

Ten years ago, Epping was the first suburb in Sydney to be declared an Urban Activation Precinct. Land use rules were changed by the Department of Planning, the effect of which was to increase height limits extensively and render land use in the town centre almost exclusively residential. The picture shows the envisaged future of Rawson Street, the main street in Epping. Most of the similar height apartments on the other side of the line have been or are nearing completion but are not visible in the picture.



The Boronia Grove Community Centre in Rawson Street (the single-storey building in the bottom of this picture with no solar panels) was purchased by Parramatta Council in 2018 and reopened in 2022 after extensive renovations costing nearly \$3m, including the installation of a wheelchair lift. The centre is next door to Parramatta Council's free car park, which in turn is next door to a Coles supermarket, the only major supermarket in the suburb. Until the May 2025 election, the centre was used for elections, including the referendum. It is within 200 metres of Epping Station, which is a junction for several bus routes, the T9 rail line, the Central Coast line and the Metro.

I have lived nearby for over 50 years and traditionally vote at the nearby Church of Christ in Bridge Street. Church of Christ and Boronia Grove are about 300 metres apart and since Boronia Grove became available, I have pre-poll at Boronia Grove. .

I have pre-poll at most previous elections and did so this year at North Epping because neither Boronia Grove nor the Church of Christ was available for pre-polling. By comparison with the traditional Epping booths, the North Epping booth is surrounded by low density housing, is at a distance from the town centre and is poorly served by public transport. Parking there is only in nearby residential streets.

In short, from the point of view of voters and AEC staff, Boronia Grove must be one of the best-located and potential polling booths in northwest Sydney. Consequently, it was disappointing that on the day of the election, only Church of Christ was available for voting.

On election day, the 3rd May, my wife spent 6.5 hours handing out how-to-vote material at the Church of Christ booth and can report that there was a steady flow of voters and long queues all of that time. An elderly neighbour, who lives opposite the booth, waited all day for a hoped for lull in the queue to be able to vote. Towards the end of the day, when she could delay no longer, she approached to join the queue, and as usual, when they realised her presence, other voters were happy to let her go to the top of the queue. The queue at this booth was consistently longer throughout the day than I can recall in any previous elections.

In short, I hope Boronia Grove has not dropped off the AEC's radar and that it will play its traditional role in the future.

More generally, I suggest that more effort be made to encourage pre-polling, rather than perpetuating the futile requirement that voters must have a reason to pre-poll. This requirement is farcical and unevenly enforced. The law should be changed to encourage load balancing between pre-polling and voting on the day.

Especially given the complications associated with a change of boundaries, I commend the AEC's adoption of technology that prints House of Representatives ballot papers on the spot in response to each voter attending at the booth.