

Community Engagement Plan

Special Rate Variation

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Background

In 2015 Council, along with all other local government organisations in NSW, completed the Fit for The Future process to inform the State Government of the corporate health of the state's local government sector. Lockhart Shire Council was subsequently rated as Fit for the Future. Through the process, the community identified the need to upgrade the existing pools at The Rock and Lockhart, and to improve flood mitigation works, as well as to maximise its own source revenue and reduce reliance on grant income.

To apply for the Special Rate Variation, and to meet the Integrated Planning and Reporting legislative requirements, Council needs to update and endorse its Integrated Planning and Reporting documentation. To do this, Council will undertake broad engagement with the community to ensure that the community vision created and adopted in 2012 is still relevant and if required, to update accordingly. At the same time, Council went back to the community with the Fit for the Future Improvement Plan to highlight the need for a Special Rate Variation and to gain feedback and support from community in regards to this proposal. Through the engagement for the development of the Community Strategic Plan, the community need for the works at the swimming pools, flood mitigation and road repairs and maintenance were confirmed.

The community engagement plan was updated in October 2016 to reflect the decision of Lockhart Shire Council remaining independent and the endorsement of the Fit for the Future Improvement plan which included the proposed Special Rate Variation application.

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, which are based on the IAP2. 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 at least the 'Involve' level and preferably reach the 'Collaborate' level with structures established for ongoing engagement.

Why engage?

A criterion in the Office of Local Government (OLG) Guidelines for 2017/18 SRV applications states that there needs to be “evidence that the community is aware of the need for and extent of the rate rise” and that “the council’s community engagement strategy for the special rate variation must demonstrate an appropriate variety of engagement methods to ensure an opportunity for community awareness and input is to occur”.

In responding to this criterion, the council must provide evidence that:

- It has consulted and engaged the community about the proposed special variation using a variety of engagement methods and that the community is aware of the need for, and extent of, the requested rate increases;
- It provided opportunities for input and gathered input/feedback from the community about the proposal; and
- The IP&R documents clearly set out the extent of the requested rate increases.

Objectives

A community engagement process will be undertaken to inform the community about the intention to apply for a Special Rate Variation and to consult about the priorities of the community for the future.

The aim of engaging with the community is to:

- Identify the priorities of the community;
- Identify game-changers/disruptors/threats that could impact the realization of the Community Vision;
- Ensure the community is aware of the size of the Special Rate Variation;
- Explain the SRV to the community in their terms;
- Qualify the impact of the SRV on ratepayers; and
- Assess the community’s willingness and capacity to pay the special rates.

The engagement insights will assist in the application process for the Special Rate Variation and inform the development of Lockhart Shire’s Community Strategic Plan and related IP&R documents.

Scope

The Community Engagement Strategy is designed to aid Council in identifying relevant methods of engagement for stakeholders that will inform and consult with the community about the Special Rate Variation and the impacts to ratepayers, as well as the development and implementation of the Community Strategic Plan.

This Community Engagement Plan was developed specifically for the purpose of engaging with the community for the Special Rate Variation. A broader plan was developed for the purpose of the Community Strategic Plan and Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

Engagement parameters

It is critical that the negotiables and non-negotiables of the project are identified, agreed and clearly communicated to the stakeholders. It is also important that the negotiables and non-negotiables are communicated to stakeholders at the earliest possible stage to ensure they understand how their contribution may influence decisions. This ensures stakeholder expectations can be managed at the outset, and continually reinforced to alleviate the potential for misunderstanding during the next stages of the project.

Outlined below are the negotiables and non-negotiables of the project.

Non-negotiables	Negotiables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The full spectrum of community and stakeholder views will be heard and documented. Community priorities and visioning insights will be considered in renewing the CSP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community priorities for Lockhart Shire.

Issues/risks and opportunities

Described below are the possible issues that may arise throughout the project, potential opportunities or mitigations associated with each issue and the relevant stakeholder groups.

Issue/risk	Opportunity
Community priorities do not align with Lockhart Shire Council strategies	Work with stakeholders to feed insights into IP&R documents.
Stakeholders and community are concerned that the consultation process is too short.	Clearly communicate the rationale and approach for this project.
Stakeholders and community do not feel that the CSP or SRV represents their input.	<p>Clearly communicate the non-negotiables for the project.</p> <p>Clearly communicate what feedback was received and how it will be / has been used to inform the recommendations.</p>
Stakeholders and community do not feel engaged or that their contributions have been included.	<p>Promote opportunities for all stakeholders to be involved at key stages.</p> <p>Ensure community members are aware of what their feedback is influencing and understand the project's negotiables and non-negotiables</p> <p>Work with stakeholders and community to identify and understand what aspects of their input should have been considered.</p> <p>Clearly communicate what feedback was received and how it will be / has been used to inform the options and overall report.</p>

Stakeholders

Described below are a broad list of stakeholder types for this engagement. These have been broadly grouped according to their likely interest and involvement in the project, but may not be an exhaustive list.

