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# NEWSLETTER

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## Virginia Judge (1956-2026)

By Cathy Jones

Virginia Judge, former Strathfield Councillor (1995-2004), Mayor of Strathfield (2000-2003) and State Member for Strathfield (2003-2011) died on 24 February 2026. In her nearly two decades of political involvement, she made significant contributions at the Municipal and State electorate area of Strathfield across her wide areas of interest including but not limited to the arts, environment, community development, heritage and health. This article mainly focuses on her activities and achievements at Strathfield Council from 1995-2004.

Dianne Virginia Judge was born in Cooma, NSW, daughter of the late Cecily and Henry Judge. She lived for some years in New Delhi where her father was Secretary of the Colombo Plan, an Australian overseas aid program<sup>1</sup>. She returned to Canberra and completed a degree in Education (double music major) at the Canberra School of Music<sup>2</sup>. She also worked as a project officer for a small non-government organisation and volunteered as an overseas teacher for Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA)<sup>3</sup>. She also worked in Tonga with Australian Volunteers Abroad, which she stated in an interview gave her experience and understanding of difficulties people encounter arriving in a new land with few contacts<sup>4</sup>. She met and married her husband in Tonga<sup>5</sup>. She worked as both a primary and secondary school teacher in the ACT and NSW. She was later employed in the real estate agency *The Professionals* in Strathfield<sup>6</sup>.



**Image 1 Virginia Judge.  
Photo Strathfield Council 1995**

In September 1995, Virginia stood for election as an independent candidate in the Strathfield Council elections. At that time, she resided on Redmyre Road, Strathfield, with her husband and children. Despite being elected as a Councillor, her influence in decision-making was limited due to the political composition of the Council.

This Council term was extended beyond the usual four years due to the progress of a proposal for amalgamation of Strathfield and Burwood Councils. However, in 2000, Strathfield Council decided to withdraw from the amalgamation discussions, which triggered an election in July 2000. During her first five-year term, Virginia Judge established a considerable following within the community. She achieved this by actively consulting with residents and representing their concerns to Council on a broad range of issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Burges, Roslyn (2002) [Virginia Judge Interview](#), Tamil Community Oral History Project

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> NSW Parliament, Former Members 'Virginia Judge'

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Strathfield Scene 1995

She was pre-selected by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) as a candidate for the Strathfield Council elections, held in July 2000. She led a team of ALP candidates and achieved significant success in electing four councillors to a Council of nine councillor positions<sup>7</sup>. The team's policies included<sup>8</sup>:

- A more open Council
- Improved planning to avoid overdevelopment
- New facilities for a young people
- More frequent and additional Council Ranger facilities
- Extra parking in the Town Centre
- Upgraded and extended library facilities
- Cleanup and beautification of our town Centre
- Cut back in Council wastage

With minor party support, she was elected Mayor on 25 July 2000. She eventually served as Mayor until March 2003, when she was elected as the Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly for the electorate of Strathfield.

Claiming a mandate for change in her first Mayoral Minute on 1 August 2000 entitled 'A new way for Strathfield', she wasted little time in launching major policy initiatives at Strathfield Council, which included reorganisation of the organisation structures, which reduced executive level staff from four to two directors, abolishing multiple Council committees and redirecting all matters to two monthly Council meetings as well as initiating Site Inspection Committees for proposed development applications<sup>9</sup>. She also sought to improve communications to the community by dedicating staff resources for community development and media relations. Known for her colourful turn of phrase, she abolished dinners after Council meetings stating 'the concept of Council's having weekly meetings and getting stuck into suppers after such meetings is similar to the proverbial snout in the trough including the two front trotters as well'<sup>10</sup>.

She announced in August 2000 'Clean Streets 2001' initiative, which involved regular inspections of the cleanliness of shopping centres and local streets by the Mayor and Senior staff, to address complaints by residents of litter hotspots and the cleanliness of public areas. A further cleanliness initiative was establishing fines for spitting in public places<sup>11</sup>. In 2001, Virginia announced the addition of new Ranger patrols and establishment of a 'Flying Squad' to address emergencies<sup>12</sup>

From her earliest days on Council, Virginia established a regular routine of community street meetings. Dubbed the 'Milk Crate Mayor', she arrived at meetings carrying a milk crate and standing on the crate to address a street meeting. This was formalised in 2000 as 'Meet the Mayor' sessions at Council and at local



**Image 2 Strathfield Scene August 2000, p1**

<sup>7</sup> From 2005, Strathfield Council reduced from 9 to 7 Councillor positions.

