and their influential friends will come at it again and in any case while the tram at Main beach is now off the drawing board the other concrete monoliths on public land at the Spit are not. In a letter dated May 16 to a local MP the deputy Premier Jackie Trad states that *the Government wasn't aware of the Mayor's announcement or the plan for trams through Main Beach to the Spit*. Given this constitutes major infrastructure why weren't they told. Deputy Premier Trad goes on to say that any plans to extend the tram south of Broadbeach are only conceptual and surely this provides a different take to the hype of Mayor Tom Tate.

So David and his slingshot and the Main Beach residents and business brought the giant down through the voice of the people and I applaud them. **Until next time this is Kent Bayley**