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**PROJECT BASED  
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GUIDELINES**

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**OCTOBER 2000**

**Endorsed by the Executive on 31/10/2000**  
File 0050/070

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## **PROJECT BASED COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GUIDELINES**

**Endorsed by Executive \_\_ 31\_/\_ 10\_/\_ 2000**  
File 0050/070

## **Executive Summary**

The objective of these guidelines is to provide assistance to staff undertaking public consultation. These guidelines relate to project based consultation and focus on providing a specific outcome within relative time and cost constraints.

In context these guidelines relate to the draft Council Policy “Community Participation”. This general policy will result in a series of community participation strategies supported by the draft “Community Participation Handbook”. This handbook describes a number of public consultation processes and guidelines provide the “how to” for those processes that relate to projects. The relationships of these documents can be seen in the diagram included as Figure 3.1.

The set of guidelines that has been developed relates to different degrees of consultation for various project complexities. The table in Figure 5.1 has been developed to assist and describes the various levels of project and the recommended level of consultation.

The detailed guidelines are included as Attachment A and cover consultation for Levels 2 through 4.

Level 5 consultation is not specifically dealt with in these guidelines because it is consultation at a corporate level with the whole community and will be adequately covered in the proposed draft policy. The flow chart on which it will be based is included as Attachment B.

## **1. Introduction**

The objective of these guidelines is to provide assistance to staff undertaking public consultation. These guidelines relate to project based consultation processes and typically focus on providing a specific outcome within relative time and cost constraints.

A typical example would be a capital works project that has a set budget allocation, is required to be constructed within that financial year and has a public consultation process aimed at developing the best design solution to an identified community need.

The most tangible benefit of appropriate public consultation is that it helps to produce better outcomes. Projects that are understood and accepted by the community are less likely to face pressure for their revision or removal. Good consultation can produce better, sustainable decisions. Getting it right the first time can save time, frustration and money.

## **2. Background**

The Shire undertakes a variety of projects, both in terms of complexity and the degree of impact on the community. At times, the level and type of consultation for a project may be uncertain. On occasions, some in the community may have felt that insufficient or no consultation has occurred. Unfortunately this may lead to a project being suspended or modified, leading to frustration and annoyance for Council officers and the community.

Employing an appropriate set of guidelines to assist in determining the degree of public consultation required should remove future uncertainty.

## **3. Policy / Strategy Framework**

Council recognises that there is a benefit in public participation, openness, and accountability in the decision making process.

A draft policy has been developed for community participation. Its first core value is a commitment to “open and effective community consultation”. Further, it states “...that policy determination and service provisions reflects the needs and expectations of the community and accordingly is owned by the community.”

In context these guidelines relate to the draft Council Policy “Community Participation”. This general policy will result in a series of community participation strategies supported by the draft “Community Participation Handbook”. This handbook describes a number of public consultation processes and the guidelines provide the “how to” for those processes that relate to infrastructure projects. The relationships of these documents can be seen in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.1 Policy / Strategy Framework**

A five tiered approach to public consultation, including a checklist of key issues to be addressed is proposed. An overlay between the different levels of consultation may occur due to scope and sensitivity of a particular project. The intent of the public consultation model is to provide guidelines and encourage staff to consider all relevant issues prior to developing consultation processes for their own projects.

#### **4. Core values for community consultation**

For community consultation to be successful, it is important that officers:

- have the right attitude;
- identify stakeholders (both internal and external);
- allow sufficient time;
- be clear, particularly about how decisions will be made;
- see issues as the community sees them;
- provide feedback.

Public consultation is more than simply notifying the public and receiving submissions. It should be viewed as an 'investment' rather than a requirement. Further, it is important that the public and Council are clear about how the consultation will influence the final decision making.

A consultation process should:

*identify stakeholders,*

So that all those who are affected and interested are identified and informed about the proposal and encouraged to participate.

*be compelling*

So that affected stakeholders will want to be involved and that the Council is interested in listening to their views.

*be clear about what the proposal is,*

Why consultation is necessary, what will be done with the information, and who will be making the decisions. Provide participants (including the community) with information so that they can make an informed decision and see how Council reached its decision.

*allow sufficient time,*

So that everyone who wants to, is given an appropriate amount of time to respond to the proposal.

*provide good feedback,*

So that those who participate are given reassurance that their views and efforts are valued. It should be advised explicitly what form the feedback will take.

*provide a project manager*

There should be a project manager who is responsible for all facets of the public consultation process for a project. On complex projects there may be several specialists and private consultants engaged. Further it is likely that there will be competing demands on the project resulting in compromised solutions being developed.

