

NSW BUDGET ESTIMATES COMMITTEE
MONDAY 15 OCTOBER 2007

Mr Frank Sartor on Callan Park

Following is transcript of Lee Rhiannon (Greens) asking questions of Frank Sartor (Minister Administering the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002) about the future of Callan Park and the current master planning process.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What community consultation was undertaken by the Government prior to the Government entering into a memorandum of understanding with the University of Sydney in relation to the Callan Park site?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: If you are suggesting that Callan Park has not been consulted, has not been open to community debate in probably an unprecedented fashion for this country—

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, that is not my question, and you know that! I was specifically talking about the memorandum of understanding with the University of Sydney.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The memorandum of understanding was deliberately made nonbinding. In fact, if you are able to be objective for a minute, the fact we entered a memorandum of understanding and deliberately made it non-binding so that people could see the specific provisions that would be totally transparent with regard to what is being proposed, I think is a good thing compared with us saying, "Oh, we might end up with something with the University, we might not." It is my view that it is best that we be totally upfront and transparent about the proposal, and that is perfectly consistent with the Callan Park Act.

So we entered into a memorandum of understanding that laid out what the university had in mind and we actually made it non-binding so that the Government was not irreversibly committed to it. Then we entered into a process whereby there is a proposal on the table that is specific about which people can make specific comments. Then we are looking at non-government organisations and how we deal with those. We are looking at the open space and whether that would

be managed by council, university or whatever, and other things around the area. Whether or not you agree with the movement of mental health, it is fair to say that the proposals as they emerge for Callan Park are very modest and very gentle on the local community.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I am trying to understand the involvement the local community can have. Is the Government aware of any concerns from the community that local residents and council members are excluded from the community reference group?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: With the greatest of respect, we set up a reference group, which is the Friends of Callan Park. It is supposed to have three or four council people on it, but they cannot agree so they all turn up. There are people with a certain point of view who believe that if their point of view prevails, that amounts to democracy. The reference group has some 20 or 30 people on it. It is very broadly based, yet the Friends of Callan Park turn up and try to disrupt meetings; they interfere and want to push their barrow. I understand that facilitators have been very patient, but at some point the broader community and the broader public interest has to be heard as well. When a draft masterplan is prepared, it will go on public exhibition.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When do you anticipate—

Mr FRANK SARTOR: We will then invite broad public comments. Then we will see whether the Friends of Callan Park speak for 10 per cent, 30 per cent, 50 per cent or 100 per cent of the local community. Let us just see because it is very important that we move beyond the ideology, rhetoric and blindness to some sort of transparency and enlightenment to try to find a solution for Callan Park that will be broadly compatible with the local area and with the aims of the Callan Park Act.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Could you tell us what stage the lease negotiations with the University have reached?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The lease negotiations with the university will not be finalised until we finalise our master plan. We have simply done the right thing and been upfront about it and said, "There is a memorandum of understanding. This is the intent. It is consistent with the Act. You pick it to pieces all you like." There are people who do not want the Callan Park issue to be resolved because they enjoy the process. People sometimes become addicted to process: They actually love the process!

You have only got to go to some of those meetings. They just love it! In fact, most of us think, "What am I going to do Friday night? I am not going to go see a show, what will I do?" They think: When is the next meeting? That is what they get excited about! If there are not four public meetings in the next month of their calendar, they start becoming all agitated, breaking out in hives and twitching. Some of us actually want a sensible and balanced approach to which everyone makes a contribution.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You have revealed quite a lot in your attitude to community consultation, but can you just give us a time line?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Are you seriously saying community consultation is deficient in this process? Are you seriously saying that?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Look at the outcome and where we are heading.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Hang on! So you do not agree with where it is heading?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: No, Minister, do not try to Peter Opie [peter_opie@ml.com] set me up here! You are the one who is here to answer questions. I am quite happy to speak with you or debate it publicly—

Mr FRANK SARTOR: You said look at where it is heading. You are expressing a prejudicial view.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I am quite happy to debate it with you at any time. At the moment all I am trying to understand is what is the time line with regard to these negotiations. When will we find out? When will we see it?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The process is like this. There is a reference group that is bigger than *Ben Hur*; there have been forums and workshops on weekends; there has been considerable discussion with university. I believe there have been bilateral discussions between the council and the university about playing fields and implications. A draft master plan is being prepared and at some point it will be put on public exhibition. Presumably it will be comprehensive; it will cover all these issues. It is at a point where people will get an idea of more than the flavour—hopefully they will see some of the specifics—of what is going to happen.

At some time next year it will be finalised, but I mean in real Greenwich Mean Time years, not Leichhardt council years, and we

will reach a landing so that people can move forward with certainty in that area, and we will test community reaction. You cannot be fairer than that. There is an Act. It is a very proscriptive Act. It is written to try to stop the world because we do not like the world and we do not like change. We are trying to comply with the spirit of a very restrictive Act, and I can tell you that it is a bit of a struggle, but we will get there.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Residential accommodation for students has been cited as one of the issues for the university on that site. Do you, your departments or agencies have a legal opinion on whether this breaches or complies with the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Okay. Let us see what comes out of the discussions that are taking place, to see whether it ends up being—

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Still—

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Hang on—whether it is still a request of the university or not. I do not know how far the university wants to push that. Let us see what comes out of the process.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I have just asked whether you have received a legal opinion. Would you prefer not to answer that?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I do not know that I have received a legal opinion, to be honest. I do not recall looking at it.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Could you ask one of your advisers whether you have received a legal opinion?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: On what? On whether the university can have student accommodation or not?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Whether the university can have residential accommodation.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I will take it on notice.