

Housing plan axed in Callan Park backflip

Linda Doherty

In its second backflip in four days, the State Government has reversed plans to sell part of historic Callan Park for a private housing development.

The Labor member for Port Jackson, Sandra Nori, yesterday said that legislation she will introduce would ensure the 61-hectare site, which includes Rozelle Hospital, would remain "forever" in public ownership.

The hospital, however, will close by 2005 when a \$43 million mental-health facility at Concord Hospital is built. The funding for the Concord Hospital development, which was to flow from selling eight hectares of Callan Park land for private housing, will now come from consolidated revenue.

Ms Nori holds Port Jackson, in Sydney's inner west, on a margin of 25 per cent, but a strong local campaign of opposition threatened to unseat her.

Tom Uren, the patron of the Defenders of Sydney Harbour Foreshores, said recent polling showed a surge in local support for the Greens.

"It would have been a similar position to Cunningham [the Wollongong federal seat].

The Liberals and everyone else would have isolated Sandra Nori," he said.

Last Wednesday night, the Minister for Education, John Watkins suddenly announced that Hunters Hill High School, sitting on \$60 million worth of riverfront land, would not be sold. He also was facing a tough election and a Hunters Hill High School parent, Kathy Prokhovnik, may still run against him in Ryde as an independent.

Ms Nori said she would introduce a private members bill into Parliament to protect the entire Callan Park site tomorrow.

"It means that the whole site, including the buildings that are there now and the open space, the gardens, foreshore, will be entrenched in public ownership forever," she said. "Residential of any kind, public or private, is ruled out."

The president of the Friends of Callan Park, Jean Lennane, said her group welcomed the victory but still wanted Rozelle Hospital to stay on the site.

"We are thrilled that the local member has at last seen the writing on the wall and is prepared to represent the wishes of her constituents," Dr Lennane said.