

EXE 021: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Objective

The Shire of Esperance recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of local democracy. It helps strengthen the relationship Council and the Shire have with the community and is critical to good governance. For this reason both Council and Shire Staff are committed to engaging with the Esperance Community.

The Shire of Esperance Strategic Community Plan 2017-2027 highlights this commitment with Strategy L4:

Actively engage and communicate with the community to ensure informed decision making.

Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus. It does involve seeking broad informed agreement and the best possible solutions for Council, the Shire of Esperance and the community. Council will be presented each quarter with a review of all community engagement that has taken place for ongoing and project specific activities, this is provided through the monthly Pulse report.

The Communications & Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 is the guiding document for the Shire of Esperance's engagement activities. In the Strategy it states

The purpose of community engagement is to ensure that the Shire;

- improves decision making
- maintains healthy relationships with the community
- increases community participation in the activities and decision making processes of Council
- enables the community to work together on issues that matter to them
- builds on the community's understanding of the Shire's role and responsibilities as well as our financial and legislative requirements, and
- provides engagement opportunities that are inclusive and accessible.

Council's commitment to community engagement is supported by the *Local Government Act 1995* which outlines the essential roles of a Councillor:

2.10. A councillor —

- a) represents the interests of electors, ratepayers and residents of the district;
- b) provides leadership and guidance to the community in the district;

- c) facilitates communication between the community and the council;
- d) participates in the Local Government's decision-making processes at council and committee meetings; and
- e) performs such other functions as are given to a councillor by this Act or any other written law.

Policy

This policy applies to all aspects of Council and Shire operations to ensure the Esperance community is well informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them. Development approvals and other planning related matters are the only exception to this rule as their engagement requirements are addressed by the *Planning and Development Act 2005*, *Land Administration Act 1997*, Town Planning Regulations 1967 and Local Planning Scheme No. 24.

It defines the principles underpinning engagement activities and the role of Councillors and staff in engaging with the community. By receiving diverse perspectives and potential solutions the quality of decisions improves and subsequently a higher standard of customer service is provided. Shire staff will ensure that the Councillors are fully informed of all community engagement activities regarding significant issues or high impact projects prior to occurring.

The decision to engage with the community may occur as part of, though not limited to:

- Planning the strategic direction of the Shire of Esperance
- Projects that require direct input from stakeholders in developing community based solutions
- Policy development and/or implementation
- Any changes to land zoning that may have impact on the community
- Service level planning and delivery
- When an issue is brought to Council by the community
- Changes to Local By-laws
- Impending legislative or statutory changes with local impact
- Major project development and/or implementation

The Community Engagement Policy provides a broad framework and policy direction for engagement. The Shire of Esperance Community Engagement Matrix, aims to provide staff with direction on engagement planning and guidance on when and how community engagement should occur.

The Council and Shire's approach to community engagement is based on the spectrum of engagement activities as advocated by the International Association for Public Participations (IAP2).

Figure 1: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns 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 in the hands of the public.
Promise to 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 issues 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 the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools	Fact sheets; Websites; Open houses; Council Minutes; Newsletters	Public comment; Focus groups; Surveys; Public meetings	Workshops; Deliberate polling	Community Reference Group; Advisory committees; Consensus-building Participatory decision-making	Referendum; Ballots; Delegated decisions; Council Elections
Role of community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Decide

The Community Engagement Matrix is relevant to Council and Shire officers when interacting with the community. It aims to guide Council and staff by ensuring the level of community engagement undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required and should make sure it is appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or strategy. In some cases requirements may be imposed by the State Government and this may override the policy and matrix.

Principles

The Shire of Esperance's Community Engagement Policy is based on a set of core values adapted from the IAP2. These principles are used to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of Council and the Shire's engagement process. Council members are elected to govern thereby all final decisions and accountability rests with Council. Shire officers make recommendations to Council based on known facts and research. Community engagement does not remove these roles but it increases opportunities for the community to provide advice and influence planning. This process enables decisions to be made that are part of a continuous process recognising the needs and interests of the whole community.

The following principles embody Council's and Shire officers' commitment to community engagement:

- Be representative of the broader community and ensure their views are adequately reflected when making decisions.
- Seek out and encourage contributions from community members who may be affected by or interested in a decision.
- Actively listen so that the community's ideas and input can assist in making decisions.
- Inform the community about decisions, and how their input was considered.
- Prior to any decision Council and Shire staff will ensure that they are well informed regarding the benefits of alternative decisions, reflecting all sides of the argument and including any community input on matters before them.
- Collaborate with key stakeholders and other levels of Government to achieve common goals for the Shire.
- Provide relevant, timely and balanced information so the community/stakeholders can contribute in a meaningful way.
- Provide a variety of appropriate, inclusive and accessible ways for people to have their say and to speak honestly.
- Endeavour to ensure that engagement processes are appropriate, accessible, well planned and adequately resourced.
- Clearly identify the level of community influence and limitations if appropriate.
- The timing of community activities should take into account key dates (school holidays, special events etc.) to ensure that maximum opportunity is given to encourage community input.
- To ensure both the Council and the Shire are meeting legislative requirements regarding community consultation in all areas of service delivery.

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