

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline to Wodonga Council staff the expectations and legislative requirements about community engagement.

OBJECTIVE

Community engagement is considered to be critical to effective, transparent and accountable governance in the public, community and private sectors.

Wodonga Council staff should practice community engagement which will assist to generate better decisions, delivering sustainable economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits.

Meaningful community engagement seeks to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of people to participate in, and negotiate and partner with, institutions that affect their lives.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all paid full and part-time staff of Wodonga Council.

POLICY

The council **must** use community engagement methods when:

- It is required by legislation; and
- An issue may have potential significant impacts on the health, safety or wellbeing of any community member.

Wodonga Council **should** use community engagement methods when:

- Any proposed changes will impact on current users or customers of a council service or facility;
- Any proposed changes will affect the rights or entitlements of community members including minority groups;
- There is potential impact on surrounding neighbours;
- It wants to identify community issues, needs and priorities;

- Any proposed changes are inter-generational in nature;
- Any proposed changes impact the greater public good;
- It wants to monitor customer satisfaction with council's services facilities; and
- There is a level of controversy, conflict or sensitivity about a particular issue.

Statutory obligations in engaging with the community

Local Government Act

Section 223 of the Local Government Act outlines provisions for the rights if people to make submissions to Council.

The minimum requirement for submissions from the date of publication of a public notice inviting submissions is 28 days.

Some of the documents governed by Section 223 include:

- Council Plan
- Council Budget
- Local laws
- Road closures
- Road discontinuance
- Intention to sell land
- Intention to lease land

Section 163 of the Local Government Act requires the council to give public notice of its intention to declare a Special Charge at least 28 days before making the declaration.

Planning and Environment Act

Wodonga Council has a number of obligations to advertise or 'give notice' of planning permit applications and amendments to the Wodonga Planning Scheme which are set out under the Planning and Environment Act.

Some examples of documents for consultation and minimum timeframes under the Planning and Environment Act include:

- Amendments to planning scheme – 28 days' minimum timeframe
- Planning permits – 14 days' public notice; 16 days' adjoining neighbours; 28 days' referral authorities

Reasons for community engagement

Community engagement is used in a variety of issues and situations, all requiring different engagement levels and methods. Some such situations are:

- Site specific – Matters about a particular site such as a change in use or sale of a property, excluding matters that need to be decided under the *Planning and Environment Act*;
- Area improvement – Matters that affect people in a specific area or neighbourhood, e.g. a change in service delivery, township strategy or structure plan;
- Service planning for entire municipality – To develop or improve a service that would see a significant change in the level of service;
- Policy development – To develop or improve policies or the council’s position on particular matters. This does not include internal operating matters;
- Key strategic issues/major development – A project that, because of its size, could impact on the finances or the future of the whole municipality;
- Strategic plans for the city – Establishing the decision-making framework for the council, e.g. the council plan; and
- Legislative requirements – This refers to all prescribed activity under the *Local Government Act (1989)* and any other relevant Acts.

ATTACHMENTS

Community relations strategy, 2014

RELATED LEGISLATION

Local Government Act, 1989
Planning and Environment Act 1987

REFERENCES

Section 223 procedural guidelines

REVIEW

Council may review this policy at an time but unless otherwise requested at least every four years from the date of adoption. Minor amendments to the policy may be authorised by the CEO at any time where such changes do not alter the substance of the policy e.g.: typographical errors, a change to the name of a related policy or a change to the name of legislation.

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