Engaging with our community

Community Engagement Strategy

Contents

About this strategy

The Community Engagement Strategy reflects Port Stephens Council's commitment to involving our community in effective engagement that actively shapes and influences the future of the Port Stephens area.

This Strategy will support us in undertaking quality engagement to ensure our community are informed and we understand what matters most to our community now and into the future.

This Strategy is divided into two distinct parts:

Section 1: Our community engagement approach and principles across a range of Council functions. This section is required under section 402 of the Local Government Act 1993: The council must establish and implement a strategy (its community engagement strategy), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan.

Section 2: Community participation plan. This section is a new requirement under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). These changes now provide a single document where the community can access all of Council's community participation requirements under the planning legislation, including all minimum mandatory requirements. It sets out how and when we will engage the community across our planning functions under the EP&A Act.

Delivering a best practice approach to engagement means:

- ensuring our community has better access to and understanding of information
- increased participation, allowing for a range of voices to be heard
- stronger community connections and trust.

Why do we need to engage?

- efficient and effective spending and resource allocation
- identification of solutions for complex problems
- social cohesion and reduced conflict
- reduction of unplanned risks
- improved services that meet community needs
- strengthened governance and accountability

Our community engagement approach

Our community engagement approach

Engaging with the community is one of the guiding principles for councils under section 8A of the Local Government Act 1993 and is an important part of local democracy.

Our core principles for engagement

Relationships and respect

What this means	How do we do this
• We act with transparency and honesty in a way that values strong relationships and builds trust with our community and stakeholders. • Good engagement helps us to identify shared values, benefits and outcomes. • We will close the loop with our community and report back on the engagement process.	• We will say what we are doing, maintain ongoing partnerships and deliver regular updates to our stakeholders and community. • We cultivate a culture of information sharing to ensure information is accurate and informed. • We respect people's time and will listen to our community. • We will accurately define the community's role in the decision making process.

Inclusive and enabling

What this means	How do we do this
• We believe good decisions are grounded in information and input from many sources. • We will allow for a range of voices to be heard, not just those who are loud, angry or powerful.	• We will actively seek to ensure a range of views are represented. • We engage appropriately and in a variety of formats to address barriers to participation. • We will make our information easy to understand, consistent and timely.

Transparency and the right to participation

What this means	How do we do this
• Community input and feedback is recognised as enhancing the quality of our decision making processes. • The community has the right to access information, be consulted and actively participate in planning and decision making that affects them.	• We make decisions in an open and transparent way. Information is timely, clear and relevant. • We work towards consistent standards and report back on decisions made. • We build our community's capacity to contribute through education and empowerment practices.

Continuous Improvement

What this means	How do we do this
• Engagement is a rapidly changing field. We recognise the need to adapt to ensure more effective engagement outcomes.	• New and innovative solutions will be sought to better listen to and communicate with our community. • We will evaluate the work we do to improve our practice. • We will use technology to ensure better access and more opportunity to engage.

How we engage

Community engagement model

Engagement is led by both the organisation and the community. The type of engagement is dependent on the nature of the relationships, activities and goals.

Organisation acts

Community acts

Community leads
the engagement and the **organisation** is responsible for the action.

Community advocacy

Community leads

Shared leadership and action

Organisation leads

Community leads
the engagement and the **community** is responsible for the action.

Community act and contribute

Organisation implementation

Organisation leads
the engagement and the **organisation** is responsible for the action.

Behaviour change

Organisation leads
the engagement and the **community** is responsible for the action.

Source: International Association of Public Participation

International Association of Public Participation Spectrum (IAP2 Spectrum)

The IAP2 Spectrum is an internationally regarded tool to select the level of participation in any community engagement program. The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are required depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

Increasing the level of public impact →

Level of community influence over decisions →

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making and/or developed budgets in the hands of the public.
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Figure 1: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. Source: International Association of Public Participation.

