

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

WHAT WE HEARD

What is the Community Engagement Policy?

The Hobsons Bay Community Engagement Policy 2021 articulates the principles, commitments and various levels of engagement that Council is committed to delivering to ensure a clear process for community engagement in Council's decision-making processes.

Why engage?

Victorian Government legislation sees community engagement as essential for the delivery of good services and projects in the local government realm. This is reflected by the Local Government Act 2020 (the LG Act) requirement that all councils deliver and maintain a community engagement policy by 1 March 2021.

The Community Engagement Policy recognises this need and is an extension of the work Council has been doing in community engagement, as directed by the Hobsons Bay Community Engagement Policy Framework 2015.

The community engagement process

At the Council Meeting held on Tuesday 8 December 2020, Council resolved to place the Draft Hobsons Bay Community Engagement Policy on public exhibition to gather community feedback.

The draft policy was publicly exhibited for five weeks from Friday 11 December 2020 to Sunday 17 January 2021 with a mix of digital and face-to-face engagement.

The digital engagement was hosted on Participate Hobsons Bay, which included an online survey. The survey took the "LOVE, CHANGE, IDEA" approach and asked the community what they love and what they would change about the policy, as well as asking them to provide ideas and comments.

Council hosted six face-to-face drop-in sessions (a composite total of about 17 hours) across the city and about 65 people conversed with Council staff at the sessions.

- Wednesday 16 December, 4-6pm, Newport Community Hub
- Wednesday 6 January, 4-6pm, Laverton Community Hub
- Sunday 10 January, 9am-12.30pm, Williamstown Farmers Market
- Tuesday 12 January, 9am-2pm Altona Beach Market
- Thursday 14 January, 4-6pm, Newport Community Hub
- Friday 15 January, 3-5pm, Altona Meadows Library

How was the engagement communicated?

The consultation was promoted on Council's communication channels including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Thirty separate posts went live across all platforms with a total reach of approximately 23,000 people.

It was also promoted in a media release, Star Weekly advertising, email signature banner, Council e-newsletters and information at Council facilities.

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Who got involved?

Three hundred and five people visited Participate Hobsons Bay and six residents made 11 separate contributions – two “loved” the policy and three gave “ideas for change”.

Seventy-five per cent of visitors were new to the site. Forty-four per cent of visitors came directly to the site, 42 per cent came via social media, 9 per cent via search engine and 5 per cent via other websites.

What we heard

Feedback from the community included 89 separate contributions (“contributions” refers to separate points of feedback, sometimes within the same submission or from the same person) in total.

There were some common themes of the feedback as per below. Also included are some feedback examples in each theme.

Positive with some areas to focus on moving forward:

- hard to fault, congratulations to the Council on the thorough work done
- addressed very well engagement between Council and the community
- a suitable and acceptable consultation process, a good start
- it will be good to see this translate into a concrete action plan

Needs some additional content:

- a summary of the policy outlined at the start
- provide several examples about the importance of community engagement and other factors
- include “legitimacy” as an additional principle
- include more about the important role Council should play in understanding underlying needs
- wanted more innovation – should be a clear commitment to new and emerging technologies, new formats, new locations etc.
- process for planning and services needs to be more explicit.
- explain the data and how the decisions are weighed up

Increased transparency and accountability:

- stakeholders should be made transparent to the community
- engagement plan needs to be defined and released to the public for transparency
- engagement options need to be specific to the needs of each stakeholder group, and be measurable against a target
- decision making criteria to be reported publicly
- evaluation to be reported publicly
- Community Engagement Staff Guidelines and Toolkit should be included
- current policy favors an information/response process only
- engagement in Council rarely moves beyond the inform and respond levels and there is more room for involve, collaborate and empower
- many projects could use a Community Advisory Committee model



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- Workshops need to be a 2-way conversation to facilitate input and capture the data in a structured way.

Localised and home-based preference for communications and engagement tools:

- drawing on community groups (by geography, cohort and policy area) and well-connected individuals to “plug” our consultations and Council to meet with them
- engagement activities to be located where the people naturally go, instead of attending Council-run sessions
- engagement opportunities and information to be tailored to suburb level
- digital community noticeboards that are location based
- post cards or notifications via mail
- SMS messaging

Consultation methodology had gaps due to timing (summer holidays):

- liked the face-to-face consultation sessions onsite
- really like the “post your comment” section on Participate, where you can see others’ comments
- consultation wasn’t sufficient – short and inappropriate timelines; sessions didn’t reach the whole community during peak holiday period; and there were no sessions at South Kingsville Community Centre, Brooklyn Community Centre or Spotswood Community Centre
- wanted an online session

Next steps

Thank you to all community members and stakeholders for their contributions to the development of the Community Engagement Policy.

The Community Engagement Team has reviewed all comments provided and has updated the Community Engagement Policy to ensure key concerns and feedback are reflected where appropriate. We will share the updated policy on Participate Hobsons Bay when it is endorsed.

To keep informed on this project please visit Participate Hobsons Bay.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact 1300 179 944 or email communityengagement@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au and ask to speak with a member of the Community Engagement Team.