

Community Engagement Policy

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Description	Community Engagement Policy
Type	Council
Approval authority	Endorsed by Council
Responsible officer	Manager Customer Experience and Engagement
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Human rights	This policy has been assessed and is compatible with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

1 Community Engagement Policy

1.1 Policy Statement

The City of Stonnington recognises and values the extensive knowledge and diverse experiences of our community.

We are committed to utilising this knowledge to inform Council's decision-making and improve outcomes for our diverse communities through specialised, relevant and purposeful engagement.

This policy supports Council's 2040 vision of becoming a safe, inclusive and creative city that celebrates its vibrancy of cultures. It will support the Council Plan 2025 – 2029 to help Stonnington deliver services that enable our community to thrive, be healthy and future-ready. Purposeful and effective community engagement is integral to facilitating this vision at a local level to reflect the needs and aspirations of our community.

This policy was informed by feedback from and evaluation of our community engagement activities, as well as benchmarking national and local examples of best practice community engagement policy.

2 Purpose

This policy outlines Council's commitment to engage with the community, and how we will strive to hear from a wide range of voices across our community. It describes how the community can expect to be involved in planning and decision making, and how insights are used to inform council decisions and activities.

Effective community engagement results in better Council decisions, improved policy, enhanced services, plus greater community satisfaction and wellbeing. It builds respectful relationships and ensures transparency, integrity and trust in Council processes.

The City of Stonnington's community engagement approach is informed by best practice research, theory and evidence to ensure that we are listening, gathering and utilizing the voice of our community and embedding this into our decision-making process.

3 What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a planned process for Council to involve the public in the decision-making process on issues that interest or impact them. Purposeful and well managed public participation activities result in inclusive policies and effective Council strategies, programs and projects.

4 Scope

This policy applies to all Council service areas, teams and employees, as well as Councillors, contractors, consultants and volunteers undertaking work on behalf of Council. It also serves as a guide for external organisations delivering infrastructure and services in Stonnington.

The policy does not apply to specific community engagement processes that are prescribed by other Victorian legislation such as planning scheme amendments, land-use

planning applications, or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

The term engagement can describe many different types of interaction between Council and its broader community. This policy applies only to the formal processes of engaging the community to gather input into council projects or inform the community of matters relating to them or their community.

5 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, Council adopts the following definitions:

Term	Definition
Community	Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the City of Stonnington and includes people who: • Live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or • organisations in the municipality • Visit, use or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality
Community Engagement	Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.
Panel	May be used to deliver a range of engagement types from world cafés, 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 Stonnington and can be appropriate for whole of Stonnington decisions with wide reaching impact. Smaller panels (15 – 30 participants) can provide representative samples for niche decisions impacting particular groups of the Stonnington community but still require appropriate support, time and information.
Consultation	The activity of seeking input on a matter.
Deliberation	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:

Term	Definition
	• a representative sample of the population or group who are impacted (see 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 and sometimes co-design of the process) • a commitment to participants on the level of influence their recommendation or decision holds (usually high).
Process	A relationship between key steps, activities, tasks, policies and/or resources.
Public Participation	A term used by IAP2 meaning the involvement of those affected (interested or impacted) by a decision in the decision-making process. We use the term interchangeably with Community Engagement, Stakeholder Engagement or Consultation.
Stakeholder	An individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes.
Empower	Whilst all levels of engagement provide an important voice to the community; for the purpose of this document, Empower is defined as a level of public participation of the IAP2 framework. <i>Empower</i> – often referred to as co-production, decisions are made jointly between government and community. This is typically when decision-making authority has been delegated to a group including members from both the government and the community/industry.

6 Responsibilities

Community engagement is a shared responsibility. There are roles for both Council and the

community in initiating, leading, participating and delivering engagement activities

Party	Roles and Responsibilities
Community, business, government and other	Support community engagement processes and Council decision-making by seeking information, respectfully participating in engagement activities, putting forward ideas and promoting consultation opportunities to other stakeholders.
Mayor and Councillors	- Champion the commitment and principles of engagement through leadership, modelling best-practice and decision making. - Review insights from community engagement and take these into account when making decisions that impact our community. - Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision.
CEO and Executive Team	- Champion a culture that fosters best practice engagement and model the principles through leadership, process and implementation of this policy. - Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership. - Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy.
Managers and Coordinators	- Manage teams and projects to ensure community engagement is undertaken consistent with this policy and that staff are appropriately resourced, trained and supported. - Ensure that matters under consideration are informed by the appropriate level of community engagement. - Ensure that community engagement activities are well planned and relevant to community needs to ensure maximum opportunities for community participation and input
Engagement team	- Monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement across the Community Engagement framework - Oversee the Community Engagement Framework to build organisational capacity and practice through provision of advice, training and mentoring, resources and tools.
Council employees	- Ensure that community engagement planning and delivery is consistent with this policy and appropriate to the needs and requirements of the community and council projects and service delivery - Maximise opportunities to gather and communicate community insights

7 Related Legislation and Policies

There are a range of legislation, codes and Council documents that inform and support this Policy. These include, but are not limited to:

Victorian Government legislation sets specific engagement requirements for certain Council activities.

