

Lendlease should buy Sirius, says Clover Moore



Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore and long time environmental activist Jack Munday outside public housing block Sirius last year. Cr Moore has asked Lendlease to buy the building. **Jessica Hromas**



y [Michael Bleby](#)

The City of Sydney is pushing Lendlease and community activist group Save our Sirius is talking to community housing providers about buying the controversial Sydney building and using it for affordable or social housing.

Lord Mayor Clover Moore has asked Lendlease to buy the brutalist housing block in The Rocks - which [the state government put up for sale](#) this month - saying the 79-unit building would be a good way for the developer to meet its obligations arising from its Barangaroo South development to provide up to 65 affordable housing units. "I have written to Lendlease and said 'If they could consider buying Sirius to fulfil their obligations it would be really good'," Cr Moore told *The Australian Financial Review*. "They haven't responded yet. I'm an optimist. I'm hoping that means they're considering it."

With the government pushing ahead with plans to sell the building, itself [born out of a bitter 1970s dispute](#) between the then state government and community and union activists, advocates of the building who say key worker and social housing is

desperately needed in the middle of the country's most expensive city, are still trying to influence building's future.



Save Our Sirius Foundation Shaun Carter with former resident Cherie Johnson. Mr Carter wants to buy the building. **James Brickwood**

They now stand a better chance. In contrast to earlier estimates that as many as 250 apartments could be built on the valuable site, government tender documents now say it has scope for only 85 apartments, making it less commercially attractive. The government also now says the height of any new build will be limited to the height of the Sydney Harbour Bridge deck.

"The draft planning controls have been prepared in accordance with SEPP 65 requirements and allow a density of approximately 85 residential dwellings, ground floor retail and commercial development or retention of the existing building," the government's own planning report says.

The Save our Sirius Foundation that took the government to court over its failure to heritage-list the building despite recommendations from the state's heritage council to do so, is also talking to community housing providers as well as private developers about buying the site.

"Ultimately our preference is to keep the building," said [foundation chairman Shaun Carter](#). "It would be great if the heritage of the architecture and heritage of use was preserved in some pure way, which could be an affordable housing component. If it wasn't for social and affordable housing, I personally think it would be a great boutique hotel."

Mr Carter said the foundation was conducting separate talks with community housing providers to buy the building, but said securing the funds cheaply enough to buy the building - which could cost between \$60 million and \$70 million and then require an additional \$20 million - to bring it in line with the present-day building code would be a hurdle.



Pru Goward, NSW Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister for Social Housing, inside the Sirius building. **Louise Kennerley**

"It's still very difficult to make affordable housing stack up," Mr Carter said.

The foundation had also been approached by three developers who were interested in taking over the building, in a process that was only likely to be concluded in the second half of next year, he said.

"All three are interested in working up a proposal for that site based on keeping the existing building."

A Lendlease spokesman said the future of the Sirius was a matter for the state government.

"Lendlease's obligation to provide a proportion of affordable housing for the Barangaroo South development is already underway," he said.

He said he could give no details on what the company already had underway.

"It is the Government's clear preference to return the skyline to Sydney, however we will not make a decision on that until we first receive responses from the market," Finance Minister Victor Dominello said.

"The Government is conducting a two stage sales process with an Expression of Interest followed by a Request for Tender during 2018. The timing of the sale will be determined as part of this two stage process."