<sup>8</sup> Strathfield Scene (2000) 'Virginia Judge and the Community Labor Team' advertisement, June 2000, p3

<sup>9</sup> Mayoral Minute presented to Council meeting 1 August 2000, Strathfield Council. Committee operations confirmed in Council resolution of Council meeting 5 September 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Mayoral Minute presented to Council meeting 1 August 2000, Strathfield Council

<sup>11</sup> 'More clean streets' presented to Mayoral Minute 7 November 2000, Strathfield Council

<sup>12</sup> 'Mayoral Column' (2001), Strathfield Scene, February 2001, p2

shopping centres, usually on Saturday mornings<sup>13</sup>. A number of communication related initiatives were implemented in 2001 including a new Council website and an upgraded customer service Centre at Homebush Road, which opened in August 2001<sup>14</sup>.

As Mayor, she hosted the then Annual Volunteers Dinner in November 2000 inviting all the local residents who volunteered for the Sydney Olympics and/or Paralympics games as well as representatives of local community volunteer organisations. She also initiated publication of quarterly Council newsletters to ratepayers via Rates Notices in late 2000<sup>15</sup>.

In July 2001, Virginia announced that Strathfield Council adopted a balanced budget for 2001-2002 which was the first budget since 1993 without loan borrowings. Further, she announced that \$2 million was allocated in the budget to build new library at Rochester Street Homebush. Virginia turned the first sod in March 2003 and it was announced that new library would contain a multi-media centre, children's activity room, a multi-function room and resources for local studies, young adults and community languages<sup>16</sup>. The new library which was twice as large as the building built in 1976, finally opened in 2004.

2001 celebrated the Centenary of Federation, when the Australian colonies formed the Commonwealth of Australia under a new constitution. The Federation fountain was dedicated in Strathfield Square on December 13, 2001, supported by donations from local businesses<sup>17</sup>. The restoration of the historic Coronation Arch was undertaken and opened as part of the Centenary Federation celebrations in 2001. This project received a commendation in the National Trust Awards 2002. The Centenary of Federation celebrations included a Mayoral Charity Ball, the 'Tour de Strathfield' historic homes tour, an antique fair in the Strathfield Town Hall and a student writing and art competition.<sup>18</sup>



**Image 3 Trial of electric car at Strathfield Council in Strathfield Scene April 2002**

A Mayoral Ball was held on 1 September 2001 to raise money for Father Chris Riley's 'Youth off the streets' charity. The Ball raised \$25,000<sup>19</sup>. Following the terrorist attacks in New York on 9 September 2001, as Mayor, Virginia organised a vigil in Strathfield Square on September 15, 2001, which brought together several hundred community members, representatives of Police, State Emergency Services (SES) and Fire Brigade<sup>20</sup>.

A number of awards programs were established including regular Garden Awards and Heritage Conservation Awards. These programs encouraged local residents to seek recognition for private gardens and works to conserve heritage in the Strathfield area.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Mayoral Minute' presented to Council meeting August 15, 2000, Strathfield Council

<sup>14</sup> 'Mayoral Column' (2001), Strathfield Scene July 2001, p2 and Strathfield Scene September 2002, p1

<sup>15</sup> 'Quarterly Newsletter to Ratepayers' (2000), Council meeting December 6 2000 Mayoral Minute, Strathfield Council

<sup>16</sup> 'Book open on library's new home' (March 19, 2003), Glebe and Inner City News, p18

<sup>17</sup> 'Federation Fountain unveiled' (2002), Strathfield Scene January 2002, p1

<sup>18</sup> Strathfield Federation celebrations advertisement (2001), Strathfield Scene July 2001 page 4

<sup>19</sup> 'Mayoral Charity Ball Raises \$25,000' (2001), Strathfield Scene October 2001, p3

<sup>20</sup> 'Mayoral Column' (2001, October), Strathfield Scene October 2001, p2

The review of the Strathfield Planning Scheme Ordinance commenced in 2002 with the holding of a Community Summit and Charette. The Community Summit involved property owners, residence and businesses participating in meetings for the review of councils planning instruments. Two large workshops were held in April and May 2002 attracting 300 residents in the review of the Local Environment Plan (commenced in 2002).

