



Policy Title:	DRAFT Community Engagement Policy	
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Last Review Date:		
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Purpose/Objective:	<p>This Policy applies when there is a decision to be made by Council. It outlines the responsibilities of Council as required under the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.</p> <p>This policy ensures that Macedon Ranges Shire Council staff, Councillors, contractors and volunteers understand the principles and values that guide Council's community engagement. It also serves as a guide for external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Macedon Ranges.</p> <p>This policy outlines the role that community members can reasonably expect to play in Council planning and decision-making and provides an explanation of the process of community engagement.</p>	
Background/Reasons for Policy:	This policy ensures that Council meets the community engagement requirements as outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.	
Definitions:	Refer Appendix 1	
References:	<p>This policy is informed by a range of external research and best practice standards, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Participation in Government Decision Making - Victorian Auditor General's Office - better practice guide • International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Quality assurance standards - Core Values, Practitioners code of ethics and the IAP2 Spectrum of engagement • Co-design Community Engagement, Victorian Government 	
Related Policies:	Governance Rules Part II Statement Councillor Code of Conduct	

	Code of Conduct for Members of Council staff Complaints Handling Policy Live Streaming and Publishing Recordings of Meetings Policy Public Transparency Policy Privacy Policy Procurement Policy
Related Legislation:	Local Government Act 2020 (Vic) Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic) Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) Health Records Act 2001 (Vic) Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) Public Records Act 1973 (Vic) Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) Copyright Act 1968 (Cth) Other relevant legislative instruments

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PART 1 – PRELIMINARY

1. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT

- 1.1 Section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) ('Act') requires a Council to adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.
- 1.2 A community engagement policy must:
- a) be developed in consultation with the municipal community; and
 - b) give effect to the community engagement principles; and
 - c) be capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws; and
 - d) be capable of being applied in relation to the Council's budget and policy development; and
 - e) describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required; and
 - f) specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
 - g) include deliberative engagement practices which must include and address any matters prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph and be capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan and
 - h) include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purposes of this Community Engagement Policy ('this Policy') are to:
- a) ensure that Macedon Ranges Shire Council staff, Councillors, contractors and volunteers understand the principles and values that guide Council's community engagement.
 - b) serve as a guide for external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Macedon Ranges.
 - c) outline the role that community members can reasonably expect to play in Council planning and decision-making and provide an explanation of the process of community engagement.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- 3.1 achieve compliance with relevant legislative requirements;
- 3.2 facilitate public awareness of Council commitment;
- 3.3 ensure achievements of appropriate standards of integrity, transparency and accountability in Council's community engagement processes;
- 3.4 lead, promote and advocate public participation in Council's decision-making processes;
- 3.5 lead and support a culture of continuous improvement in the way that Council increases openness and transparency with the community and the public at large.

4. SCOPE

- 4.1 This Policy is responsible for guiding Macedon Ranges Shire Council community engagement with its stakeholders and community. Well planned and genuine community engagement is an essential element of a good governance process. It is at the heart of Council's commitment to its community to listen to community and engage with them as appropriate in the decision-making process.

This Policy provides a statement of Council's commitment to deliver one of the overarching Council decision-making principles in line with the *Local Government Act 2020*.

5. POLICY STATEMENT

Council will develop and maintain this Policy in consultation with the community.

6. ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL PLAN

Our community engagement vision is in keeping with the Council Plan.

7. THE POLICY

This policy has been developed in consultation with the Macedon Ranges Shire community and stakeholders. The draft policy was informed by a six-month engagement process undertaken in 2019 to develop the Macedon Ranges Shire Council Community Engagement Framework. The draft policy was also informed by the Victorian Government's Engage Vic good practice examples. After a further internal engagement, the draft policy was then taken to the community for their feedback was adopted by Council in 2020.

PART 2 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

8. THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is the process by which Council gathers information to make decisions that impact the community. Council is committed to meaningful community engagement and recognises the important role that it plays in democratic governance and civic life.

Good democratic governance occurs when a government governs for and on behalf of an informed and engaged community. An engaged community feels part of the overall governance and activities of that community. Community members are informed, connected, participate in services and activities relevant to them, and feel they have a role to play.

Quality community engagement between Council and its community can also build resilience, trust and a sense of united purpose. Engaged citizens will be more informed and have greater capacity to problem solve and work collaboratively with one another and with Council.