To ensure a uniform and consistent approach to the community is provided, all queries, should be directed to the Council officer acting as project manager. This will also ensure that the project manager is aware of all issues relating to the project and prevent mis or conflicting information being disseminated to the community.

## **5. Public participation models**

There are generally four levels for public participation. These are:

- providing information  
bulletins, pamphlets, information letters
- providing information and seeking feedback  
meetings with individuals, discussion papers, questionnaires
- information coordination between stakeholders  
public meetings, presentations, steering group committees
- Council facilitates discussion and communication between stakeholders  
Consultative committees, committees of management, value management sessions

Detailed explanations, including advantages and disadvantages and best practice for each model is presented in Section C of *VicRoads Community Participation Strategies and Guidelines May 1997*.

Figure 5.1 Public Consultation Matrix provides a list of typical projects with appropriate methods of public consultation.

**Figure 5.1 Public Consultation Matrix**

To assist officers in determining the type and level of public consultation that should be undertaken, a matrix of available options and typical examples is shown below.

Degree of Public Consultation	Methods of consultation	Issues to consider to determine level of consultation	Typical examples
<b>Level 1</b> No consultation required	N/A	Works are not of a sensitive nature Residents are generally unlikely to notice the works. Usually a one off process.	General minor maintenance such as park grass cutting or street drainage pit cleaning.
<b>Level 2</b> Notification only	Bulletins, pamphlets, information letters	Works are significant, will be readily noticed by residents however there is generally only one way to achieve the desired result. Usually a one off process.	General major maintenance such as road resealing, tree pruning, creek maintenance or pit cleaning in private property.
<b>Level 3</b> Provide information and seek feedback	Meetings with individuals, discussion papers, questionnaires.	Works may impact on residents' views, amenity. Works are noticeable. Works will result in a physical change to the environment. Usually a one off process.	Proposed traffic management works, modification to parking restrictions, local road reconstruction or major drainage works.
<b>Level 4</b> Information coordination between stakeholders to provide design input to a solution.	Public meetings, presentations, Advisory and groups.	There are a number of options available to achieve the result. Works will impact on numerous stakeholders. Full community participation is required for local issues. Usually one off but may lead to an ongoing review process.	Proposed traffic management works (LATM studies), streetscape/beautification works, local park master plans or creek rehabilitation works.
<b>Level 5</b> Council facilitates discussion and communication between stakeholders.	Consultative committees, committees of management, value management sessions.	Full community participation is required for major Shire or regional issues. Often a long term or ongoing process.	Corporate policy development, freeway extensions, Waste Management Strategies or provision of other Council services for example a review of waste collection services or infrastructure maintenance services.

## **6. Conclusion**

The guidelines that have been developed to assist officers with this process are included as Attachment A and cover consultation for Levels 2 through 4.

Level 5 consultation is not specifically dealt with in these guidelines because it is consultation at a strategic level with the whole community and will be adequately covered in the proposed draft policy. The flow chart on which it will be based is included as Attachment B.

**Attachment A**

**A.1 Level 2 Consultation Guidelines**

**Notification, providing information bulletins, pamphlets, information letters.**

Letterdrop or Public Notice should contain at least the following information:

- Why works are required.
- When they will occur (amount of notice should be tailored to the job, for example, for street resurfacing works notice should not be less than two days because the resident may need time to make alternative parking arrangements, and not more than two weeks because the issue will lose urgency and may be forgotten).
- Who is the contact and who will be doing the work.
- Emergency contact no if different.

A typical notice may tell residents that Council's contractors will be resurfacing their street because it is in poor condition. The work will be done tomorrow and you are requested to park your cars off the street for two days. The project manager is Engineer Bloggs who can be contacted on 5886 0xxx or after hours on 0418 xxx xxx.

## **A.2 Level 3 Consultation Guidelines**

### **Preliminary consultation, providing information and seeking feedback, meetings with individuals, discussion papers, questionnaires**

Letterdrop or Public Notice should explain the purpose or objective, the timeframes for return of information and follow up feedback and the contact officer.

Any questionnaire should be pre-tested on a non-expert for clarity and understanding. It should provide space for comments and preferably be kept to one page. Such a letterdrop should include a reply paid envelope and should address the issue of non-resident owners by, for example, a direct mail out to all or registration on a mail out list.

An example of this level of consultation would include a pre-construction meeting with local residents for a significant road construction or drainage works project. Any public meeting of this sort should include enough representation to provide on the spot answers for concerned residents, for example, the project manager, the site superintendent, the contractor and relevant service authorities.

