Penrith Town Council

Making a Difference in Penrith

Core Values, Code of Ethics and Principles relating to Penrith Town Council's Approach to Community Engagement

Drawing from a review of best practice, the following set of core values, ethics and principles guides how Penrith Town Council engages and consults with stakeholders. The aim is to broaden community participation in the work of the council and in decision-making processes

Core Values

The purpose is to help the Council make ethical decisions that reflect the interests and concerns of those likely to be affected.

1. Community Participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a Council decision have a right to be consulted or involved directly in the decision-making process.
2. Community participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence decisions.
3. Community participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-makers.
4. Community participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Community participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Community participation provides participants with the information they need to take part in a meaningful way.
7. Community participation communicates to participants how their input affected decisions.

Code of Ethics

Role of Councillors: Councillors will do their best to talk to people and provide help. It may be necessary at times to a) explain what different

layers of Councils do and b) outline what Town Councillors can and can't do.

Councillors will be careful not to commit to something they and the Council can't do, while ensuring members of the community who approach them do not feel their concerns are being ignored.

Wherever possible, town councilors should deal with concerns directly. Where this is not possible, it will be an important part of each Councillor's role to take concerns to those deemed most appropriate to deal with them. In this regard, it is also important to keep track of what is being done to ensure problems are resolved in the best way possible.

Role of the Council: Councillors and Officers will encourage the community's participation in decision-making processes and we will be responsive to the community's concerns and suggestions.

Trust: We will encourage actions that build trust and credibility in the community in relation to our community engagement and participation approaches.

Defining the Public's Role: We will consider and accurately portray the public's role in our decision-making processes.

Open-ness: We will encourage dissemination of balanced information relevant to the community's understanding and evaluation of a Town Council decision.

Access to the Participatory Process: We will ensure that our community stakeholders have a fair and equal access to the participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions being made by the Town Council.

Respect for the Community: We will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interests or that appear to 'divide and conquer.'

Advocacy: We will advocate for the community participation process and will not advocate for interest, party, or project outcome.

Commitments: We will ensure that commitments made to the community are made in good faith.

Support of Community Participation Practice: Councillors, Council staff and the community will be encouraged to understand the value and use of public participation.

Our Guiding principles

We support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders. The following guiding principles serve to inform the design and delivery of effective community engagement. These five interdependent principles serve both as ideals to pursue and as criteria for assessing quality.

1. Clarity of Purpose
- Understanding the purpose for engaging the community
- Knowing which individuals and groups are important to include in the engagement process
- Recognising which engagement methods would be most valuable
- Being clear about how participants can influence a decision
- Being clear about what decisions cannot be influenced
- Recognising the underlying principles and values that are important in the process

2. Transparency
- Communicating clearly about the engagement process, including the purpose, timing, roles and responsibilities, constraints and outcomes
- Ensuring that community members are given information about the full scope of the project
- Publicising information about the outcome of the engagement process.

3. Effective Communication
- Valuing and providing opportunities for dialogue
- Providing timely and accessible information to all who are interested in a project or issue
- Using a variety of communication approaches to reach the community
- Using clear language that is jargon-free in communications
- Working to enhance the quality of relationships throughout engagement processes

4. Integrity
- Being open to and expressing appreciation for diverse views being shared
- Having high regard for the expressed views and opinions provided through public input
- Being open about how the community's voice has influenced the final decision
- Addressing public concerns in an honest and forthright way
- Demonstrating respect while seeking the advice and input of community members

- Ensuring that the community engagement process does not focus on a predetermined outcome.

5. Continuous Learning & Improvement
- Monitoring and evaluating throughout the process and making modifications in the approach as necessary
- Encouraging community feedback on the process itself as well as the subject of the engagement
- Building on past experiences and reflecting on ways to improve processes
- Finding out what has already happened in an area relevant to the engagement process subject matter.
- Reporting within the organization so that everyone learns from the process
- Preserving ability to change and innovate by recognising that human systems require refinement as they work towards excellence