These statutory requirements usually relate to long term strategic council planning and budgeting, amendments to the planning scheme, development of public health and wellbeing plans, local law making, land acquisition and sales, electoral reviews, and some road changes.

The Local Government Act 2020 outlines a set of overarching principles and requirements to guide the engagement approach of councils.

Legislation	Council documents
• Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 • Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 • Disability Act 2006 • Equal Opportunity Act 2010 • Gender Equality Act 2020 • Local Government Act 1989 • Local Government Act 2020 • Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 • Planning and Environment Act 2007 • Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 • Public Administration Act 2004 • Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 • Road Management Act 2004 • Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 • Gender Equality Act 2020	

8 Engagement principles

Council's community and stakeholder engagement approach is guided by the community engagement principles set out under the Local Government Act 2020:

1. A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.
2. Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
3. Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and

groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.

5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

These principles are supported by our Community Engagement values.

9 Stonnington's community engagement values

Our community engagement values are based on best practice 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 for engagement outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020.

Transparent: we will clearly explain the objectives and scope of the engagement and how community members can be involved. At the conclusion of the engagement we will report back to those involved and the broader community with the outcomes and next actions.

Inclusive: we value diverse ideas and perspectives of members from right across our community, and will make every effort to consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that want to be involved in the process

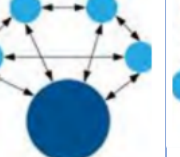
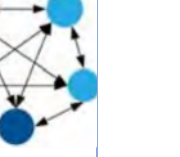
Accessible: we will provide the community with objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation, and allow sufficient time for review and participation. We will use a mix of communication channels to ensure that the community is informed about, and can participate in, engagement activities.

Respect: We value and respect our community's time and will provide all reasonable supports to allow community members to have their voice heard

10 Engagement framework

The City of Stonnington's community engagement planning and delivery is guided by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement. The IAP2 Spectrum is a useful and widely recognised tool that identifies five levels of participation, which outlines the goals, commitments and role for Council and the community in the process.

The engagement approach is determined by the significance, complexity and anticipated community impact of the topic being proposed. Other factors such as timeframes for delivery, and cost/budget will also be considered when selecting engagement techniques and duration.

Deliberative			Consultative		
	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 concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	To place the 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 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 look to you for 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
Type of engagement undertaken	Communicate	Seek feedback	Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement

Source: IAP2 Spectrum of engagement

11 How we engage

Engagement activities are delivered in a wide range of formats, which can be divided into two broad groups to help inform and structure the nature of engagement, and tailor the consultation depending on the complexity of the topic.

11.1 Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement involves, collaborates with and empowers the community to reach an outcome or decision for complex issues.

Deliberative engagement typically occurs over a longer period of time than other engagement activities and brings together diverse voices to work through and consider matters in a supported environment. It is an inclusive and transparent process in which participants are provided with:

- a clear purpose from the outset of what will be achieved and why
- relevant evidence and background information to analyse
- sufficient time to explore, assess and discuss options
- practical support to enable participation in the process

It enables a diverse range of community members to be highly involved and aims to come to a decision after considering all information and prioritising and weighing solutions. It requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered, and has the involvement of our community.

11.2 Examples of deliberative practices:

- Working with advisory groups
- Online proposals and ideas discussed by a panel of community members
- Participation by a representative group in a series of information exchange sessions to reach consensus
- People's/Community Panel
- Focus groups
- Workshops
- Virtual online sessions
- Temporary installations/ pop-ups/ activations
- Co-design workshops
- Virtual online sessions
- Action learning approach

11.3 Consultative Engagement

Consultative engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

Examples of consultative practices are:

- surveys and polls
- ideas gathering
- submissions
- factsheets
- drop-in sessions/ information sessions
- web pages
- newsletters
- virtual online sessions
- focus groups

Participation at this level can be very broad and may include involvement by stakeholders

who choose to observe the engagement and project but offer no direct input.

