Community Engagement Policy (Council)

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the policy is twofold. Firstly, to ensure that Council effectively engages with the community when required and when the community expects to be engaged, and secondly, to outline expectations for Council's engagement practice. This will be achieved by:

- Ensuring that Council engages with the community using a deliberative methodology on important strategic plans, including the Community Vision, the Council Plan, the Financial Plan and the Asset Plan.
- Council will partner with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) to ensure that traditional owners' rights, aspirations, and perspectives are incorporated into all HRCC Community Vision and Council Plan documents prepared under the *Local Government Act 2020*.
- Providing a guide to the type of engagement that will produce better outcomes for Council's projects and operations and ensure that this engagement meets the expectations of the community.
- Ensuring that the community is effectively engaged by Council and that barriers to participation are minimised.
- Ensuring that the appropriate level of engagement is used by Council.
- Providing a consistent approach to community engagement across the organisation through the use of the engagement toolkit that provides tools for planning, conducting, evaluating, and recording of engagement.

In addition, this policy will ensure that Council complies with the community engagement requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Part 3 – Council decision making, Division 1 – Community Accountability, Sections 55 and 56) and conducts engagement in accordance with the Local Government Engagement Strategy detailed in the Recognition and Settlement Agreement between the State of Victoria and the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

2. INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is a vital function for Council because by effectively engaging with our community:

- We will develop solutions using the knowledge and experience of our community.
- We will hear comments and be able to implement recommendations from the community on our plans, strategies and operations.
- We will be able to inform the community about decisions, plans and strategies that Council intends to adopt or implement.

The benefits of successful engagement can include:
- Community input that improves the quality of policy being developed, making it more practical and relevant.
- Community input that ensures services are delivered in a more effective and efficient way for that community.
- Community input that ensures Council-owned community facilities are developed and maintained in a more effective and efficient way for the community.
- Early notice of emerging issues that puts Council in a better position to deal with those issues in a proactive way, instead of reacting as anger and conflict arise.
- Good engagement that enhances the reputation of the Council as open, accountable, transparent and willing to listen.
- Engagement that can foster a sense of belonging to community and considerable benefits from working together on behalf of the community.

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HRCC Policy No: C04/095– Community Engagement Policy

Printed (date)
Page 1 of 5

3. SCOPE

Councillors and Council staff should be aware of the importance of engagement, for both ongoing operations and one-off projects, and those circumstances where it is required or desirable. Councillors and Council staff that are involved in engagement should understand the standards and principles that govern effective engagement. Staff must use Council's engagement toolkit and the tools within, to assess the need to engage, plan, conduct, evaluate and record the engagement. The Community Relations and Advocacy Team has a role in advising Council Officers on engagement and in approving various steps in the engagement process.

Contractors conducting projects or ongoing operations on Council's behalf should adhere to this policy when conducting engagement activities. Contracts, requests for quotation and tenders are constructed to make this an obligation.

The policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are imposed by other Victorian legislation, such as land-use planning applications, or Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

4. PRINCIPLES

When engaging the community in a decision-making process, Council promises to:

- Provide a genuine opportunity for the community to have input and an influence on decisions that are the subject of the engagement.
- Actively seek out and encourage contributions from people who may be affected by or interested in a decision.
- Work with Traditional Owners and other First Nations people within our municipality in our community engagement processes, to ensure their voices and perspectives are heard, understood and respected.
- Provide relevant, timely and balanced information, including project funding sources (where available), so people can contribute in a meaningful way including clearly defining negotiable and non-negotiable elements of any subject of engagement and an explanation of why elements are non-negotiable.
- Provide a variety of appropriate and accessible ways for people to have their say and to speak honestly.
- Actively listen so that people's ideas and input assist in making the final decision.
- Consider the needs and interests of all people in the decision-making process.
- Inform the community about the final decision, and how their input was considered.
- Effectively record engagement plans, methodologies, community responses, outcomes and evaluations.

The following principles will guide Horsham Rural City Council's engagement practice:

4.1 Clear objectives and scope – Council will provide clear statements about the objectives and scope of each community engagement activity.

4.2 Representative engagement – Council will seek participants for each community engagement that are representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.

4.3 Genuine – Council will be upfront and explain how each community engagement process will influence Council decision making and will highlight the negotiable and non-negotiable elements of any community engagement.

4.4 Inclusiveness and accessibility – Council will provide reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement processes for a diverse range of perspectives to be heard. Community engagement processes will recognise that there are a number of groups within the community who have particular

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HRCC Policy No: C04/095– Community Engagement Policy

Printed (date)
Page 2 of 5

requirements to enable them to participate effectively in engagement processes and will seek to accommodate and include these groups.

