



Community Participation Policy

Why does Penrith City Council undertake Community Participation ?

Council values the diversity of skills, views and expertise in the community and aims to use these to improve its decision-making. Effective community participation is good democracy, good business and good management.

Who are the Community ?

Council broadly defines community as those who have an interest in or are affected by the business of the Council and the way it operates and may include :

- residents and landowners
- business operators
- people who work in the Local Government Area
- service providers
- visitors (including tourists and shoppers);
- statutory and government agencies
- users of Council services
- associations and organisations based locally or in the wider region.

What is Community Participation ?

Council broadly defines community participation as any process that values and facilitates community input to help Council make better-informed decisions.

Community participation does not replace, but enhances, the formal decision-making functions and responsibilities of Council as an elected governing body.

What are Council's Principles for Community Participation ?

Council acknowledges that effectively incorporating the views of a diverse community is not always easy. The following principles will guide Council's approach.

Council recognises :

- ⇒ the community's wish and right to participate in the decisions made by Council;
- ⇒ the importance of assisting the community to understand what they are being asked to participate in and what influence they can have on Council's decision-making;
- ⇒ that successful community participation depends on mutual trust, respect, and effective communication between the community, elected members and Council Officers;
- ⇒ that it is not the purpose of community participation to win support for, or defend, a decision already made by Council;
- ⇒ that it must provide equal opportunity for participation to all parts of the community;
- ⇒ its responsibility to ensure that the community's input, when obtained, is carefully considered and informs Council's decisions.

What are Council's Objectives for Community Participation ?

Council aims to :

- ⇒ use the community's input to make better, more sustainable decisions;



Community Participation Policy

- ⇒ make clear the nature of the decisions to be made that involve community participation,
- ⇒ make clear any matters that are non-negotiable and why;
- ⇒ inform members and groups in the community of their ability and limits to influence Council's decision-making;
- ⇒ provide members and groups in the community with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way;
- ⇒ build on any previous relevant community participation carried out;
- ⇒ carefully plan and structure community participation processes to make it easy for people and groups to obtain information and provide input;
- ⇒ make use of the expertise and diverse perspectives within the community;
- ⇒ use methods that are flexible, inclusive and appropriate for those participating;
- ⇒ seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected including those who often face barriers to participation;
- ⇒ gather, listen and respond to, community views, aspirations, and concerns;
- ⇒ build positive relationships between Council and all sections of the community;
- ⇒ facilitate mutual understanding between groups and individuals with differing perspectives and interests;
- ⇒ work toward consensus where possible; and
- ⇒ provide feedback on how the community's participation informed Council's decisions.

When will Council invite Community Participation ?

Council will invite community participation :-

- ⇒ in response to community interest,
- ⇒ to help it identify community needs,
- ⇒ when required to meet its statutory obligations, and
- ⇒ when it believes that community input will enhance its decision-making.

How will the Policy be Implemented ?

- ⇒ Council will at all times design and implement Community Participation processes using the Community Participation Manual, which is based upon this Policy;
- ⇒ Council will support and train its staff to facilitate community participation in line with this Policy, and to use the Community Participation Manual.
- ⇒ Council commits to review and continually improve its practice of community participation.
- ⇒ Council will review this policy each year to ensure that it continues to be relevant and useful.



Community Participation Policy

What Framework will Council use for Community Participation ?

Some decisions require more participation by the community than others. There are many ways for conducting community participation. Council often has limited resources and time with which to meaningfully seek the participation of the community. Devoting substantial resources toward community participation when the community has very limited influence on a decision, or when a decision is straightforward or of minor significance, is generally an unwise use of resources.

Similarly, allocating insufficient resources for community participation over very important and complex decisions will mean that Council is deprived of potentially valuable contributions by the community.

To help Council make decisions on how it will approach community participation for a given issue, it will use the framework shown below and select the most appropriate level. This framework has been adapted from that developed in 2000 by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Level	Aim	Promise to Communities	Examples
Inform	To provide the community with balanced, objective information to assist them to understand Council issues, alternatives and decisions.	Council will keep you informed	Community Newsletter Council News Column Council's Website
Consult	To obtain community feedback on issues, analysis, alternatives and decisions being considered by Council	Council will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your aspirations, concerns and issues, and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision	Management Planning Process Public Exhibition Process Development Application process
Involve	To work directly with communities throughout the process to ensure that community aspirations, concerns and issues are consistently understood and considered	Council will work directly with you to ensure that your aspirations, concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	Rural Land Study Design Reference Groups for Community Facilities
Collaborate	To partner with communities in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	Council will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating issues, alternatives and solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into Council decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Community Renewal Projects Town Centre Projects
Delegate	To delegate certain functions to community representatives.	Council will enable you to exercise the delegated function within agreed charters	Facilities Management Committees



Community Participation Policy

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