From 2001, Virginia initiated a range of environmental initiatives including the adoption of mandatory rainwater tanks in new buildings and installation of solar power to light common areas in multiple unit developments.<sup>21</sup> Speaking in 2002, Virginia stated 'the policy attracted interest from councils as far away as Perth. She acknowledged sustainable development controls passed last year. Council is also claiming a first with these more extensive green controls, with Wyong Council and Willoughby not far behind in installing comprehensive sustainable development controls'<sup>22</sup>

In November 2022, Strathfield Council became the first in Australia to make solar water heaters mandatory and solar power for lighting in common areas in all new multistorey unit developments<sup>23</sup>. Virginia announced that 'amendments would be made to the areas development control plan relating to multi unit housing and the Parramatta Rd corridor'<sup>24</sup>. In May 2001, Virginia moved a Mayoral Minute to support the Kyoto Protocol - a global warming treaty aimed at achieving global commitment and environmental sustainability.



**Image 4 Virginia Judge at the Red Cross Appeal door knock.  
Photo Cathy Jones 2000**

Among the many upgrades of local parks, the first draft Powells Creek landscape design framework was prepared and placed on exhibition in late 2002. This framework set out landscaping plans for open space, active transport connections and recreation facilities along the various parks adjacent to Powells Creek in Homebush. Virginia also announced that the disused piece of land on Tavistock Road would be transformed into a passive recreation area. She said 'it's an old piece of road left when the freeway was put through beside a sound barrier it's all units there and they need as much open space as they can get. We might even get a mural up there on the sound barrier. It depends what the residents want'<sup>25</sup>.

A Heritage Advisory Committee was established in late 2000 as well as incentives for heritage conservation including free heritage advisory service, establishment of a heritage fund, reduction of council development application fees, and a local heritage conservation awards scheme<sup>26</sup>. The first Strathfield Heritage Awards were presented by Virginia in April 2001 during Heritage Week celebrations, together with the launch of self-guided walking tours and an exhibition of Past Politicians of Strathfield, aligning with the themes of the Federation Centenary celebrations.<sup>27</sup> A new heritage review commenced in 2001.

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<sup>21</sup> 'Strathfield goes solar' (2002), Strathfield Scene December 2002, p3

<sup>22</sup> Shaw, K (August 28, 2002), 'Units must use tanks, solar power all-green policy', *Glebe and Inner City News*, p1

<sup>23</sup> 'Greenest suburb' (November 22, 2022), Daily Telegraph, p24

<sup>24</sup> 'Greenest suburb' (November 22, 2022), Daily Telegraph, p24

<sup>25</sup> 'Road end going green' (April 24, 2002), *Glebe and Inner City News*, p5

<sup>26</sup> 'Mayoral Column' (2000), Strathfield Scene November 2000, p2 & p13

<sup>27</sup> 'Strathfield Heritage Week' (2001), Strathfield Scene April 2001, p9

In March 2001, a new domestic waste recycling bin service was established as a joint service with Burwood Council<sup>28</sup>. Each home received a 240 litre recycle bin which was collected fortnightly to direct waste from General rubbish and landfill. In September 2002, Council resolved to introduce green waste (garden organics) collections followed by distribution of kitchen tidy bins for the collection of food scraps for compost in November 2002. Virginia said, 'The handy size of the bin allows it to be placed on a kitchen bench ...to dispose of fruit and vegetable scraps when preparing food...if every house in the Municipality composts, the reduction in household waste will be enormous'.<sup>29</sup>

The funding to upgrade the Homebush shopping village was approved in July 2001 with plans for the upgrade of the shopping centre featuring heritage sympathetic designs to complement the historic shopping centre.<sup>30</sup> The improvements costing \$2.7 million included widening of the pavement on the western side of the street and new paving in the pedestrian areas, Pedestrian areas, a resurfaced roadway, a landscape strip along the length of the Homebush Public School boundary and ornamental street lighting<sup>31</sup>. Virginia, as Mayor, opened the upgraded centre in June 2002 by holding a community party with food and market stalls. She stated at the opening 'The difference isn't only cosmetic. The improved appearance of Homebush shopping village will stimulate business and create a focal point for the community'<sup>32</sup>.

