

‘Bizarre, bonkers’: Carey accuses Victoria Park of wasting money on racetrack lobbyist

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Planning Minister John Carey says the Town of Victoria Park is “pissing money up the wall” by hiring a lobbyist to pressure his government to abandon its \$217 million Burswood racetrack plan.

But Town of Victoria Park mayor Karen Vernon has defended the move and accused Carey of not keeping the debate civil.

A recent email from Victoria Park’s stakeholder relations manager Roz Ellis, obtained by the government, revealed the town had put a call-out for quotes from professional lobbyists to help it fight the racetrack plan.

“The Town of Victoria Park is seeking to engage a registered, experienced government relations professional to support our advocacy against the proposed Motorsports Complex at Burswood,” the message reads.

“The project, ‘Protect Burswood Parklands & Swan River–Right Project, Right Place’, requires a coordinated programme across statutory, community, cultural and fiscal streams.

“Are you available to discuss the project and hopefully provide a quote for the work?”



The concept plan for the Burswood precinct. EPA/GOVERNMENT

Carey, a former mayor of the City of Vincent was incredulous at the town's actions, describing it as "bonkers and bizarre".

"This is pissing money up against the wall. I mean, it is outrageous," he said.

"It is the job of mayors. It is the job of elected officials to actually advocate for their communities.

"I might not like what they're saying, but now they're going to be paying for lobbyists.

"I might not like the mayor's advocacy. I might not like any local government's advocacy, but it is absurd for Victoria Park to be paying a lobbyist or consultant."

Vernon told ABC's Gary Adshead on Thursday afternoon the town had a right to seek the services to help it advocate for its position to remove the racetrack from its plans.

She said if a lobbyist was selected the cost would be shared with ratepayers.

Vernon took offence to Carey's comments.

"I have to say, what's been done today by Minister Carey particularly, is this really the behaviour that the public expects of its members of parliament?" she said.

"I think its disgraceful and every member of the WA Labor government should be appalled at these tactics being used.

"This kind of narrative from a senior member of their government is not good enough.

"Why can't they keep this debate civil?

"The only thing that's bizarre and bonkers that I've heard is the plan to put a racetrack at Burswood park."

Town of Victoria Park staff are taking part in working groups for the Burswood racetrack project.

Vernon said it was up to the Victoria Park CEO whether those staff remained in the working groups but she suggested it would likely not happen.

Transport Minister Rita Saffioti said the town's pursuit of a lobbyist diminished their cause.

"The fact that they've had to approach eastern state lobbyists to try and come in – I mean, if their argument was strong enough they wouldn't need to use ratepayers' money to buy a lobbyist firm to help them," she said.

Saffioti said the Town of Victoria Park already had staff in its Perth Entertainment and Sporting precinct working groups.

A business case for the project is expected to be made public before the end of the year.

The racetrack would include a 10,000-person amphitheatre and would host an annual V8 Supercar race.

The town is one of several local groups which oppose the project over the loss of green space on the peninsula and noise concerns