What this looks like at Port Stephens Council

Engagement design

Engagement can take many forms and there is no one size fits all approach. In some cases we are guided by legislation. In other cases we seek informed feedback on a particular plan, policy or project. Each project's level of engagement will be determined by assessing:

- objectives, scope and context of the project (including legislative requirements)
- level of impact including risk and complexity
- level of interest and influence on decisions to be made
- level of resources available including time and budget.

Key elements of engagement design:

Purpose: what we aim to acheive	**Context:** the unique situation	**Process:** design methods and activities

Community engagement plans are tailored to the needs of each project. Our approach reflects the social justice principles of equity, access and participation. At all levels of engagement, our objective is to ensure our community can easily access balanced, timely and accurate information on our projects and programs.

Table 1 provides a snapshot of the types of activities and projects undertaken in the framework. The framework is not limited to the example projects and engagement techniques contained in the table.

Refer to Section 2 of this document for statutory decision making obligations and timeframes under the EP&A Act.

Table 1

IAP 2 Level	Description	Engagement techniques examples	Project type examples
Inform	• share balanced information to increase awareness and understanding • one way process • can clarify level of impact and help build relationships	• advertising • newsletters • fact sheets • displays • media • website	• maintenance, renewal of capital works • changes to local activity • policy updates
Consult	• community views and feedback are sought • we will listen and acknowledge your concerns	• focus groups • workshops • surveys • polls • one-on-one meetings • public exhibition and hearings • plus Inform activities	Key social planning and strategic documents, for example: • youth strategy • plans of management • public domain plans • masterplans • new policies with broad impact
Involve	• work with the community throughout the process to ensure your priorities and aspirations are reflected in the decision	• advisory committees • workshops • world cafes • community visioning • workshops • town centre implementation panels • plus inform and consult activities	• Community Strategic Plan and Operational Plan Other examples: • placemaking projects • early development infrastructure and capital works projects like playgrounds and recreation facilities
Collaborating	• actively working with community to ensure their aspirations and priorities strongly influence the outcome • shared responsibility for decision making	• community reference group • design workshops • advisory committees • plus Inform and Consult activities	• S355 Advisory Committees
Empowering	• decision making is in the hands of the community • particularly useful in engaging under represented or marginalised groups	• project teams	• community development programs

Inclusive engagement

We know there are some groups in our community that are harder to reach and less likely to participate in engagement activities. Council is committed to using inclusive methods and settings to make it easy for all of our community to participate. Some of these harder to reach groups identified in Port Stephens are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- people with a disability
- young people
- young families / primary carers

Barriers such as language, physical ability, digital comprehension, lack of time and social isolation are considered in engagement planning.

Key strategies for inclusive engagement:

- adaptation of methods
- make it fun
- go to where the people are and targeted outreach
- make it as easy as possible for people — choose appropriate locations and accessible venues
- provide incentives

Section 2

Community participation plan

Community participation plan

It is a statutory requirement for councils in New South Wales to prepare a Community Participation Plan that sets out how and when it will undertake community participation when exercising relevant planning functions under the EP&A Act.

How is community participation carried out

The Community Participation Plan specifies requirements including notification and public exhibition. This can include:

- Giving written notice to neighbours, individual landowners or occupiers;
- Advertising on Councils website; and
- Making documents publicly available online.

Other methods may be used for notification and exhibition on a case by case basis and depending on statutory requirements.

If the exhibition period is due to close on a weekend or public holiday we may extend the exhibition to finish on the first available work day. In accordance with the planning legislation, the period between 20 December and 10 January (inclusive) is excluded from the calculation of a period of public exhibition.

Plans or applications cannot be made or determined until after the minimum period of public exhibition. If a longer timeframe is placed on public exhibition, the matter cannot be determined until after the specified period.