There needs to be valid reasons to commit to engaging with the community and investing Council resources and the community's time into conducting an engagement process.

For effective community engagement to occur, communities need to be informed. This occurs when there is timely and equal access to information, good ongoing information flow, consultation and participation between a Council and its community.

Community engagement is a process of informed, two-way communication between Council and the community on an issue prior to a decision being made and:

- It recognises that Council has the mandate to be the decision-maker.
- In most cases, community engagement impacts on a decision through influence, rather than power.
- Depending on the legislative requirement or issue, Council may undertake deliberative form of engagement.
- It aims to recognise and communicate the needs and interests of all impacted stakeholders.

9. OUR PROMISE TO THE COMMUNITY

The principles below articulate our community engagement promise and guide our activities. They are guided by our organisational values and our commitment to working in partnership with our community.

The principles have been informed by community feedback that was received in 2019 during the development of Council's Community Consultation Framework.

They are also based on best-practice community engagement frameworks including the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) Public Participation Principles and the principles outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.

10. OUR PRINCIPLES

1. Our community engagement is planned and identifies objectives and scope
2. Our community engagement is timely and relevant
3. Our community will be provided with the information to support meaningful engagement
4. Our community engagement approach is inclusive and supported
5. We will close the loop by communicating with and reporting to our community on our engagement activities and outcomes via a variety of accessible methods.

11. WHEN WE ENGAGE

Community engagement is conducted for a specific purpose that has been identified by Council when it is required to make a decision.

In determining the need for engagement, officers consider the intended outcomes and benefits that will be derived from the engagement, what resources will be required and how the information gathered will influence Council's decision making. These considerations demonstrate when community engagement will enhance the work of Council.

11.1 Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement methods will be used where required under the Local Government Act 2020. Deliberative engagement methods may be considered, where appropriate, for other CE opportunities.

Deliberative engagement **does apply** to the following:

- The development of the Community Vision
- The development of the Council Plan
- The development of the Financial Plan
- The development of the Asset Plan

Council will design and deliver an appropriate deliberative engagement strategy to seek community input into the above¹. The deliberative engagement strategy employed for each of these matters will include the hearing from submitters at a Submitters Delegated Committee meeting.

The principles that Council will apply to its deliberative engagement methods are:

- **Representative**
 - We will engage a representative sample of Macedon Ranges Shire community.
- **Deliberative**
 - We will provide adequate opportunities for dialogue and deliberation.
- **Influence**
 - We will give full, fair and thorough consideration to the outputs of the deliberative process.

¹ Including the hearing of submitters at a Submitters Delegated Committee meeting

IAP2-recognised deliberative methods may include citizen's juries/people's panels, deliberative polls, steering committees, planning cells, consensus forums, 21st century dialogue/town meetings, co-design process, world cafés, negotiation tables, online consultations, policy roundtables, search conferences and formal and informal partnerships. All of these will be subject to requirements such as timelines and resourcing.

The Community Engagement Guidelines for staff will outline the detail on how to develop a deliberative community engagement process.

11.2 Statutory engagement

This policy **does apply** to other relevant decision-making processes. The Local Government Act 2020 does not require a deliberative engagement approach must be undertaken on any of the issues in Appendix 3; however, Council may choose to do so following an assessment of engagement requirements based upon the complexity of the issue, the community impact and interest in issue, and the available Council budget and resources allocated for the engagement.

For specific issues requiring statutory consultation and planning scheme amendments, see Appendix 3.

The Community Engagement Guidelines for staff provides the detail on how to develop a fit for purpose community engagement process.

11.3 Other engagement

Council may also undertake community engagement on a variety of issues that are not specified in the Local Government Act 2020. The decision to engage is based upon an assessment of the need for engagement. This may include:

- Development of strategies that guide future decision-making and service delivery.
- How Council allocates resources to services and projects through its annual budget
- New or revised policies
- Changes to service delivery, including discontinuing or altering a service, and identifying new opportunities or areas for improvement.
- Infrastructure projects, including construction, alteration or closure of buildings and facilities.
- Any other projects that significantly impact on the environment.

12. WHEN WE MAY CHOOSE NOT TO ENGAGE

This policy applies only to matters requiring a decision by Council.