11.4 Where we apply deliberative and consultative engagement

Matter requiring engagement	Level of engagement required
Annual budget	Consultative
Revenue and rating plan	Consultative
Community vision	Deliberative
Council Plan	Deliberative
Financial Plan	Deliberative
Asset Plan	Deliberative
Making of a local law	Consultative
Selling of land	Consultative
Leasing of land	Level to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter
Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects	Level to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter

11.5 Who we engage with

Timeframes for engagement will be determined by the amount of time required to gather feedback from the people most impacted by the engagement matter. A minimum of three weeks is generally required to reach target audiences and allow adequate opportunity for feedback.

We are committed to creating an equitable environment where all members of our diverse community are given the opportunity to participate in community engagement activities.

To deliver on this commitment, we will identify stakeholders, people and communities that may be affected by a decision and encourage participation in a range of engagement opportunities that are designed to meet the needs of our community. We will create a culturally safe environment that welcomes participation and respects the diverse and unique identities of our community members.

Our community engagement activities will be accessible to all people. We will engage with Council's specialist advisory committees and encourage participation from all groups across the municipality to ensure that we reach those most impacted by the engagement topic.

We will strive to hear from a wide range of people in our community, including those that are typically under-represented in engagement activities. On occasions this may require the use of incentives to enable and encourage community participation in engagement activities. Council employees and serving Councillors would not be eligible to receive participation incentives.

11.6 When we engage

The City of Stonnington engages with the community on matters that are likely to impact them.

This can include:

- A significant change, review or proposal of a council plan, strategy, or policy
- A significant change or review of a council facility, program, or service
- Capital works projects including community centres, infrastructure, or public buildings

Engagement may happen once, or multiple times, within the process, depending on the scope and complexity.

11.7 Where we may not engage

Council may not engage with the community in situations where this is not appropriate, for example:

- Emergency situations where decisions need to be made immediately to ensure community safety
- Matters related to everyday council operations
- Where Council doesn't have the decision-making power

11.8 Property Engagement

A relevant form of communication or community engagement must be performed at least 4 weeks prior to selling or exchanging land, along with a notice of intention published on the council's website, except where section 116 applies of the Local Government Act 2020 or there is a safety hazard.

Community engagement will occur when the leasing of council property is for more than one year and the rent for any period of lease is \$100,000 or more a year, or if the lease is for 10 years or more.

11.9 Submissions

Where Victorian Government legislation defines that the only form of community participation available to the public is by official submission, Council will continue to consult and engage according to Section 223 of the Local Government Act 2020. This includes:

- Council decision to change system of valuation (Section 157(5))
- Special rates (Sections 163A and 166(4))
- Rebates and concessions (Section 169(1C))
- Some traffic and road related matters (Section 207A)

12 Closing the loop

We will ensure that participants and community members are informed of engagement progress and insights using tools and communication appropriate to the nature of the project. This may include:

- Sharing outcomes on Connect Stonnington
- Direct communications with community members that participated or requested engagement insights
- Publishing engagement insights and outcomes as part of Council meeting minutes
- Sharing outcomes in Stonnington-owned media – eg: Stonnington news, social media
- Informing the community of when a decision will be made on the topic, and how they can find out more about this process

13 Evaluating Engagement

Understanding and measuring our engagement performance and public participation is an integral part of the engagement process. We measure outcomes against the stated objectives and listen to feedback from participants to understand how we can continually improve the delivery of community engagement activities.

Engagement evaluation measures include:

- survey completion
- community participation and attendance
- input levels and interaction metrics
- number of engagement activities
- timeliness of reporting back to the community
- the diversity and representativeness of participants and the inclusion of specific or hard to reach groups
- survey and feedback insights – eg: Community Satisfaction Survey; engagement activity feedback

14 Useful links

14.1 Connect Stonnington

connectstonnington.vic.gov.au

Connect Stonnington is the City of Stonnington's online engagement platform where the community can have their say on proposed activities and future plans. The platform enables people to contribute their opinions, join conversations, receive updates on projects, and find out how their feedback has influenced decisions.

14.2 Council Meetings

The City of Stonnington's Council is responsible for making decisions on behalf of the community, and comprises nine elected Councillors, each representing one of the city's nine wards. Meetings are open for public questions and statements, and agendas and minutes are available at stonnington.vic.gov.au/about/about-council/council-meetings. Council meetings can be watched live via Live Streaming webcast.stonnington.vic.gov.au