Making a submission

The community can participate during public exhibition by making a submission. The planning legislation sets out some requirements for submissions. In addition to these requirements, when making a submission to Council, the submission should be:

- Received on or before the last day of the nominated timeframe for exhibition;
- Made in writing (through the mail, email or hand delivered to Council);
- Contain the name and address (or email address) of the person making the submission;
- Include the application number for reference (for development applications) or the name of the exhibited planning matter; and
- Include a statement of objection or support and reasons.

Community participation requirements

Under the EP&A Act, the following minimum community participation requirements apply to local planning functions:

Table 2

Mandatory timeframes	Minimum community participation requirement
Division 1 — Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act	
Draft community participation plans	28 days
Draft local strategic planning statements	28 days
Planning proposals for local environmental plans subjects to a gateway determination	28 days or as specified by the Gateway Determination
Draft development control plans	28 days
Draft contributions plans	28 days
Division 2 — Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act	
Development Application for designated development	28 days
Environmental Impact Statement obtained under Division 5.1 (An Environmental Impact Statement prepared for certain development such as state significant development.)	28 days
Re-exhibition of any amended application or matter referred to above	The period (if any) determined by the person or body responsible for publicly exhibiting the application or matter.

Exhibition timeframes are measured in calendar days and include weekends.

Development applications

Table 3 outlines Council's minimum notification requirements for development applications. Where there is an inconsistency between the notification requirements of this Community Participation Plan and legislative requirements, the legislative requirements will prevail.

Table 3 Community Participation Categories (Refer to Appendix A for details)

Exhibition types	
Type	**Requirements**
A	**Not Notified Development.** Council may at its discretion decide to notify any of this type of development that may significantly impact on the amenity of adjoining land owners.
B	**Advertised Development**, written notification in accordance with 'type B' requirements and an advertisement published on Councils website. Development Application (DA) information published on DA Tracker. At Council's discretion, additional advertisements may be placed in newspapers and/or through such other mechanisms as may be appropriate to ensure that the public is reasonably aware of the proposal. Council may also at its discretion decide not to advertise development.
Not included in Table 1	**Notified Development.** A 14 day notification period will apply for development types not included in Appendix A. Written notification will be sent to all owners of land directly adjoining or opposite the development site. Additional owners and occupiers may be notified at the discretion of Council staff. Council may at its discretion decide not to notify development where impacts on adjoining land owners are considered minor in nature.

Modification Applications

The need or otherwise to notify an application to modify a development consent will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act and Regulations or at the discretion of Council in consideration of the nature of the modifications proposed.

Appendix A — Exhibition periods

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	**B**
Rural Development		
Agriculture	▉	
Farm buildings	▉	
Forestry		▉
Residential Accommodation		
Dwelling — single storey	▉	
Residential ancillary (sheds, pools, etc.)	▉	
Rural worker's dwellings	▉	
Secondary dwellings	▉	
Subdivision (all types of subdivision)		
Strata Subdivision	▉	
More than ten Torrens or Community title lots		▉
Tourist and visitor accommodation		
Caravan parks / Camping grounds		▉
Commercial development		
Home business / occupation	▉	
Entertainment facilities		▉
Function centres		▉
Sex services premises / Home occupation (sex services)		▉
Restricted premises		▉
Community and entertainment facilities		
Places of public worship		▉
Recreation facility (major)		▉
Industrial Development		
General industry	▉	
Industrial retail outlets	▉	
Industrial training facilities	▉	
Light industry	▉	
Storage premises	▉	
Warehouse or distribution centres	▉	
Freight transport facilities		▉
Miscellaneous		
Boatshed	▉	
Electricity generating works	▉	
Environmental Facilities / Environmental Protection works	▉	
Moorings / Mooring Pens	▉	
Signage — other than advertising structures	▉	
Extractive industries / open cut mines		▉
Air transport facility		▉
Airstrip		▉
Cemetery / crematorium / mortuaries		▉
Correction centre		▉
Helipad		▉
Marinas		▉
Passenger transport facilities		▉
Port facilities		▉