When a decision has already been made, it is appropriate that Council inform/advise on its implementation. Furthermore, this policy **does not apply** to routine works or day-to-day activities such as tree maintenance, road and footpath works. When undertaking these activities, Council will inform people living at affected properties.

There may also be occasions when Council does not engage on a matter due to circumstances beyond its control, such as statutory requirements, and funding or policy requirements of other levels of government.

When there is no genuine opportunity for the community to influence particular decisions, it is not appropriate to conduct community engagement that implies the public can influence the outcome.

13. HOW WE ENGAGE

Council will determine the level and process of participation for each community engagement activity based on the issue, timeframes, available resources, expected level of public impact, and expected level of community interest in the issue.

13.1 Single stage community engagement

For low to medium public impact issues, or for highly technical documents where specialised knowledge is required, a single stage community engagement process is usually appropriate. For details on how to determine the impact of an issue, see Levels of Participation in Appendix 2.


13.2 Two stage community engagement

Resource and timeframe-permitting, for medium to high public impact issues Council will use a two-stage community engagement process before making a decision:

- 13.2.1 Pre-position forming engagement (to seek input from the community before forming a preferred position)
- 13.2.2 Post-position forming engagement (to test the preferred position before making a final decision). Two-stage engagement requires more resources and a greater lead-time, so this will need to be factored into planning.

The expected level of impact and public participation required will be determined in consultation with the relevant manager and director, Council's communications team and in some circumstances the Executive team.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum is one of the tools used to identify the need for, and level of engagement required.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations 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 aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Deliberative engagement sits within the collaborative – empower pillars of the spectrum.

14. ENGAGEMENT CATEGORIES

Council has identified five categories of issues to help determine the required level of participation and engagement methods.

Category	Issue	Examples
One	Matters that change the current arrangements/uses on a single site	Any significant redevelopment of a community facility, e.g. kindergarten renovation.
Two	Matters impacting on an area, neighbourhood or township	Traffic management proposals/solutions, streetscape proposals e.g. installation of roundabouts, speed humps, local open space developments, sporting club rooms at a recreation reserve.
Three	Service planning matters which have impacts across the shire	Changes to the garbage service, changes to aged care services or maternal child health services.
Four	Major plans which have impacts across the shire	Development of strategies relating to residential/industrial land use, or Council's strategic position related to issues such as open space planning, economic development, arts and culture or youth development.
Five	Major projects or issues with shire-wide impacts	Development of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Vision*• Council Plan*• Financial Plan*• Asset Plan*• New and major infrastructure projects

*Deliberative method required

15. WHO WE ENGAGE WITH - UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY

We make better decisions when we fully understand the needs, priorities and concerns of individuals and groups within our community. When we are planning to make a decision, we first identify the people and groups likely to be affected, and we reach out to involve them in the process.

We recognise that some groups face barriers to engaging with us and we commit to using methods that enable and encourage their participation. Identifying who is impacted or interested in a decision, best methods of outreach and any barriers to participation are guided by a rigorous stakeholder identification process and our guide to working with groups at risk of underrepresentation that is routinely updated for current best practice.

16. THE DIVERSITY OF OUR POPULATION

We understand that some of our decisions affect the entire community, but we also know that

most of our decisions affect some people more than others. We work hard to identify and engage directly with the most impacted, including those who face barriers to participation. Some community members fall within multiple stakeholder groups, making them particularly relevant to certain engagement processes. Our stakeholders may also include visitors to the region and non-resident ratepayers.

Sustainable decision making is also achieved when we involve relevant service providers, decision makers and funding bodies who might be external to Council. This might be seeking their input prior to community engagement to understand all issues and parameters of a decision or to facilitate conversation between different community stakeholders and other levels of government or to inform those organisations

16.1 Council committees and Stakeholder Groups

Council may also choose to seek input from, and the assistance of its Advisory Committees and external Stakeholder groups in its engagement activities.

17. MAKING A DECISION

Following planned community engagement activities, Council will:

- analyse the feedback received
- consider the feedback in the context of the other data, advice, strategies and/or legislation that is relevant to this matter;
- review the proposal in the context of concerns or suggestions expressed.

Council commits to respect the diverse range of interests and views which may exist on a particular issue and make genuine attempts to resolve conflicts, while recognising that it has the ultimate decision-making role.

Where appropriate a report will be presented to Council for a decision.

Engagement participants who have opted in for project updates should be notified of the report going to Council prior to the meeting taking place.

