WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is how we reach out and encourage you, our community, to talk with us about the plans, projects and policies we develop on your behalf. It is about asking and listening to the community to help us make decisions.

Community Engagement is important, it:

• Informs decision making;
• Builds relationships and trust;
• Strengthens community;
• Builds a sense of belonging; and
• Keeps the community informed.

OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We are committed to the following principles of community engagement:

1. We aim to be flexible
   We will keep you informed and give you opportunities to have your say in a variety of ways. We encourage feedback from you and all community members who may be affected by, or are interested in, a decision we make on our community’s behalf.

2. We will be inclusive
   We live in a diverse community and know it’s important everyone’s voices are heard. We also recognise the unique and significant contribution made by Aboriginal people to the local community. We will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, children and young people, people with a disability, and community members who need support, have appropriate access and opportunities to get involved and have their say.

3. We believe community engagement is important for good governance
   We are committed to engaging with you, our community, as a core component of good governance and effective decision making. We value your ideas, views and local knowledge. Your feedback will be used to continuously improve the service we provide.

4. We aim to effectively plan each engagement
   Through effective planning and engagement techniques we will avoid repeatedly asking the community to provide feedback about the same topic. You will be encouraged to have your say in a timely manner and consultations will run during school terms. Where we are unable to avoid school holidays, additional consultation time will be factored in.

5. We will give you feedback
   We are committed to letting you know that your views, concerns and feedback have been heard and will keep you informed about what the final decision is.

Acknowledgement of Country

Wollongong City Council would like to show their respect and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land, of Elders past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
OUR PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Each engagement will be tailored to the needs of the affected community and the individual project. We will undertake six key steps.

First we PLAN:

When planning an engagement we consider who, when, and how the process will be conducted. Council and the community benefit from sharing new ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences.

• Who we engage
We define community as all people and groups who are interested in the future of Wollongong. This includes government and non-government agencies, community groups, businesses, residents and visitors. We will target engagements to those who might be impacted by or interested in a decision.

• When we engage
Community engagement happens at the planning stage of a project or initiative, when a change of service, activities or infrastructure is considered, when an issue is raised and requires a decision, or when more information or evidence is required. For a long-term project or activity there is likely to be multiple stages of engagement.

• How we engage
The level of engagement will depend on the level of interest and impact a plan or project will have on the community. A detailed table setting out the levels of engagement and examples of engagement methods are listed on page 5.

Then we ENGAGE:

This is when we talk directly with you, the community, about a project. We call this the engagement or exhibition period.

For each engagement process we will explain:

• What the engagement is about;
• Where to find out more information about the topic;
• How you can have your say;
• The timeframe you have to provide your comments;
• What happens to your feedback.

We accept community feedback in a variety of formats such as written letters, emails, surveys and feedback forms. We also uses face to face and workshop techniques to gain community feedback.

All submissions can be made available for people to read. You can request we remove your personal information from your submission.
Then we ANALYSE:

We read, review and analyse all feedback. From this an engagement report is written summarising what was said and presenting key themes and included in reports to Council. This is how your feedback becomes a key element in the decision making process.

Then we DECIDE:

Your views, ideas and local knowledge are an important part of the decision making process. Other things we need to consider include:

- Council Budget or Financial impact (so we can spend your money wisely);
- Legislation (State and Federal);
- Council policies and resolutions (endorsed by your elected representatives);
- Evidence provided by technical and professional assessment and industry best practice;
- Economic, environmental, social and governance impacts.

The diagram below shows how feedback is one of a number of considerations that are taken into account when a decision is made.

When an engagement you have participated in is being voted on at a Council meeting, you will be notified of the meeting date. Council reports are available online or via Customer Service before a meeting, and minutes following a meeting. You are also welcome to attend Council meetings or watch them online.

Ultimately, the decision is made by your elected representatives.

Then we FEEDBACK TO THE COMMUNITY about the decision:

We will let you know what the outcome of the engagement was including how your feedback was used and what decisions were made. This is often referred to as the feedback loop.

