



Newport Residents Association Inc.

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The Chief Executive Officer
Northern Beaches Council
PO Box 1336,
DEE WHY NSW 2099

8 February 2022

Dear Sir,

NRA Submission on NBC Community Engagement Policy and Strategy

PREAMBLE

Our resident's association, certainly during the last three decades of its century-plus existence, has had a significant involvement and representation in community-centric consultation with the Council of the day. With Pittwater Council, this meant delegate involvement in all Community Reference Groups and numerous other specific project groups, including the evolution of the Newport Village Masterplan.

With the formation of Northern Beaches Council, this representation has been partially echoed with positions on some of the Strategic Reference Groups. Since 2019, the "engagement" with our Association and with the Newport community has had a positive initiative, with the establishment of a specific ongoing liaison and involvement with the NRA by Council's *Community Liaison Coordinator* and other associated community relations and engagement personnel.

These ongoing engagements (both the more formal and the less formal) bring similar benefits to Council as they do to our Residents Association: individuals on both sides become involved initially on a more acute focus but then extend their interest – and consequently their value – via the experience they accrue as representatives of their various communities.

FEEDBACK

The principles, methods and procedures set down in the draft appear both admirable and pertinent. The test of their effectiveness will be in NBC's commitment to and ability in delivering them.

The Draft indicates that it does not pertain to "Planning" in the built development sense. Yet to address its defined **Scope**, the policy does need to embrace the community input and feedback on this important component of Council's domain. For instance:

Scope: Of the 5 'Project' examples given, 2 are directly involved with "Planning" to do with built infrastructure:

- *environmental assessments*

- *open space, streetscape, facility and other infrastructure improvements*

Under **Considerations**, it is stated:

- *“When developing on Council owned and managed land, a community engagement process consistent with this policy and supporting strategy will be required in addition to any statutory requirements.”*

This seems to indicate that the CEP&S is intended to cover the community-centric aspects of “Planning”, as indeed it should.

So for the Policy to be true to its Scope and to be effective, our Association contends that the policy must be pertinent to the local community’s needs, wants and facility to input on “Planning” factors, especially those which have any mid- to long- term effect on our local (ie, suburb and ward) environment and planned development.

Also, under **Considerations**, it is stated:

- *“Form letters and petitions will be treated separately to submissions and noted as such on community and stakeholder engagement reports.”*

However, it does not indicate how they will be treated. Will they be given the weight commensurate with the number of endorsing community participants they summarise but represent?

In the **IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation** – the NBC’s template – under “COLLABORATE” and “EMPOWER” it states:

- *“To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.”*
- *“To place final decision making in the hands of the public”*

followed by:

- *“We will implement what you decide”*

How will the delivery on this be executed, at the various interface levels with Council bureaucracy?

For instance, in **Shape 2028 Northern Beaches Community Strategic Plan**, take just a couple of the goals: *“Goal 7 – our urban planning reflects the unique character of our villages and natural environment and is responsive to the evolving needs of our community”*; *“Goal 8 – Our neighbourhoods inspire social interaction, inclusion and support health and wellbeing”*

Our recent Newport experience is that adherence to these admirable principles is just not happening, especially at the coalface of individual officer level. The real test of any stated Policy is to be able to point to the outcome as consistent with that policy.

IN CONCLUSION

We expect our Newport Residents Association feedback will be pretty much in accord with what you receive from other established residents associations, as our aims are to be a forum and then a conduit between the residents of our suburb/area and the bodies which affect us.

We have found our communication relationship and interface with NBC to be positive and cooperative. We look forward to that continuing and expanding.

We endorse the spirit expressed in this draft policy document. In your implementing it and in its outcomes, we would put emphasis on:

- Maintain and continue to build these community liaison roles

- Acknowledge the volume and depth of resident voluntary participation involved in submissions and representation by these associations
- Acknowledge the continuing importance of the local voice over the specific interest of occasional, external voices
- Continue to build consistency across all communication interfaces between Council's staff and representatives with our communities
- On significant matters, optimise timeframes available for community input, with interim feedback where feasible, as this can help focus wider and more pertinent community response
- Complete the information loop by reporting on the key factors influencing project changes resulting from community feedback, prior to the commissioning of any resultant works.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Dunnet
Secretary