4.5 Provision of information and feedback – Council will provide objective, relevant and timely information that is easy to read and accessible to give community members the opportunity to provide informed input in the engagement. People participating in a community engagement process will be advised on issues of interest or concern and of the outcome and how community input affected the outcome and/or how community input was considered. The outcome of the engagement process will be communicated to the community and participants in the engagement using public means of communication (e.g. Council's website, newsletter, public notices and social media) and where contact information has been collected in an engagement process directly to participants.

4.6 Proportionate – Engagement will be in proportion to the impact of the decisions being made, plans or projects that have widespread impacts (i.e. affect more people) and/or greater impacts will have engagement methods that have scope for more engagement and greater influence on the decision makers. The Community Vision, Council Plan, Asset Plan and Long Term Financial Plan shall have engagement that uses deliberative methods.

4.7 Timing – Council will ensure that community engagement is timed so that results are able to influence the policy, planning, decision making process and the implementation of those decisions. Engagement should be undertaken as early in a project as practical so as to promote community ownership. Council will, by using the Engagement Register, ensure that the risk of engagement fatigue is reduced by co-ordinating engagement activities when possible.

4.8 Transparency – Council will communicate in an open and transparent way with the community to ensure meaningful input into Council's planning and prioritisation processes.

4.9 Evaluation – Council will evaluate community engagement processes against the goals as articulated in each community engagement plan.

4.10 Resourcing – Council will consider the effective resourcing for community engagement at the start of each new project and when ongoing operations are reviewed allowance should be made for the resources required for any community engagement that is warranted. Council will, by using the Engagement Register, ensure that where practical engagement activities will be conducted together.

5.   COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to Councillors, all Horsham Rural City Council employees and the community via the Intranet and Council website. Executive Management Team, managers and staff directly involved in engagement will be briefed on the policy and the associated procedure.

Project briefs that are prepared to engage contractors for work that includes community engagement must contain the obligation to conform to this policy. The policy will be made available via the tender portal when required.

6.   RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Owner: Community Facilitator

This Policy will be reviewed every three (3) years or earlier as required by changed circumstances including changes to legislation and plans, strategies or policies of HRCC.

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HRCC Policy No: C04/095– Community Engagement Policy   Page 3 of 5

7. DEFINITIONS

Term	Meaning
Community	Horsham Rural City is made up of many communities, including: • those centred around a town, neighbourhood or region • those based on a particular interest, such as agriculture, sustainability, arts or sport • those based on life stages, lifestyles or population groups such as senior citizens, people with a disability or youth • those based on a particular unifying event, such as the drought or the Remlaw fire.
Community Engagement	A planned process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decision or actions of the members of the community, stakeholders or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome.
Deliberative Engagement	Mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern that produces a decision.
Stakeholders	Individuals or groups who are likely to be affected either physically or financially or with interest in, the project, policy or program e.g. adjacent residents, ratepayers, ethnic groups, absent owners, community groups, sporting clubs, agencies and Council's other departments or directorates. Council's projects, policies and operations do have varying impacts on the community and different stakeholders will be affected in different ways to account for these differences varying degrees of engagement will be appropriate depending on the circumstances.
The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) recognises the following levels of engagement:	
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. Inform promise – We will keep you informed.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. Consult promise – We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. Involve promise – 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 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.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Collaborate promise – We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public. Empower promise- We will implement what you decide.
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8. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Document	Location
Community Engagement Procedure	Intranet
Engagement resources	Intranet
Local Government Act 2020	Internet
The Recognition and Settlement Agreement between the State of Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	Intranet
The Ministerial Good Practice Guideline and General Guidance for Councils Engaging with Aboriginal Victorians- Local Government Victoria	Intranet
Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector	Intranet
Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2014	Internet

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HRCC Policy No: C04/095– Community Engagement Policy

Printed (date)
Page 4 of 5

9. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version Number	Approval Date	Approval By	Amendment	Review Date
01	15 June 2015	Council	New policy	
02	22 February 2021	Council	New Policy to align with requirements of the LG Act 2020	22 February 2024
2.1	March 2023	n/a	New logo	22 February 2024
03	February 2024	Council	Updated to align with requirements of the Settlement Agreement	February 2027

It is recognised that from time-to-time circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to Council and Administrative Policies. Where an update does not materially alter a Policy, such a change may be made administratively, without the need for formal adoption by EMT or Council. Examples include a change to the name of a Council Department/Position Title, a change to the name of a Federal or State Government Department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, all changes will be noted in the document control section and version number updated.