

Special Reports of the Director of Organisational Services
Monday 26 August 2024

24SP058	Public exhibition of the draft Community Engagement Strategy including Community Participation Plan
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Key focus area	7. Shared decision-making
Objective	7.1 Our community influences decisions that shape our city
File	F2024/01327 - D11525984
Author	Community and Stakeholder Engagement Lead - Amelia Parrott
Responsible manager	Manager Communications and Corporate Strategy - Jacqueline Smith
Previous items	22OS028 - Community Engagement Strategy for adoption - Organisational Services Standing Committee - 14 Nov 2022 6.30pm

Executive summary

This report seeks approval for public exhibition of the draft Community Engagement Strategy incorporating the Community Participation Plan 2024-2028.

Recommendation

Council:

- A. places the draft Community Engagement Strategy including Community Participation Plan 2024-2028 on public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days and accepts submissions during this time, and
- B. notes staff will prepare a further report outlining the outcomes of the public exhibition.

Context

Council adopted its current Community Engagement Strategy including Community Participation Plan on 14 November 2022 (22OS028).

The strategy identifies relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outlines when, how and why each group will be able to provide input into Council’s long-term planning and decision-making activities.

The *Local Government Act 1993* states Council must establish and implement a Community Engagement Strategy. The Community Engagement Strategy must be exhibited for 28 days if it is combined with a Community Participation Plan, as per the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Under this legislation, Council is required to:

- engage with the community to prepare a draft Community Engagement Strategy by 31 December in the year of a local government election and review the strategy at least every four years
- publicly exhibit the draft Community Engagement Strategy for at least 28 days and invite submissions.

Discussion

Council is required to undertake corporate planning and reporting activities in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021*, which incorporates the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines and Handbook 2021.

All councils are required to prepare and implement a Community Engagement Strategy to support the development of their plans, policies, programs and key activities. The NSW Office of Local Government recommends the Community Engagement Strategy be incorporated with the Community Participation Plan. The Community Participation Plan identifies how and when we will engage with our community on the development and planning functions Council performs under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

The Community Engagement Strategy identifies relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outlines when, how and why each group will be able to provide input into Council's long-term planning and decision making. As per the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines, the strategy is based on the social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights.

The key updates to the draft 2024-2028 strategy, which have been informed by community engagement and internal consultation are:

- provide greater clarity around the public exhibition submission process including how Council manages form letters and petitions
- increased visibility of the practical steps Council staff take to engage with 'hard to reach' priority populations in our community
- updated references to NSW Government stakeholders and relevant planning and development legislation.

Community engagement and internal consultation

Community feedback has informed the draft strategy. This includes engagement-focused feedback collected through consultation on Council's draft Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035 and Local Strategic Planning Statement, and feedback on Council's internal Guidelines for Engaging with Priority Populations.

Consultation on Council's draft Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035 and Local Strategic Planning Statement was undertaken from February to May 2024, and included:

- engagement with community-centred Council committees and portfolios
- the 100 Voices community summit
- online discussion forums that invited the community to share their 10-year vision for Lake Macquarie with a focus on community, environment, economy and governance.

Through this consultation, the community expressed a desire for Council's community engagement activities to be open and transparent, easily accessible and tailored to the unique needs of stakeholders interested in the project, strategy or decision.

From February to May 2024, Council staff also undertook engagement to inform its internal Guidelines for Engaging with Priority Populations, and feedback gathered has been incorporated in the draft strategy. This included face-to-face engagement with community-centred Council committees and groups representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse people, over 55s, children and families, and young people, to understand how Council staff can overcome potential barriers to engaging with such groups.

Internal consultation was also undertaken including engagement with Council's Governance Portfolio and staff from Council's Integrated Planning and Development Assessment and Certification departments.

Assessment of options

The report recommends that Council places the Community Engagement Strategy including Community Participation Plan 2024-2028 on public exhibition for at least 28 days. This will enable Council to meet its legislated obligations under the *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Council could alternatively resolve to amend the draft Community Engagement Strategy including Community Participation Plan 2024-2028 and to place the amended document on public exhibition. This is not recommended because in developing the draft strategy, Council staff have ensured the strategy meets legislative requirements and reflects Councillor and community feedback, where possible. The public exhibition period invites submissions on the strategy, which may result in amendments for Council to consider prior to adopting the draft strategy.

Council may resolve to not proceed with the exhibition. This option is not recommended as it would see Council fail to meet its obligations under the *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Next steps

Placing the draft Community Engagement Strategy on public exhibition will provide further opportunity for the community to provide feedback. A further report, including a summary of submissions received during public exhibition, will be presented to Council in November 2024.

Key considerations

Economic

The Community Participation Plan, included as part of the draft Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028, provides a framework for how Council will engage with the community on matters relating to planning and development, such as development applications, contribution plans and master plans, and amendments to the Lake Macquarie Development Control Plan 2014.

Supporting our community to provide feedback on such matters allows Council to make more informed decisions that support sustainable development and economic activity in Lake Macquarie.

Environment

The Community Participation Plan, included as part of the draft Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028, provides a framework for how Council will engage with the community on matters relating to planning and the environment, such as development applications, reclassification of land and amendments to the *Lake Macquarie Local Environmental Plan 2014*.

Supporting our community to provide feedback on such matters allows Council to make more informed decisions that protect and enhance the natural environment.

Community

The draft Community Engagement Strategy provides a framework for inclusive community engagement that enables the Lake Macquarie community to participate meaningfully in the decision-making process. Community engagement informs the vision and direction of Council, as outlined in our Community Strategic Plan.

Civic leadership

Effective and meaningful engagement is at the heart of local government and the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. The draft Community Engagement Strategy will guide our approach to community engagement to support the development of plans, policies, programs and key activities relating to Integrated Planning and Reporting, as well as on the planning functions Council performs under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. The draft strategy supports good governance by demonstrating transparency and fairness in Council's approach to engagement.

Financial

Implementation of the draft Community Engagement Strategy can be accommodated in existing budgets and forecasts in Council's Long-term Financial Plan.

Infrastructure

The draft Community Engagement Strategy will support the provision of quality infrastructure across Lake Macquarie by providing a framework for community feedback to be collected and incorporated into capital works projects. Seeking community feedback as part of the capital works planning and design process helps ensure built infrastructure meets community needs.

Compliance

The draft Community Engagement Strategy has been prepared in accordance with relevant legislation and government guidelines.

Legislative and policy considerations

Lake Macquarie City Council Community Engagement Strategy 2022-2024

Lake Macquarie City Council Code of Meeting Practice

Local Government Act 1993

Local Government (General) Regulation 2021

NSW Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines and Handbook 2021

Attachments

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| 1. Draft Community Engagement Strategy including Community Participation Plan 2024-2028 | Under separate cover | D11671522 |
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