The decision will be communicated to all stakeholders involved in the community engagement and the broader community through the appropriate channels.

18. PRIVACY

Local government decision-making and community engagement processes usually affect both public and private interests. In many instances, Council will seek written submissions and input to proposals. These public processes imply a certain amount of public disclosure of information and therefore a degree of privacy loss. Reference to See Privacy Policy to see how these issues re addressed.

APPENDIX 1 – DEFINITIONS

Community engagement - involving those affected by or interested in a decision in the decision-making process.

Community - Can refer to the Macedon Ranges Shire community as a whole or:

- community of place (based on geographic location e.g. the Gisborne community)
- community of practice (based on common interests and activities e.g. the bike riding or gardening community)
- community of identity (based on an individual's shared perspective e.g. Aboriginal heritage, language speakers, residents of public housing, particular age groups or a religious community)

Stakeholders - Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.

Tools and methods - Refers to the many types of engagement that can be employed such as online or in person, public meetings and community panels, surveys, ideas boards, public competitions or deliberative budgeting for example.

Engagement approach - The design/plan that ensures appropriate timing, resources, tools and methods according to a considered analysis of those affected, impacted or interested and the scope and remit of any engagement project.

Co-design - A partnership with community to come to an agreed model or design of service delivery or public infrastructure. Can also refer to the co-design of the engagement process itself to ensure it is fully transparent and works for all parties.

Representative community panel - Can be used to deliver a range of engagement types from world café's, in person and/or online advisory groups through to complex deliberative processes. Larger panels (50-60 participants) can provide a representative sample of the population (to acceptable industry standards) of Macedon Ranges and can be appropriate for whole of Council area decisions with wide reaching impact. Smaller panels (15-30 participants) can provide representative samples for niche decisions impacting particular groups of the Macedon Ranges community but still require appropriate support, time and information.

Deliberative processes and/or citizens juries - Usually convened for more complex, long term and high impact issues, where perspectives are likely to differ and/or where the issue is high impact on sections of the community. Can take different forms but best practice always involves:

- a representative sample of the population or group who are impacted (see representative panel)
- a clear scope and remit that often asks for an agreed compromise of interests and outcomes, agreed priorities or consensus on a vision and direction
- provision of timely, objective and independently sourced/verified information
- sufficient time (often half day sessions spread across several weeks or months)
- support to participate (including independent facilitation, reimbursement for time, hardships and expenses incurred and sometimes co-design of the process)
- a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendation or decision holds (usually high).

Deliberative elements - Used where time and resources required of a full deliberative exercise is incompatible with the level of impact a decision entails, but the impact is sufficiently high or the decision is sufficiently complex to still warrant an extra level of transparency, meaningfulness and representation. Examples of elements of deliberative practice include:

- Inviting a representative sample of those impacted by a decision in to a one-off workshop in order to hear the range of perspectives and share more detailed information (this would usually happen after a broader community consultation so the full range of perspectives and issues requiring compromise are fully understood)
- Inviting the community to consider the trade-offs involved in decision by presenting options, choices or a budget framework
- Offering information sessions and accessible explanations of the project scope where issues are complex or dependent on other factors
- Inviting key stakeholders or a sample of those highly impacted to co-design the engagement process to ensure it reaches out to the right groups and is fully representative.

APPENDIX 2 – LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Council will determine the level of participation for each consultation activity based on the timeframes, available resources, expected level of public impact, and expected level of community interest in the issue.

Inform: low level of public impact	Provides information to the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in their understanding of a problem, alternatives, opportunities and possible solutions. Most appropriate when the activity is routine in nature, and affects a limited number of people in a limited way.
Consult: low to medium level of public impact	Obtains feedback from the community on analysis, alternatives and decisions. Usually involves developing a preliminary or preferred position before releasing it for community input. Most appropriate for projects which affect larger numbers of people but in a limited way. Methods may include community information sessions, surveys and email or written submissions.
Involve: medium level of public impact	Works directly with the community to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered throughout a process. This may involve the community in various stages of the project in seeking specific answers to issues as opposed to broad general feedback sessions. Methods may include focus groups, workshops, advisory committees and online consultations.
Collaborate: medium to high level of public impact	Partners with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Community collaboration may be fostered through deliberative engagement such as steering committees, planning cells, consensus forums, 21st century dialogue/town meetings, Co-Design Process, Deliberative Polls, World café, negotiation tables, online consultations, policy roundtables, citizen panels, search conferences and formal and informal partnerships.
Empower: high level of public impact	May use similar methods for lower levels of participation, but instead of Council making the final decision, decision-making is placed in the hands of the community.