Virginia initiated the inaugural Strathfield Eco Art Prize, which was held in October 2002 at the Strathfield Town Hall. The Prize attracted over 300 entries from across Australia and prizes were presented by the NSW Premier Bob Carr and Virginia, as Mayor of Strathfield. Virginia stated 'Artists have expressed how delicate the environment is and how it must be protected and sustained and some of the works show the negative effects of environmental degradation'<sup>33</sup>

Construction of a pedestrian bridge over The Boulevarde, Strathfield commenced in July 2002 providing safe access for students of Santa Sabina College, a school located on both sides of The Boulevarde. Virginia had been a long-term advocate for this project to improve student pedestrian safety<sup>34</sup>.

Labor's Paul Whelan MP, the then State Member for the electorate of Strathfield, retired at the 2003 election, and therefore a vacancy was created. Virginia announced that she will stand for like a party preselection for the State electorate in June 2002. It was her 4th preselection attempt for the state seat. Virginia stated she would campaign on five major issues community safety, health facilities, integrity and local government, public transport an environmentally sustainable development<sup>35</sup>. She was endorsed as the Labor candidate and stood for election on 22 March 2003 against the Liberal Party's Joe Tannous. She won decisively and shortly after resigned as Mayor of Strathfield<sup>36</sup>. She said her greatest achievement in four years as mayor was 'to make council more accountable and transparent'<sup>37</sup>.

Though she continued as a Councillor on Strathfield Council until the 2004 election in March, her participation in Council activities reduced significantly as she took on her new position in the NSW Legislative Assembly. The NSW Government was led by Labor Premier Bob Carr until 2005, when he

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<sup>28</sup> 'A new approach to waste management' (2001), Strathfield Scene April 2001, p4

<sup>29</sup> 'Free Bin for Composting' (2002 November), Strathfield Council website (archived version)

<sup>30</sup> Homebush Shopping Village Improvements for early 2002 (2001), Strathfield Scene August 2001, p9

<sup>31</sup> Shaw, Kim (July 17, 2002), 'Village salutes smarter image', Glebe and Inner City News, p5

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Shaw, Kim (October 16, 2002), 'Strathfield brush with fame', Glebe and Inner City News, p8

<sup>34</sup> Strathfield Pedestrian Construction Starts (2002), Strathfield Scene August 2002, p5

<sup>35</sup> Shaw, Kim (June 12, 2002), K 'Mayor to make bid for seat' Glebe and Inner City News, p1

<sup>36</sup> Apap, Veronica & Shaw, K (April 9 2003), New Role in Focus, Glebe and Inner City News, p8

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

stood down and was replaced as Premier by Morris Iemma. Virginia was re-elected at the 2007 NSW Election and served as Member for Strathfield until 2011, when she and the NSW Labor Government was defeated. She served a total of 7 years 11 months 11 days in the NSW Parliament<sup>38</sup>.

In 2007 she was made Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Education & Training, Industrial Relations, and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance<sup>39</sup>. She was appointed as Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Citizenship, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts in September 2008.

In her inaugural speech to the NSW Parliament in 2003, she referenced several successful initiatives as Mayor of Strathfield relating to social and environmental issues<sup>40</sup>:

*"I want to offer my community a message of hope and practical solutions which address the real issues of crime and disorder. For example, in Strathfield I recently initiated a youth outreach program called Point Zero, which takes assistance in the form of counselling and information to young people in need. People are not born criminals. Alienation and exclusion generate the conditions in which crime thrives. These conditions are created when people lack the basic needs which so many of us take for granted. Stable families, affordable housing, et cetera, are all necessary services which provide a feeling of community, family, and friendship, and that it is what I will strive for."*

*"As mayor I made it my mission to make my local community highly environmentally conscious and engaged. We made it mandatory that all new dwellings have a rainwater tank; the first council in the State to do so. I believe passionately that nature is a finite resource that needs to be nourished, cherished and preserved."*

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**Image 5 Virginia Judge at International Women's Day at Strathfield Town Hall in 2022.**

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<sup>38</sup> NSW Parliament, Former Members 'Virginia Judge'

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Virginia Judge (2003), Legislative Assembly Hansard April 29 2003

'Road end going green' (April 24, 2002), *Glebe and Inner City News*, p5

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