Stakeholder lists should be reviewed and updated throughout the project and new groups are identified as required.

While all project stakeholders identified will receive information about the project and be invited to contribute it is not guaranteed that all will participate in the project

Outlined below are the stakeholders for the project as identified by Lockhart Shire Council:

- IPART;
- OLG;
- Lockhart Shire residents;
- Council;
- Councillors;
- Council staff;
- Lockhart Progress Association;
- The Rock Progress Association;
- Targeted township residents in The Rock, Lockhart, Pleasant Hills, Osborne and Yerong Creek;
- Community organisations and services;
- Community groups and clubs; and
- Schools.

Consultation

Engagement activities will take place between Monday 10 October and Friday 28 October 2016.

The consultation activities will consist of:

- Focus groups
 - 5 x Town-based sessions; one each in Pleasant Hills, Osborne, Lockhart, The Rock, and Yerong Creek;
 - 2 x Disability Inclusion Action Planning sessions; one each in Lockhart and The Rock;
 - 3 x School sessions; one primary session and one secondary session in Lockhart and The Rock;
- Community survey

Level of engagement	Method	Location	Targeted stakeholders	When	Performance measures
Consult	Survey	Website Facebook	All residents	October 2016	150 surveys completed
Involve	Focus group	Pleasant Hills, Osborne, Lockhart, The Rock, Yerong Creek	Township residents	October 2016	5 sessions, 5-20 people per session
Involve	Focus group	Lockhart, The Rock,	People with a disability, carers, health and disability services	October 2016	2 sessions, 10 people per session.
Involve	School focus groups	Lockhart, The Rock,	Children and young people	October 2016	3 sessions, 15 people per session

A number of communication and engagement methods will be used to maximise the reach to all ratepayers and community members. The following is an outline of these methods.

Method	Outline	Level of Engagement
Council website	Ongoing updates promoting the community meetings, updates on the progress and provide information in regards to the Special Rate Variation.	Inform

Council Facebook	Ongoing updates promoting the community meetings, updates on the progress and provide information in regards to the Special Rate Variation.	Inform
Community Survey	Residents provided the opportunity to identify priorities and provide input in the IP&R documents.	Involve
Community meetings	Community members to be given the opportunity to not only speak about the Special Rate Variation and any concerns, but as well as provide input on the community's priorities.	Involve
Media releases and newspaper articles	Ongoing updates promoting the community meetings, updates on the progress and provide information in regards to the Special Rate Variation.	Inform
Lockhart Shire Council monthly newsletter	To ensure community members are informed of the process and to be involved in the community meetings. This newsletter goes to every resident in the Shire.	Inform/Involve
Council IP&R Documents	The documents outline the community's priorities and the impact of the SRV on the ratepayers.	Consult
Posters	To inform community members of meeting dates and information in relation to SRV.	Inform
Email database	To inform community members of meeting dates and information in relation to SRV.	Involve

It must be recognised that the following engagement activities occurred in early 2015 as part of the Fit for the Future process. These activities form part of the Special Rate Variation process as the community had provided support for Council to proceed with the application. Details of this support are provided in the Community Engagement report.

- Town meetings
 - The Rock, Tuesday 14 April;

- Yerong Creek Hall, Tuesday 15 April;
 - Lockhart Council Chambers, Thursday 16 April;
 - Pleasant Hills Hall, Tuesday 21 April; and
 - Osborne Recreation Ground, Wednesday 22 April.
- Information booklet provided to residents in regards to the Fit For the Future process and Council's improvement plan, including intention of a Special Rate Variation.
 - Lockhart Shire Council monthly newsletter;
 - Media releases and newspaper articles;
 - Email database; and
 - Advert in local newspaper.

Communicating the outcomes of the engagement

Following any community engagement activity, it is always important to ensure the outcomes of the community engagement are reported back to the community and those who provided input.

Findings from the consultation period will be incorporated in the IP&R documents which will be on public exhibition and advertised extensively to ensure that the community see the outcome of the Community Engagement. Additionally, information on the Special Rate Variation will be clearly communicated to ratepayers following any resolution of Council to apply for an SRV, to ensure that the community are very aware of the process and impact of a Special Rate Variation.