



Community Engagement Strategy

Special Rate Variation Proposal

Introduction

Armidale Dumaresq Council recently completed a review of the Armidale Dumaresq Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2011. A new term of Councillors worked with the community to review the document, resulting in a CSP for 2013-2028. This will help Council, the community and local businesses to better understand what the Armidale Dumaresq Local Government Area may look like in 15 years time.

One of the goals in the CSP document is about Council achieving asset sustainability.

Council has been undertaking a review of its asset plans and has identified an annual shortfall in general fund asset renewal expenditure, amounting to \$2.15m.

Council is considering a Special Rate Variation to address this shortfall and this process will require extensive information exchange and consultation with the community. The process will provide the Armidale Dumaresq community, including residents, ratepayers, workers, businesses and agencies, an opportunity to be involved and contribute to the Council's future.

This Community Engagement Strategy outlines Council's intentions for involving the community in a proposed Special Rate Variation.

Why is this Necessary?

In October 2009, the *Local Government Act 1993* was amended to include requirements related to the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.

The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) reforms replaced the former Management Plan and Social Plan with an integrated framework, which includes a new requirement to prepare a long term CSP. The CSP and the IPR suite of documents need to be reviewed with every new term of Council inclusive of asset management plans.

The Strategic Goal 5P-10.1 within the CSP states: *"Council to achieve asset sustainability and be able to accommodate needs in asset growth."* The proposed Special Rate Variation is a strategy in order to address that Strategic Goal. Currently, there is a shortfall in asset renewal of \$2.15 million. This shortfall is broken down as follows:

- Roads and Bridges \$1 million
- Drainage \$600,000
- Property \$400,000
- Parks and Reserves \$150,000

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is about involving the community in the decision making processes for the development of long term objectives and strategies that impact the community. Community engagement covers a broad range of activities and can take many forms.

The Division of Local Governments Planning and Reporting manual identifies and defines various levels of community engagement. These are:

- **Inform:** One way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.
- **Consult:** Two way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making.
- **Involve:** Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision making.
- **Collaborate:** Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.
- **Empower:** To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

The Planning and Reporting manual also directs that councils should aim to achieve to at least the '**Involve**' level and preferably reach the '**Collaborate**' level with structures established for ongoing engagement.

The following are tactical methods which Council is considering, however are not limited by (but will need to be practicable for the limited timeframe):

Inform

Factsheets

Webpages

Flyer

Emails

Staff Networks

Local Committees

Exhibitions

Community notice board

Newsletters

Target stakeholder letters

Street signs and window displays

Consult

Public submissions
Suggestion boxes
Focus groups/workshops/public meetings
Surveys
Face-to-face
Letterbox drop

Involve

Open meetings
Forums
Online discussion boards

Collaborate

Public participation
Networks and community group coordination
Partnerships
Delegated decisions through Committees and groups

Empower

Involve community in final decision making
Use the community's ideas and solutions

Stakeholders

A stakeholder is defined as someone who may be affected by or have a specific interest in the decision or issue under consideration. It is important to develop a consistent approach to ensure equitable inclusion of all potential stakeholders who reflect the demographics of the community. Not only will this ensure a credible process and equitable representation, but the approach will help to develop community trust in the process.

Who are our Stakeholders?

- Councillors
- Businesses
- Community Groups
- Cultural Groups
- Council Employees
- Environmental Groups
- Individual residents
- State and Federal Government
- Sport and Recreation Groups
- Non-government Agencies and Organisations

Within Attachment 1 is a matrix of identified stakeholders and engagement strategies to be considered.

Timeframes

November – Mid December 2013 – Initial Community Engagement on a proposed Special Rate Variation, looking at 3 rating scenarios.

By 13 December 2013 – Council has to notify the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) that it is seeking a Special Rate Variation.

Mid December to Mid February 2014 – Council conduct a further round of consultation on a specific rating scenario and develop an application to submit to IPART by 24 February 2013.

Community Engagement Activities

The following table details the activities that will take place throughout Armidale Dumaresq Council's Community Engagement phase.

