

COUNCIL POLICY

Community Engagement Policy

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Date	Version	Revision description
23/02/2021	1.0	Adopted by Council
25/06/2024	2.0	Presented for adoption by Council

1. Purpose

Section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) requires Council to adopt and maintain a Community Engagement Policy that:

- Is developed in consultation with the municipal community;
- Gives effect to the community engagement principles contained in the Act;
- Is capable of being applied to the making of the Council's local laws, Council's budget, and policy development;
- Describes the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required;
- Specifies a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement;
- Includes deliberative engagement practices which must address any matters prescribed by, and be capable of being applied to, the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and Asset Plan; and
- Includes any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

Council will apply the following community engagement principles, outlined in the Act, to its community engagement activities:

- Each community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant, and timely information to inform their participation;
- Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement; and,
- Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all community engagement activities undertaken by Council. It is binding upon all Council staff and all persons undertaking community engagement on behalf of the Council including volunteers, contractors, consultants, and related committees.

This policy does not apply to advocacy activities where Council is not the decision-maker.

Community engagement relating to planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments is outside of the scope of this policy, as these processes are governed by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and associated regulations.

3. Policy details

3.1 COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITMENT

Council values community feedback and its important role in informing decision making. Council makes the following commitments,

Communication: Communication regarding community engagement activities will be delivered in a concise, consistent, realistic, and timely manner. We will close the loop and provide ongoing transparency and feedback on decisions of Council.

Engagement approach: Engagement methods will be chosen that are appropriate for the purpose of the community engagement activity and are inclusive, informative, and ever evolving.

Stakeholders: Council will collaborate with the Alpine Shire community and capture a broad range of views and interests to meet the community's needs.

Decision making: Council will make informed, deliberate and evidence-based decisions that will be considered with foresight.

3.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

3.2.1 What is community engagement?

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement is a collaborative relationship between Council and the community to seek input and feedback to assist Council with decision making.

3.2.2 Who will Council engage with?

Council engages with a broad range of people, all with differing interests. For the purpose of this Policy we identify the community as anyone affected by the specific Council decision resulting from the engagement.

Meaningful community engagement seeks to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of all people to participate in, negotiate and partner with institutions that affect their lives.

Everyone should feel supported and comfortable to have their say in Council decision making.

Council recognises that some groups may face barriers to engage with us and we aim to use methods that enable and support their participation.

Council will provide accessible information and genuine opportunities that invite and enable the community to participate, ensuring they feel valued and empowered.

Council will allocate appropriate resources to support the needs of participants, particularly from underrepresented voices in the community, ensuring the methods, communication and spaces we use are culturally safe and accessible for all.

3.2.3 What is deliberative engagement?

Deliberative engagement is an iterative community engagement method and process to assist with complex, strategic, and impactful decision making. The process first seeks a broad range of input and feedback, and then refines recommendations through deliberation.

Deliberative engagement is characterised by several factors including that:

- Council seeks a broad range of views from a representative group of people who will be affected by the decision under consideration;
- Participants are informed about the subject matter;
- Participants understand the question that is being asked of them;
- Participants are advised what impact their input will have on Council decision making; and
- Participants will take part in engagement methods where they will weigh and balances priorities to gain broad consensus, and form recommendations for Council's consideration.

In accordance with the Act, deliberative engagement processes will be undertaken to develop:

- The Community Vision
- The Council Plan
- The Financial Plan
- The Asset Plan

Deliberative engagement processes may be undertaken for other projects if a high level of engagement is assessed as required.

3.2.4 When will Council engage?

Alpine Shire Council will engage with the community when:

- Council requires input or feedback to assist or inform decision making;
- Community members will be impacted by the decision under consideration by Council;
- Community members can have an impact on the decision to be made;
- There is a high level of public interest in the matter under consideration;
- There is a real or perceived change in Council service delivery;
- When there is a real or perceived change to the use of public facilities or spaces;
- It is a major project or initiative; or
- When it is legislatively required.

3.2.5 When will Council not engage?

Council will not engage when there is a decision to be made when:

- Feedback received through community engagement is unable to impact decision making;
- Council is not the lead agency for a project or change;
- Council is not the decision maker for a project, initiative or change; or
- Responding to natural, social, or economic disaster where the timeliness of response takes precedence.

3.2.6 How will Council assess the level of engagement required?

Council will determine the level of engagement required against both the public participation goal and our promise to the public. Levels of engagement will range from inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. The greater impact community engagement can have on decision making, the higher the level of engagement adopted.

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 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 to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Figure 1: IAP2, Public Participation Spectrum

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When determining what level of engagement is appropriate Council will consider the following factors:

- How many residents of Alpine Shire will be affected by the decision;
- The foreseen impact the decision will have on the community;
- The strategic importance of the subject matter;
- The level of community interest;
- The resources available;
- The community's ability to impact decision making; and
- Legislative requirements.

