

- Service performance plans
- Annual and community surveys

Service delivery and development

- All services through which decisions impact on the circumstances and opportunities of individuals and communities

Applying the framework to planning decisions and place development

One of the key areas where community engagement requires an increasing sophistication and flexibility is in land use planning and place development. Land use planning decisions which include strategic changes to a neighbourhood/area and to individual properties and local amenity are often subject to final approval by the State Government or State Government instrumentalities

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning at Darebin Council has a history and mandate for extensive and inclusive community engagement processes regarding place developments. One example is the planning process for the development of the Draft Reservoir Structure Plan released in June 2012. Most recently, as part of its strategic planning business, Council carried out extensive community engagement towards developing the Darebin Housing Strategy. The Housing Strategy is an important opportunity for setting out a plan for responding to major housing issues. An extensive three-month engagement process utilising both consultation and deliberation approaches was facilitated (May-July 2012). It included an online interactive dialogue between people and place-based workshops, a joint forum between Council and the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council, and one-to-one discussions with residents. These voices and ideas will further contribute to, and be integrated into a policy that will guide, future housing growth and development in Darebin. Strategic planning is a more conceptual process where engagement requires Council and communities to express their collective future aspirations about the look and feel of the city. In this process the primary role of participants is that of citizens.

Statutory Planning

Statutory planning and development deals with individual planning applications (individual home-based renovations to more controversial high-density developments) and are usually much more fine grained and proximal to individual residents and local neighbourhoods. The impacts of these planning applications often both affect local amenity and are subject to contestability. Decisions associated with individual planning applications are processed under prescriptive State Government legislative frameworks that are often outside of Council's ultimate

decision-making powers. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) can override decisions made by Council, notwithstanding the level of community engagement.

It is fundamental contestability that makes the statutory planning process most challenging for any community and citizen engagement. Participants are primarily 'objectors' and 'proponents' and in light of Council's limited decision-making powers, it is important that the community engagement process is clear. In some instances the type of application under consideration may determine the engagement methodology to be used.

One of the strengths of the statutory planning process is that individuals and communities of interest are able to influence the outcomes to varying degrees through but not limited to the following methods:

- one-on-one deliberation with Council staff on an application-by-application basis
- informal mediation process convened by Council staff (at the discretion of staff)
- direct contact with appropriate ward Councillors
- informal mediation convened by Councillors with Council staff (at the discretion of Councillors)
- written submissions
- public verbal submissions to Council Planning Committee (with clear written format for proceedings)
- public verbal submission to Council (where Council receives 100 or more objections)

One or a combination of the following methods may be employed during the statutory planning process. Council staff may also apply the EIPAT where major or sensitive applications may have an impact on disadvantaged groups or communities. This process will also allow Council to consider a range of possible actions including any advocacy.

Community education

A positive and proactive role Council can play is to develop and implement a community education program on planning which would outline the different types of planning Council engages in (statutory, strategic). The program would provide information to Darebin residents on how to influence planning decisions, the role of local government versus State government, the limitations and constraints and the factors that affect planning decisions.

Activities such as community information sessions and an interactive website on planning matters, will ensure that the public have open and easy access to information and related resources through a range of platforms and mediums.