



Response to Mosman Council draft community participation plan – “Involving the Mosman community in planning”

General Manager

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Attention: Urban Planning

24th September, 2019

The following submission contains Mosman Parks and Bushland’s response to Council’s *Draft Mosman Community Participation Plan*.

We welcome the development of a community participation plan to ensure that the wider Mosman community understands how council plans to engage with the community on a wide range of planning matters.

The overwhelming message in this plan is that it has been prepared to meet/support a statutory requirement. The plan needs more than this to encourage community participation and importantly to be seen to be encouraging and facilitating community participation.

The Mosman Parks and Bushland Association has actively participated in various council plans and processes over many years. It has appreciated the opportunity to make its views known, to discuss policies and proposals and at times to work collaboratively with council/council staff to develop policies, particularly in the area of our natural resources and open space.

The Association’s excellent experience is not matched by what the participation plan offers the Mosman community. The plan needs to be expanded.

The plan should include both a value and an ethics statement that underpins a rigorous community participation process, which the community can feel confident about participating in, and respected for its involvement.

We have carefully considered the plan and make the following comments in relation to various sections of the plan.

Comments on “Introduction” Section

The introduction to the plan indicates that the plan has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the EP&A Act 1979 (Division 6). This is a concern and really is a disservice to the effort which Council, and council staff put into engaging with the community. The plan should reflect council’s own values about the importance of community participation in the planning process and not be seen to be just meeting a statutory requirement.

We would strongly recommend that council consider expanding the introduction to this plan to include a values and ethics component.

We suggest Council consider including the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values for the practice of Public Participation and the Code of Ethics for the practice of community participation.

These are outlined below and are taken from the IAP2 publication (Foundations of Public Participation 2004) a copy of which is attached to this submission. The Core Values and Code of Ethics are outlined below.

IAP2 Core Values

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

IAP2 Code of Ethics

Purpose. We support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.

Role of Practitioner. We will enhance the public's participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.

Trust. We will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process among all the participants.

Defining the Public's Role. We will carefully consider and accurately portray the public's role in the decision-making process.

Openness. We will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.

Access to the Process. We will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.

Respect for Communities. We will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interests or that appear to "divide and conquer."

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

Commitments. We ensure that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are made in good faith.

Support of the Practice. We will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.

Council's draft plan includes some of these matters (inclusiveness via access to the process /diversity of tools etc) but the plan would be improved by including all of the core values and the code of ethics in their entirety.

Comments on "Objectives" Section

All 4 objectives are supported. School holidays should be avoided. In addition, mid-December until late January should also be avoided. This goes beyond the Christmas New Year period described on p4 (summary of notification). These are times when people are away or very busy with other activities. The community is unlikely to perceive a community participation process as genuine if the timing makes it extremely difficult to do. A 5th objective could read:

To undertake community engagement in a timely fashion that does not conflict with school holidays or the busy Christmas January period.

Comments on "Our community" Section

MPBA agrees that community participation should be inclusive (p3) and that a diversity of tools should be used in order to engage effectively, (see the Spectrum later in this submission). It is very helpful to this process that council has recognised the communication needs of different groups.

One note of caution. The reliability of the Mosman Daily to reach the community is problematic. There are many households who no longer receive the Daily. It is not distributed reliably across the LGA and some households never get it.

Comments on "Community participation in development consent functions" Section

The time periods for applications are described as the statutory periods from the EP& A Act 1979.

The message given is that this is fixed (except where it doesn't need to occur at all). There is a need to recognise in the policy that there are some projects and proposals that need a more substantial engagement process and a longer time frame. The policy needs to move beyond ***inform*** and ***consult*** in some cases and other engagement techniques such as ***collaboration*** need a longer engagement/participation period (this is further discussed later in this submission-see Spectrum).

We would recommend a statement in the policy which indicates that the statutory periods can be extended where the proposal or project requires more community engagement.

Comments on "Exceptions"

MPBA is concerned about exceptions b, g, and i. (page 6)

Exception b. It has been determined that development relating to a heritage item or in a heritage conservation area cannot be dealt with as complying or exempt development and that a DA is required. Since a DA is required because of the special nature of a site or its environs it follows that community participation should occur for such development.

Exception g. Minor landscaping works. The cumulative affect of minor landscaping works across the LGA can be substantial. If the community is not to be given the opportunity to participate in consideration of these, Council needs to prepare a policy and guidelines for such proposals.

Exception i. If the vegetation associated with a heritage item or in a heritage conservation area is integral to the integrity of the area, any clearing needs careful

examination. Council needs to have a more detailed and a transparent policy for these areas if community scrutiny of individual proposals is not to occur.

Comments on “Community Participation in Strategic Planning and Contribution Plan Making”

Council is allowing for participation at the *inform and consult level*.

This limits the opportunities for community participation.

These two levels of engagement are necessary but not always sufficient for strategic planning.

MPBA recommends strongly that Council consider other levels of community participation/engagement that might be used. It recommends that Council adopt the IAP2 Spectrum of Community Participation as an integral part of the participation plan. The suite of methods available are clearly set out and could be utilised as appropriate. Adoption of other participation activities will serve to meet objective 4 more comprehensively and completely.

The Spectrum is described below

Public Participation Spectrum

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	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.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.



influenced
the decision.

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Comment “Evaluation” section

MPBA supports council inclusion of an evaluation component of the plan. It is hoped that evaluation will lead to continuous improvement in the way council undertakes engagement with the community.

Conclusions

The Draft Mosman Community Participation Plan reads more like Council needs to do this plan to meet a statutory requirement rather than a genuine commitment to ensure the community can participate in the planning process.

The document does not reflect the effort that Council puts in to engaging with its community.

The suggestions made above will create a more robust and rigorous plan that will be understood to offer a real commitment to community participation.

Inclusion of the IAP2 foundations document which allows council to adopt a robust and comprehensive set of values and an explicit ethical approach to community engagement is strongly recommended to improve the draft policy and ultimately the implementation of community participation.

Adoption of the IAP2 Spectrum will allow for a more considered design for a broad participation process. The Mosman community is capable of participating comprehensively and these other ‘techniques’ will facilitate its involvement in the planning process in partnership with Council.

Kate Eccles
President

24th September, 2019