3.2.7 Council's community engagement planning will include:

Once Council has determined that engagement is required, and what level of engagement is needed, responsible officers will develop a community engagement and communications plan (the plan) which will outline:

- Clearly defined objectives for the community engagement proposed;
- The relevant legislative, policy or other contextual matters;
- The level of engagement proposed;
- What elements of the project community members can impact with their feedback;
- Stakeholders who will be affected and will be included;
- Engagement methods and communication channels used to support the process;
- Key messages and questions for the community;
- Key dates for the rollout of engagement and deliverables; and
- Methods of informing the community of outcomes.

3.2.8 What method of engagement will Council use?

Council will determine the most appropriate method of engagement based upon consideration of the following factors:

- The level of engagement required;
- A community's preference for engagement methods;
- The stakeholders identified through the planning process;
- The resources available to Council; and
- Ensuring a timely engagement process.

3.2.9 Feedback to the community

Council understands and values the importance of closing the loop with community engagement participants and the broader community. Closing the loop allows Council to advise participants of how their feedback was considered in the decision-making process.

Council will use its website, social media platforms, online engagement platform, and other direct communication channels to provide feedback to participants and stakeholders regarding the outcome of the engagement, and how their feedback impacted decision making.

3.2.10 Continuous improvement

Council is committed to continuously reviewing and improving our community engagement practices. At times Council will seek feedback from participants to measure and consider:

- The number of people who participated in the engagement process;
- All key demographics to identify if we have missed any voices;
- Satisfaction with chosen engagement methods;
- The responsiveness of Council;
- Satisfaction with the level and availability of information;
- Whether participants felt heard throughout the process; and
- What we can improve upon next time.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The following positions are responsible for

Responsibility	Role / Position
Champion the commitment to community engagement and community engagement principles.	Councillors Chief Executive Officer Directors Manager Council officers and project officers
Determine when engagement needs to occur.	Chief Executive Officer Directors Managers Council officers and project officers
Determine the level of engagement required to assist Council decision making.	Chief Executive Officer Directors Managers Council officers and project officers
Implement community engagement processes in accordance with Council's commitment to community engagement and the community engagement principles.	All responsible Council employees, individuals and entities undertaking community engagement on behalf of Council.

5. Breaches

Failure to comply with Council policy, supporting procedures or guidelines, will be subject to investigation.

6. Human Rights Charter compatibility

This policy has been assessed as being compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 [Vic]*.

7. Gender Impact Assessment

The implications of this policy were assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

The Gender Impact Assessment showed that Community Engagement Policy risks isolating minority groups due to lack of size, perceived significance, or barriers to engagement when engaging with the diverse communities within the Alpine Shire.

While this can be overcome through the accompanying Community Engagement Procedure and Engagement and Communications Toolkit, the Policy should also be accessible to these groups.

By prioritising women and non-binary people at these intersections of culture, language, and ability, Council can ensure that our communities are aware of the ways in which we will engage with them.

8. Supporting documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other relevant Council policies and procedures, as well as relevant legislative requirements.

Related Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020 [Vic]*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2021 [Vic]*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987 [Vic]*
- *Disability Act 2016 [Vic]*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 [Vic]*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 [Vic]*
- *Emergency Management Act 2013 [Vic]*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 [Vic]*
- *Road Management Act 2004 [Vic]*
- Other relevant legislative instruments

Related Guidelines, Operational Directives, Policies or Procedures

- Alpine Shire Council Public Transparency Policy
- Alpine Shire Council Governance Rules
- Alpine Shire Council Governance and Risk Framework
- Alpine Shire Council Complaints Policy
- Other relevant guidelines, operational directives, policies and procedures.

9. Definitions and abbreviations

Term	Meaning
the Act	<i>Local Government Act 2020</i>
Community	All residents, ratepayers, landowners, and members of the general public, including individuals, groups, organisations, user groups, and businesses.
Community engagement	For the purposes of this policy, community engagement is a collaborative relationship between Council and the community for to seek input and feedback to assist Council with decision making.
Deliberative engagement	Deliberative engagement is an iterative community engagement method and process to assist with complex, strategic, and impactful decision making. The process first seeks a broad range of input and feedback, and then refines recommendations through deliberation.
Councillors	Councils consist of elected members (democratically elected Councillors) and the administration (Council Officers). Councillors are elected by their community every four years. They participate in the decision-making of Council, representing the interest of the municipality.
Council Officers	Council Officers are employees who are overseen by the Chief Executive Officer to deliver council services and projects.
Public participation	Community members taking part in community engagement activities.
Stakeholder	Community members, organisations, and businesses affected by the subject matter under consideration.
IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum	A framework to help define the public's role in any public participation process. It clearly shows the differing levels of participation that are required, depending on the goals, timeframes, resources, and levels of concern or interest in the decision to be made.

10. Approval

THE COMMON SEAL OF THE
ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL was
hereunto affixed this 25th day of June
2024 in the presence of:

SARA NICHOLAS
COUNCILLOR

SIMON KELLEY
COUNCILLOR

WILL JEREMY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Version 2 of the Community Engagement Policy was signed and sealed at the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 25 June 2024.

The original signed copy is held in Council's records.