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum

Appendix 3: STATUTORY CONSULTATION

While the community engagement processes used for the matters below will vary according to the complexity of the particular issue, each process used will include the hearing from submitters at a Submitters Delegated Committee meeting.

Council has responsibilities and makes decisions under a wide variety of Victorian and Australian legislation. In many instances the legislation sets standards and provides minimum requirements in regard to notifications and referrals. This relates to the following matters:

- Setting Councillor and Mayoral allowances (s 39)
- Adopting a Council Plan
- Making and amending a Local Law (s 73)
- Changing the Council's system of land valuations for Council rates (s 355)
- Adopting a budget
- Declaring a special rate or a special charge
- Selling, exchanging or leasing land
- Entering into a regional library agreement
- Deviating or discontinuing a road
- Developing or amending Governance Rules (s 60)
- Leasing land not included as a proposal in the budget (s 114)
- Conducting a review of, or restructuring advisory panel (s 16 & s 239)
- Declaring a special rate or a special charge

The consultation required by law for these matters must include the following:

- The Council must publish a public notice (in a local or daily newspaper, and on the Council's internet website) that identifies the proposal and tells people that they have the right to make a written submission to the Council.
- People who wish to make submissions must lodge them by the date specified in the public notice, which is a date not less than 28 days of the public notice.
- Anyone who has made a written submission and asked to be heard in support of this submission is entitled to speak to the Council or a committee appointed for the purpose. The submitter may appear in person or be represented by someone else.
- The Council must fix a time, date and place for this meeting and give reasonable notice of the meeting to each person requesting to be heard.
- The Council or a Council committee must consider any submissions received before making a decision.
- After it has made a decision, the Council must write to a person who has lodged a submission advising of the Council decision and the reasons for it.

(Note: where a submission is lodged on behalf of a number of people, the Council notice of the meeting is required to be sent to the person specified on the submission and the notice of the Council decision is only required to be sent to one of the people.)

Planning scheme amendments

Specific consultation arrangements apply in relation to proposed amendments to the Planning Scheme under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. These arrangements enable a person to make a submission:

- to the planning authority about an amendment to its planning scheme
- to a panel appointed to consider a planning scheme amendment.

Council is required to give public notice when proposing amendments to its planning scheme, including advice about how submissions can be made.

Protocol for planning permits

In dealing with any planning application, Council uses the following consultative protocol:

- An assessment of the impact of the proposed use or development on surrounding residents/landowners will be undertaken by the planning officer. This may involve an on-site inspection.
- On the basis of the assessed impact, the planning officer will make a decision on the necessity or otherwise and/or extent of notifications required to surrounding residents/landowners.
- In making this decision the planning officer will consider, amongst other issues, the scale of the development, the nature and type of use or development and the impact on the surrounding area. The planning officer will consider whether there is any material detriment to any person as is required by state legislation.
- Councillors are advised of permit applications fortnightly, including the extent of advertising and referral to authorities if undertaken. These applications include those with recommendations of refusal, which involve objections, where there are proposed car parking reductions or extension of times.
- In circumstances where the planning officer decides that a proposal has the likelihood of having impacts beyond the immediate neighbourhood area, letters to adjoining landowners/occupiers and a sign will be required to be placed on the site. In some instances in addition to the letters and sign on-site, public advertising of the proposal will occur in the local newspaper(s).
- Notifications to surrounding residents/landowners will advise people on how they can view any plans and supporting information on a proposal. In such instances the information will be available at the relevant Council service centres and online. The advertising period for planning permit application is 14 days.
- In some circumstances where high levels of community interest are anticipated, community information sessions will be held, either by the developer alone or jointly with Council.
- All submissions on a proposal will be considered in determining any application. If there are objections, the planning officer may convene and facilitate an applicant/objector(s) meeting involving the relevant ward Councillors and other interested Councillors.
- Any planning application that has received objections may be referred to Council for decision. Applicants and objectors will be advised of Council's decision.
- Planning applications that have shire-wide or significant community input and/or interest, will be referred to Council for decision.