Typical notification times would be, for example, one week where access to a resident's backyard was required and two weeks notice to attend a pre construction meeting. Consideration should allow for school and other public holidays, ie more notice time should be allowed if it is expected residents that would be away from their homes or businesses for an extended period.

### **A.3 Level 4 Consultation Guidelines**

**Comprehensive consultation with a specific interest group for a design outcome, information coordination between stakeholders public meetings, presentations, Advisory groups.**

*The following is not intended to be a prescriptive list because each study will be unique and have its own special requirements or attributes. The following is a description of what is considered to be best practice for this municipality and whilst each step does not need to be followed rigorously each should be at least considered and if deleted the reason should be documented.*

It is important to understand that the democratic process comprises elected representatives making decisions on behalf of the broader community. The purpose of consultation is to inform the decision making process not replace it. Thus a typical Advisory Group will not be a decision-making body but will provide “local” information to Council officers who will provide a report to Council. This report will only form one component of the decision making process. Other elements include the Councillors direct experience or knowledge and the submissions of individuals made in writing or presented directly to the Council meeting.

#### **A 3.1 Typical Process**

##### **Step 1 Information Gathering**

Broad questionnaire, Letterdrop Number 1, to a whole area determining the community’s objectives for the study, for example, in a local shopping centre streetscape review is the objective to improve economic viability or to make the shopping experience more pleasant. (more parking versus more planting)

##### **Step 2 Participation Planning**

Define and confirm the objectives of study based on results of broad questionnaire survey. Letterdrop Number 2 notifies the community of the objectives and seeks nominations for Advisory Group members. Nominations to include a brief description of why they would be appropriate and is accompanied by ten supporting signatures from area participants.

The selection criteria for representatives on the Advisory Group should address the need to include a diversity of views representing a variety of areas (not necessarily geographic). Candidates should have a demonstrated ability to communicate with a sample of the effected community (hence the required ten signatures).

The notice will also detail the Advisory Group’s roles, and the meeting times and schedule. This will reduce the need for many future letterdrops advising of meeting times and will allow the community to plan their future participation well in advance.

Notification will typically be by hand delivered letterdrop but may be supplemented by newspaper notices and supplementary mailing lists. For example, non-resident owners may request to have notices posted to them where they live remotely.

### **Step 3 Advisory Group meetings**

A typical program of meetings could be:

- Meeting 1 Discuss ground rules, determine study programme and then identify issues in a creative non-judgemental way.
- Meeting 2 Provide answers to questions raised at Meeting 1, present various options or elements in response to Meeting 1 issues.
- Meeting 3 Present two options to Advisory Group and reach agreement on the two to be presented to the broader community.

### **Step 4 Distribute options to the community and seek feedback via questionnaire.**

This is an important part of the community ownership process and will provide feedback to the Advisory Group members on how well they are representing the diverse views of the community. The preferred number of options would be two, only one choice is not an option and a large number of options can be confusing.

### **Step 5 Meeting 4**

Present results of feedback to the Advisory Group and seek support for a favoured proposal to be submitted to Council.

### **Step 6 Report to Council**

Results of consultation process are reported to Council with an officer's recommendation on the most appropriate course of action. The broader community and the Advisory Group members are encouraged to attend this meeting and make personal submissions direct to Council.

The final report should also officially wind up the Advisory Group and thank all participants. If a monitoring or review panel is required this should be formed separately at the time it is required.

#### **Note:**

It is expected that to be meaningful this process could take from four to six months. The process will be assisted by the development of a comprehensive project plan that accounts for this period of consultation.

### **A 3.2 The Typical Advisory Group**

Once the defined objectives of the study are agreed to by the participants, the Advisory Group shall be formed.

#### **Role of the Advisory Group**

Objectives of the study arising from the information gathering phase will be defined prior to the formation of the Advisory Group by the participants in the area. The role of the Advisory Group is to discuss the objectives of the study and formulate a scheme which would meet the defined objectives and obtain participant support. This is expected to be achieved over a set period with a definite start and end date. For example, this may require a maximum number of four meetings.

Each meeting will have an Agenda. The Advisory Group will develop, with the help and expertise of the consultant and/or Council officers, a number of proposals. Consideration would be given to participant concerns and preferences raised through the earlier questionnaire, described in Step 1.

The proposals would be discussed at length and a limited number of proposals, which meet the objectives set by the participants, would be distributed to the Local Area. After considering participant feedback on these proposals, the Advisory Group would meet one final time to finalise the preferred scheme and the staging of the works.

