

Community Groups

The future of Callan Park has been of intense interest to the community for much of its history, but particularly since private housing was first proposed on the site in 2002.

In September, 2002, the Green Left Weekly reported that 'A mass rally, public forums and independent polling have shown that there is overwhelming opposition to the NSW Labor government's plan to sell eight hectares of Callan Park.'¹

The community was galvanized into action again in 2007 when the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority draft Land Use Plan was exhibited. The then Planning Minister, Kristina Kenneally, told parliament that 'a total of more than 2,079 public submissions were received, of which 67 per cent objected to the proposal and 33 per cent indicated support, although it is my understanding, without having read all 2,079 submissions, that those who indicated support were expressing support for the playing field and open space provisions under the land use plan.'²

The numbers and strength of purpose in these reports cannot describe who comprises the 'community' opposed to overdevelopment or inappropriate development at Callan Park. Leichhardt Council describes its local population as a 'young, prosperous community. The two major groups in the community are the baby-boomer, typically long-term resident home-owners in their fifties, and the younger Gen X city-workers, who typically rent and leave when in their mid-thirties, and the small dwellings become too restrictive for their growing families'.³ It is clear that a significant proportion of Leichhardt's 54,525 strong geographic community was part of the community united in vocal opposition to past plans for Callan Park. But it is also clear that other members of the community supported past plans for Callan Park, based on their own interactions with the space.

This is not surprising. Despite the fact that few sociologists can agree on a definition for 'community', independent thinker Etienne Wenger offers this useful construction: 'Members of a community are informally bound by what they do together - from engaging in lunchtime discussions to solving difficult problems - and by what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities.'⁴

A community can form around a shared interest, a common purpose, a shared activity or even a common profession. Community groups in today's world include communities of interest, communities of practice, and online communities. Community groups can be formal or informal, casual or structured, regular or irregular, bound by a common goal or by sets of agreed rules.

The community groups with an interest in Callan Park range from unstructured communities of interest like 'dog walkers' to not-for-profit incorporated associations like the Sydney City Farm. The most well known community group is the Friends of Callan Park, 'an open public organisation dedicated to saving all of Callan Park and maintaining an upgraded and relevant mental health hospital in the grounds'. The Friends has over 1,200 people on its mailing list, communicates with the broad public effectively through a dynamic website and regular interactions with the media, meets regularly to sustain its membership, and operates completely on public donations.

This diversity demonstrates the variety of ways in which people with a common purpose can work together. The type of governance structure depends on the strength of that purpose and increases in formality depending on whether legal contracts, money, government funding and public accountability will be involved.

As a principle, the more complex the transactions and the more likely it is that something could go wrong, the more important it is to formalise the group's structural framework.

¹ Green Left Weekly, September 2002

² General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 Wednesday 15 October 2008

³ Leichhardt Council Community Portrait

⁴ Etienne Wenger, Learning as a Social System, 'Systems Thinker' 1998

Formalised frameworks for community groups include:

- unincorporated associations;
- incorporated associations;
- companies limited by guarantee; and
- co-operatives.

The key features of each is described in this table:

Feature	Unincorporated Association	Incorporated Association	Company limited by guarantee	Co-operative
Legal entity?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Can open a bank account?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Limited personal liability of members?	Yes	No	No	No
Clarity about who owns property?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Formal rules of operation? (voting/membership/meetings winding up)	Not necessarily	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minimum membership?	No	At least 5 members	At least 3 directors 1 secretary A least 1 member;	No
Formal requirements to keep accounting records?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Equal voting rights for members	Not necessarily	Run by committee	Run by a Board	Yes

As the Master Plan process unfolds, the governance structure of individual community groups with an interest in Callan Park is likely to impact on analysis. For example, if the Glover Street Garden is currently an unincorporated association, it will not be possible to formalise legal arrangements over the land this group occupies unless the structure of the group changes.

Strengths

- There is a long history of community involvement at Callan Park
- Local community groups are well informed of the issues around Callan Park
- As predominantly 'not for profit' organizations, community groups and their activities are compatible with the Callan Park Act

Constraints

- The Callan Park Act may prohibit some groups having a formal presence and using the buildings on Callan Park
- It has yet to be established which buildings on Callan Park are suitable for different activities

Opportunities

- To define locations within Callan Park that can meet specific needs of the local community
- To create a hub of community activities on Callan Park
- To use a presence on Callan Park to publicise the work of community groups and organisations
- To find groups to occupy some of the derelict buildings on Callan park and contribute to their maintenance and upkeep
- Incorporated Community groups may be able to apply for grant funding with the adaptive re-use of building on Callan Park
- Having more activity on Callan Park will enhance its vitality

Risks

- Some groups may not have the adequate financial stability to make a long term commitment to Callan Park
- Theft of material from community spaces on Callan Park and personal safety risks for people using Callan Park in the evening
- That existing governance arrangements of some groups may prohibit formalizing arrangements to use parts of Callan park
- That groups take on buildings and there are subsequent discoveries of contamination such as asbestos

Expectations

- The consultation process will allow all interested groups to make representations to Council
- The Master Plan process will identify the buildings on Callan Park that are suitable for use by community groups
- The Master Plan will identify the forms of governance that will be necessary for a Community Group to use buildings on Callan Park
- That the Master Plan allows Leichhardt to create a framework for assessing bids and allocating space to Community Groups on Callan Park

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