

Councillors could face stiff competition

By Denise Mooney

A PORT Melbourne lobby group is believed to be running six candidates in the November council elections, including a former Greater Geelong City Council mayor.

The Port Melbourne Alliance, which has campaigned strongly against a council plan to build a rooming house on Liardet Street, would not confirm who the candidates were or which wards they would represent.

But it's believed the group will run candidates against councillors Janet Bolitho and Peter Logan.

A former mayor of the troubled Greater Geelong City Council, Shane Dowling, is believed to be running against Cr Bolitho.

Mr Dowling moved to Port Melbourne earlier this year after resigning from the City of Greater Geelong in

January for personal reasons. He served six years, including a term as mayor from 2004 to 2005. His resignation came two months before a report by State Ombudsman George Brouwer slammed the council's lack of transparency.

Mr Dowling is a former police inspector and was mayor of South Melbourne Council from 1989 to 1991. He denied he had decided to run as a candidate but refused to rule it out.

"There are a couple of issues in Port Phillip that really concern me, including the South Melbourne Town Hall, the triangle in St Kilda and the amount of money spent on that consultant (Caroline Shahbaz)," he said.

"The City of Greater Geelong leaves the City of Port Phillip for dead as far as consultation goes," he said. Mr Dowling said he became involved

with the alliance after reading reports of the council's plan for a rooming house in *EHW*.

The Port Melbourne Alliance is emerging as a powerful lobby group with several high-profile traders among its members. It is believed to have raised substantial campaign funds just weeks into its campaign.

Unchain St Kilda president Serge Thomann said he was in talks with the Port Melbourne Alliance with a view to collaborating with the group.

"But we haven't had a proper meeting yet," he said.

Mr Thomann said he did not think the group was anti-rooming house or conservative politically, as some community members had claimed.

"They're not anti-social housing or right wing. I think they're just against that building."

"By working together as a community we've got better chances."