### **Composition of the Advisory Group**

#### *Councillors*

The role of the Councillor would be to chair the Advisory Group meetings. The Councillor of the Ward directly affected by the proposed project would usually be expected to attend and chair the meetings. Should this Councillor be unable to attend a meeting then another Councillor or Council officer would be asked to chair the meeting on a temporary basis. It is important that the role of the chair also be that of a facilitator by ensuring all participants are dealt with fairly and are encouraged to actively contribute.

#### *Mediators*

The use of trained mediators to assist with the meeting is an option that may be exercised in some sensitive or very difficult situations.

Previous experience has shown that mediators and facilitators may be inappropriate. For outcomes to be obtained in a limited number of meetings, a more formal meeting structure with set objectives should be used. Mediators can rely on the group members making up their own mind as to what should be discussed and when. In order for all participant concerns, not just the Advisory Group members concerns, to be discussed a more formal approach should be used.

#### *Specialist Engineering Consultants*

Some municipalities contract out the whole study process and the only role Council officers play is to introduce the consultant to the public at a public meeting, to attend and oversee all meetings and to write an accompanying report to the consultant's one at the end of the process.

The "Peninsula Way" does not fit comfortably with this model because of our special commitment to service. It is important that when consultants are used they are there only to provide technical support to the officers and to any Advisory Group. For example, the public should see Council officers running the meetings, should receive correspondence from Council officers on Council letterhead and should be provided with telephone contact details of Council officers whom they can call to discuss their issues.

Consultants play an important role in data collection, using specialist tools and expertise. They also assist in letterdropping and preparation of concept designs and graphic material.

Due to their technical support role the specialist engineering consultant who is dealing with the study should be available at the meetings to discuss the proposed treatments and explain to the Advisory Group members any data or surveys that have been undertaken.

### *Public Gallery*

Participants of the local area will be informed of the dates and times of the scheduled Advisory Group meetings and will have the opportunity to attend. Although they can attend, there will not be an opportunity for them to speak. Should they have any questions regarding the meeting they would be able to raise their concerns with any of the Advisory Group members who would then be responsible for informing the Advisory Group at the next meeting. It is considered that this is the most efficient means of running effective meetings in the limited time available.

Although members of the gallery are not able to speak during the meetings, representatives of various organisations, who may be affected by any studies, for instance School Principals, will be invited to join a meeting to discuss their concerns and how they may be addressed.

### **Advisory Group Member Selection**

The subject area should be divided up into a number of sub-areas, with a maximum of six sub-areas, and participants within the sub-area would be invited to nominate themselves or another participant to represent the sub-area. The sub area need not be only geographic, it may be according to age group, resident / trader or any other division that may be appropriate to the study.

A letter delivered to residences within this area or a public notice would detail the objectives of the study defining each sub-area and describe the responsibilities of the Advisory Group member. There will be occasions when a letter should also be forwarded to non-resident property owners, particularly if they are not likely to be aware of any published public notice.

The responsibilities of the Participant Advisory Group members would be to:

- attend Advisory Group meetings, the dates to be determined and published at the outset of the study;
- make their name, contact telephone number and address available to all participants within the sub-area and the Local Area; and
- liaise with the community of the sub-area and provide for two way feedback between the Advisory Group and this community.

The letter outlining the objectives and responsibilities of the Advisory Group members would also invite participants to nominate either themselves or another participant to be the Advisory Group member for their sub-area. Each nominee would be required to provide signatures from at least 10 other participants of that sub area to support their nomination.

On receiving submissions from participants, the Council officers rate them according to the participant's approach to the study, their location within the sub-area and their support from other participants from the sub-area. The top rating participant would then be chosen to be the Advisory Group member.

The residents of the area would then be notified of the name, address and contact telephone number of the nominated Advisory Group member for each sub-area. If that participant was unable to attend a particular meeting they should nominate a replacement to represent that sub area at the meeting.

## **Support for the Advisory Group Members**

### *Advisory Group Meeting Discussion Notes*

Discussions held at each Advisory Group Meeting will be recorded, the notes of the meetings will be made available to any participant who would wish to obtain a copy. Detailed minutes or overly formal meeting procedures are not appropriate to this creative process. Notes should focus on decisions made and actions required.

### *Information Pack*

An information package will be provided to all Advisory Group members including their role in the meetings and guidelines for the running of the meetings and any background data. Relevant technical background should also be provided, for example in a traffic study a sheet could be provided which lists the various traffic management treatments available and their relative advantages, disadvantages and costs.