Then we EVALUATE:

We want to understand the community’s satisfaction with our engagement activities and processes so that we can continue to improve the ways in which we engage.
ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

Councillors are your elected representatives. They meet with the community in a range of ways including sitting on Committee and Reference Groups, and attending Council meetings, events and engagement activities, to hear your views, concerns and aspirations. As a community member you’re able to contact your Councillors directly. Their contact details are listed on Council’s website.

Councillors may attend opportunities set up by staff to talk with the community. At these community engagements the Councillors’ role is to listen, discuss and record community feedback so it can be considered in decision making. Councillors may also engage with the community without Council staff involvement.

ROLE OF COUNCIL STAFF

Council staff are responsible for providing clear and unbiased information to help the community understand a project, the ways they can have their say, and how the feedback received will be reported. Council staff will engage in a respectful and genuine way.

The requirements to engage with you on matters that affect you are set out in the Local Government Charter (section 8).

APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY

This Policy applies to Council’s:

- Councillors
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Contractors
- Consultants

RELATED DOCUMENTS

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

Civil Works Notifications Policy - describes a standard notification process for construction and maintenance projects.

Public Notification and Advertising Procedures - sets out a standard notification and advertising process for development assessment and determination. It sets out criteria for assessments to be referred to the Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel.

Customer Service Policy - sets out Council’s commitment to delivering quality customer service, and complaint handling.

Reference Group and Neighbourhood Forum Charters (various) - set out the purpose, recruitment and meeting practices for a variety of special interest topic reference groups and neighbourhood forums. These groups consist of community, Councillor and Council staff members.

Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel (IHAP) Charter - provides an independent forum for stakeholders (applicants and objectors) to present and discuss issues relating to controversial development proposals.

Public Access Forum Policy - provides community members with an opportunity to address Councillors prior to an ordinary meeting of Council.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COUNCIL POLICY

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

The guide below shows the four levels of engagement Council has adapted from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum. A range of factors need to be considered to determine the level of engagement for each project including the engagement purpose, level of impact, degree of complexity, timeframes and legislation.

The process of community engagement is a dynamic one which means there is likely to be movement back and forth through the different levels of an engagement process especially for more complex projects. Whichever process is used, Council is responsible for the final decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>AWARENESS BUILDING</th>
<th>IDEAS GENERATION</th>
<th>DISCUSS AND COLLATE</th>
<th>WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE A DECISION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INFORM</td>
<td>Clear communication from Council to the community to assist their understanding of decisions that have been made.</td>
<td>Council seeks feedback from the community on draft plans, services, projects or policies. The community has an opportunity to have their say before a decision is made.</td>
<td>Council works with the community to understand issues and involves community members in designing possible solutions.</td>
<td>Council will offer opportunities for members of the community to work with us to understand issues and develop a range of solutions. We will work together to make a decision on a preferred solution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONSULT</td>
<td>We will use a variety of communication methods to keep the community informed. We will strive to ensure that information about Council services and plans is accessible and readily available. Council will provide community updates and information on decisions. Council acknowledges that sometimes it has to inform the community on decisions the community cannot change.</td>
<td>We will provide opportunities for the community to provide feedback on plans and projects that will be considered in decision making. We are committed to providing clear information about how and when the community can have their say and how feedback will be used.</td>
<td>We will provide feedback on how community input influenced decisions.</td>
<td>Council will partner with the community on the development of alternatives and solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVOLVE</td>
<td>Council’s website and online media channels Council’s newsletters Letters and emails Fact sheets Customer Service Events and functions Information stand and information sessions</td>
<td>Public Access Forum Community Forums Information stand Surveys and submissions Online engagement Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel</td>
<td>Community forums Information stand Reference and Advisory groups Focus groups Workshops Online engagement</td>
<td>Focus groups Workshops Reference and Advisory groups Online engagement</td>
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| COLLABORATE         | * adopted from IAP2 |"
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<tr>
<th><strong>SUMMARY SHEET</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date adopted by Council</td>
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<td>Date of previous adoptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of next review</td>
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<td>Responsible Manager</td>
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<td>Authorised by</td>
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Recognises the value of your voice in determining our collective future. It also recognises Councillors and staff as part of the same community. Together we can create our future Wollongong.

We are a connected and engaged community