

Community Engagement Policy

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Responsible Officer	Manager Community Wellbeing	Date Approved:	Dec 2020
Review Officer:	Manager Community Wellbeing	Review Due:	Dec 2024
Author:	Manager Community Wellbeing	Commencement:	Dec 2020

1. PURPOSE

Mareeba Shire Council is committed to meaningful community engagement to assist in the delivery of high quality local government. The Community Engagement Policy outlines Council's intentions to appropriately involving the community in decision-making across a range of Council functions including policy development, planning, program and service delivery.

The Policy will set an expectation to community members about the level of public involvement in problem-solving and decision-making.

The importance of community engagement is reflected in two key principles of the *Local Government Act 2009*: "*democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement*" and the "*transparent and effective processes and decision-making in the public interest.*"

2. SCOPE

This Policy applies to Council and consultants engaged by Council.

Community consultation that is prescribed under legislation is outside of the scope of this Policy. However, where the legislation does not prescribe how community consultation should be undertaken that engagement is within the scope of the Policy.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Mareeba Shire Council recognises that residents and other stakeholders have diverse opinions, innovative ideas and a wealth of life experience and this information allows Council to better understand issues and provide services that are tailored to community needs. Council aims to inform the public about decisions and to provide appropriate mechanisms for public input and participation in Council decision-making to ensure that community needs and values are recognised in service planning and delivery.

Community engagement is not about replacing the decision-making functions of democratically elected Councillors, rather it is about enhancing and informing this decision-making and providing new opportunities for partnering between Council and others to address issues and problems. Responsibility for the final decision rests with Council.

Effective community engagement contributes to the following outcomes:

Human Rights Compatibility Statement

The *Human Rights Act 2019* (HR Act) (Qld) came into effect on 1 January 2020 and will mean fairer laws, policies and practices by public entities when dealing with the community on a day-to-day basis. This policy has been drafted in alignment with obligations under s 58 of the HR Act.

- Increased community awareness about Council policy development, planning, program and service delivery;
- Increased community satisfaction with Council and strengthening of trust between Council and community;
- Increased awareness of community views and needs for consideration in decision-making processes;
- Improved decision-making with solutions and outcomes broadly supported by and reflecting the best interests of the community.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework and the Local Government Association of Queensland community engagement principles guide the community engagement conducted by Council.

3.2 PRINCIPLES

The following principles provide a framework for how Council engages with the community and should be evident in all engagement activities and processes:

Integrity - Council acts ethically using engagement processes that are open, honest and accountable; accurately defining the scope and purpose of engagement and clearly articulating the community's level of influence in a decision or activity and how the final decision will be made.

Inclusion - Council ensures stakeholders have fair and equitable access to Councillors to influence decision making; using a variety of engagement techniques that meet the diverse needs of the community and connect with those who are hardest to reach.

Deliberation - Council provides sufficient and relevant information whenever possible and feasible, to allow the community to understand, discuss and evaluate problems, alternatives and solutions; meaningful community engagement is facilitated through the provision of appropriate information.

Influence - Council recognises and values the opinions, ideas, experiences, needs and aspirations of the community; community influence in the decision-making is acknowledged, apparent and reflected in Policy, plans, programs and services. The final decision rests with Council and the community will be informed of the outcome of the community engagement to 'close the engagement loop'.

3.3 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

3.3.1 When will Council Engage with the Community?

Priority will be given to engaging with the community when:

- It is a requirement under legislation or under a funding agreement;
- When Council resolves to recommend the need for community engagement;
- When the decision is likely to impact on people and the places they live and work; or
- When a Council operated event, program, service, facility, community focussed Policy or plan is to be introduced, changed or discontinued, which may impact on the community.

3.3.2 When will Council Not Engage with the Community?

There are certain situations that are not suited to community engagement and these include:

- When decisions must be made immediately;

- When decisions relate to everyday council business operations or legislative matters and there is no scope for community views to be considered; or
- When legal or commercial and other confidentiality restrictions prevent.

4. REPORTING

No additional reporting is required

5. DEFINITIONS

Community

A group of people united by at least one common characteristic such as geography, shared interest, experience, values, or attitudes.

Community Engagement

A planned process of connecting, communicating and working with the community to ensure that they are well informed and provided with opportunities to be part of the problem-solving and decision-making processes on matters that affect their lives and the community generally.

Stakeholder

Any individual, group, or entity with an interest in the subject matter or may be affected by the outcome of a decision.

6. RELATED DOCUMENTS AND REFERENCES

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Land Act 1994 (Qld)
- Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)
- Local Government Regulation 2012 (Qld)
- Planning Act 2016 (Qld)

REFERENCES

- Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. 2017. Community Engagement Toolkit for Planning.
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). 2015. Quality Assurance Standard for Community Engagement and Stakeholder Engagement.
- Local Government Association of Queensland. 2010. Community Engagement Policy Development Guide.

7. REVIEW

It is the responsibility of the Manager Community Wellbeing to monitor the adequacy of this Policy and implement and approve appropriate changes. This Policy will be formally reviewed every four (4) years or as required by Council.