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues	Responsibility	Cost
Inform	Line Managers and Supervisors Meeting with Senior Management	CAB	Managers and Supervisors	October 2013	Senior Management	Nil COMPLETED
Consult	Run workshops for the elected Council to discuss rating scenarios, service levels, etc.	Council Chambers	Councillors	6 November 2013	Senior Management	Nil COMPLETED
Consult	Telephone Survey 300 people	NA		November/ Early December 2013	Communications Officer	\$10,000
Inform	Briefing for Media	Mayor's Office	Media	November 2013	Senior Managers and Council Committee Members	Nil
Inform	Letter to all ratepayers advising of proposal for rate variation and ways they can contribute to the process	NA	Ratepayers	November – December 2013	Senior Management	\$6,000
Inform	Staff Meetings and notices in the Staff Newsletter	Depot and Council Chambers	Staff	November 2013	Senior Managers and Council Committee Members	Nil Internal and External Staff Meeting: Information on SRV provided by GM on 29 October 2013, 26 November 2013. Published in Staff Newsletter 4 December 2013. COMPLETED
Inform	Briefing meeting with Adam		State MP	November 2013	General Manager, CFIO and	Nil – Scheduled for

	Marshall MP (State)				Mayor	3 December 2013. COMPLETED
Inform	Present to all Local Area Committees		Local Area Committee Members	October/November 2013	Councillors* supported by Senior Managers	Nil (1 st Round Completed, with the exception of Ebor). Second round to commence in Jan 2014.
Collaborate	Present to the following Council Committees – Community Relations, Economic Development and Tourism, Sports Council, Youth Council, Gayinyaga, Sustainability, Access Advisory	Council Meeting Rooms	Businesses, tourism agencies, sport agencies, Youth, Aboriginal, Sustainable interests	November – January 2014	Councillors * supported by relevant Managers and Council Committee Members	Nil - COMPLETED Package sent to all Committees 18 November 2013 for consideration at the next meeting.
Inform	Information for collection at Council's Customer Service Centre	CAB		November – December 2013	Communications Officer and Administration Officer	Nil COMPLETED Available 3 December 2013
Inform	Meeting UNE Representatives Town and Gown			December 2013	Senior Management and Councillors*	Nil
Inform/Consult	Market Stalls	Mall/Creeklands	Various	December 2013 – January 2014	Councillors*	\$100
Inform	One week manned Display at shopping centre, Council CAB, Community Centre and Library.	Shopping Centre, CAB, Kent House, Library	Shoppers, those involved with the Community Centre (Aged, Disabled, Youth, Carers), Library members	December 2013	Communications Officer	\$500 Scheduled Week 16-20 December 2013
Involve	Conduct Community Forums. Invite business groups including DIGAR, Armidale Business Chamber, real estate agents and professional groups, cafes and restaurants, motels and hotels, school principals and board members.	Town Hall	Aged, Cultural Groups, Ratepayers, Developers, Businesses, Real Estate Agents, Hospitality.	November - January 2014	Councillors * supported by relevant Managers	\$300 for tea/coffee Scheduled for 15 January 2014

Inform	Present to the following groups: U3A Rotary Central Rotary AM Armidale Lions SLA Probus Church Groups CWA Zonta		Aged and other Community groups	November –January 2014	Councillors* supported by Senior Managers	Nil Letters sent out 29 November 2013 to all groups. COMPLETED
Inform	Print advertising which references website for information, submissions and community forums	NA	Newspaper readers, website	November– February 2014	Communications Officer Administration Officer	\$1,000
Consult	Social networking Facebook, and Twitter to give information and receive feedback	NA	Youth, Social Media users	November – February 2014	Communications Officer Administration Officer	Nil
Inform	Run radio ads calling for submissions	NA	Radio listeners	December- February 2014	Communications Officer	\$2,000
Inform	E-Newsletters to Council Committee Members	NA	Committee Members	December – February 2014	Communications Officer	Nil
Inform	E-Newsletters to subscribed members	NA	E-newsletter subscribers	December – February 2014	Communications Officer	Nil
Consult	Letterbox survey drop	NA	Residents	January 2014	Communications Officer	\$2,000
Consult	Letter to ratepayers advising of impact on rates & requesting feedback	NA	Ratepayer	Early – mid January	Communications Officer, Administration Officer	\$6,000
Inform	Insert into free paper outlining the scenarios, proposals, etc.	NA	Residents	January 2014	Communications Officer	\$2,000
Consult	Face to Face surveys at shopping centres	Shopping Centres	Shoppers	January 2014	Communications Officer, Administration Officer	\$1,000
Consult	Survey Monkey online. Survey form on Council website	NA		January- February 2014	Communications Officer, Administration Officer	Nil
Collaborate	Public Forum to have your say and speak to public submissions	Town Hall		February 2014	Senior Management and Councillors*	\$300

TOTAL						\$31,200

Resources available:

Dashboard on Services (prepared by consultant)

Powerpoint (prepared by management)

Media Pack / Information Sheet INT/2013/13009

* Councillors are to be familiar with the case to present to the community:

1. Reason for Special Rate Variation
2. Where the money will be spent
3. The impact if Council is unsuccessful in its Special Rate Variation application
4. Consultant will be present where Councillors are not available.