

CEO promises new hospital for Putney

Plans to sell 11ha of the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney at Ryde to a developer have stalled as Ryde Council votes on a technicality. Protagonists need the project to go ahead to finance the upgrading of facilities for the occupants of the centre, antagonists protest that what is planned there is overdevelopment that will damage the character of the area and worsen traffic congestion. **MELISSA DAVEY** sought answers to the issues at the heart of the matter.

ROYAL Rehabilitation Centre CEO Stephen Lowndes has guaranteed that a new hospital will be built on the Putney site, as well as a new Weemala building.

This assurance addresses one of the main concerns from members of the Coalition Against Private Overdevelopment (CAPO) that a hospital might not be built on that site at all if sale of the land to developer Frasers Property Group goes ahead.

“Royal Rehab guarantees that it will be proceeding with the construction of a new state-of-the-art rehabilitation centre and new Weemala building as soon as it is able to finalise the sale of its land,” Mr Lowndes said.

That sale will not be finalised until Ryde City councillors pass a deed of novation, a document which would assign works, responsibilities and costs in regard to the major earthworks, parkland and internal roadworks of the construction to Frasers.

Mr Lowndes’ comments came following remarks from Ryde Cr Bill Pickering that “all Royal Rehab management are interested in doing is taking the money (from the sale) and running”.

“I want a guarantee that I am satisfied with that a hospital will actually be built on the site, and I want to know that they can also assure the public that the funding will

be available to keep any new hospital completely operational into the future,” Cr Pickering said.

Mr Lowndes said suggestions that management were only interested in money were untrue.

“In regard to Cr Pickering’s comments that Royal Rehab intends to ‘take the money and run’, Royal Rehab is a not-for-profit public company with a voluntary board of directors,” Mr Lowndes said.

“All of the assets of the company have to be applied to meeting its objectives, which is, broadly, the provision of health and disability services and the research that supports this.

“The sale of the land is necessary to allow us to continue to do just that, now and well into the future.”

Mr Lowndes said management were committed to obtaining funding for the ongoing operation of the hospital, but admitted it could prove difficult.

In a letter sent to councillors last week, including Cr Pickering, Mr Lowndes wrote: “There is no real guarantee at any time when it comes to government funding, but obviously the facility will be built for the long term – we consider the operating life of a new hospital to be at least 30 years.”

Cr Pickering said residents did not oppose the building of a new hospital and

Weemala building, but were against overdevelopment of the site and potential traffic issues that could arise.

He said he wanted any developer who bought the site to assure residents it would explore the option of making Victoria Rd the only vehicle access to the hospital and address other traffic concerns.

“Where has this issue been addressed?” Cr Pickering said.

“There has been a lack of community consultation and a lack of will to come up with an amicable solution to this.”

Mr Lowndes said Royal Rehab supported suggestions to the RTA to permit the flow of traffic from and on to Victoria Road.

“However, having made such submissions in the past without success, we will not compromise the integrity of our approved planning consent which forms the basis of the contractual sale arrangements with Frasers Property Group,” Mr Lowndes said. “Frasers is aware of resident concerns over the traffic lights issue and has indicated to council its preparedness to listen to community concerns and explore options available to it.

“However, Frasers will do that only after it has secured the property.”

Mr Lowndes described rumours that residents from Weemala would be moved to the new Graythwaite hospital in Ryde as

unfounded.

“Apart from the fact that it is absolutely and totally without foundation, the Graythwaite rehab unit will be transferring beds from our CARS/Dixon unit, and from Greenwich, when it opens,” he said. “So apart from the fact that it would presumably be full, these are beds for health funded rehabilitation clients.

“Some of our Weemala residents are funded by NSW Health but not at rehabilitation rates, and many are funded by Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

“I have never witnessed NSW Health footing the bill for any other department. It’s simply not happening from our perspective.”

A rescision motion put forward by Cr Vic Tagg after the deed of novation was passed by councillors two weeks ago came up at the Ryde Council meeting last night.

If the rescision motion failed to pass and the deed of novation, which is required to define management responsibility of the whole site and clarify boundaries, was approved, Mr Lowndes has indicated that the sale of the land to Frasers and construction of the new hospital would be able to commence.

An update on the outcome of the rescision motion is available on northerndistricttimes.com.au.

