Hawkesbury City Council

Community Engagement Strategy

Workshops

A report prepared for

Hawkesbury City Council

August 2007

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Background and methodology

In July 2007, Micromex Research, on behalf of the Hawkesbury City Council conducted quantitative research of residents to determine what they believe are the future priorities and strategic directions that Council should pursue to achieve the community's vision for the future of the City of Hawkesbury.

This research was undertaken as the first stage in a community engagement process to assist with the development of a 10 year Community Strategic Plan.

Subsequent to the research, 2 Resident Workshops were undertaken to qualitatively analyse the key research outcomes.

The 1st Workshop was conducted at Windsor Central Library on August 21, 2007 from 1:00pm to 4:00pm. The 2nd Workshop was conducted at Council Chambers on August 21, 2007 from 6:00pm to 8:30pm.

The makeup of the groups was developed so as to accurately represent the demographics of the Hawkesbury City Council LGA.

22 residents attended the first Workshop and 21 attended the second. Participants were rewarded with a $50 Riverview Shopping Centre voucher for their attendance.

Participants were sourced randomly from those residents who had responded to the telephone survey.

A scripted Facilitator's Guide was utilised for the Workshops. This guide is detailed in Appendix A of the report.

This report details the outcomes of the Workshops.

Resident willingness to assist with the workshop process of this engagement strategy was very high. This willingness is reflected in some of the key outcomes of the workshop process. These include:

- There is a high level of pride in the local area

- There is a strong sense of community in the Hawkesbury LGA

- Attendees wish to be more knowledgeable with regards to the future direction of the area

Detailed within this report are the key outcomes of the two workshops. The most significant themes emanating from these workshops include:

- The value identified in further developing a Hawkesbury brand

- The perceived untapped potential of the region

- The requirement for planning to reduce major congestion issues

- The high esteem for which agriculture is held within the community

- The requirement for the community to be better educated about Council and its role

- The requirement for detailed planning on the future of the Hawkesbury LGA and communication of this plan to residents

- The significance to residents of the environment and good environmental practices

Key Outcomes

Developing more local employment opportunities

At the beginning of the session, attendees were asked to consider how we should be developing our economy to achieve more local employment opportunities.

Question:

How should we be developing our local economy to achieve more local employment opportunities?

Key points of discussion within the workshop included:

1) Developing a Hawkesbury Brand

Considerable discussion was had regarding the positive benefits of further developing the *Hawkesbury Brand.* By further promoting this brand it was felt that the Hawkesbury area would become more attractive to tourists and that produce and products developed in the Hawkesbury would become more attractive to the consumers.

The Hawkesbury brand was identified as rural/environmental, with an emphasis on clean living.

2) Develop and promote the tourism industry

Developing and promoting tourism in the local area was identified as a positive way of creating more local employment opportunities. Opportunities for this included further developing local events to attract tourists and specifically targeting day tourists from other areas within the Sydney metropolitan area.

Further promoting the history of the area, as well as such things as the quality of art produced was also suggested as a means of increasing tourism.

3) Assist in a locally made campaign

The workshop identified a high level of pride from residents in the area that they live. It was suggested that this pride be leveraged via the development of a 'locally made' campaign. This campaign would promote locally, products and services produced in the area, thus having a positive effect on local employment and the economy.

4) Develop further opportunities for the agricultural sector

Developing opportunities within the agricultural sector was discussed in the workshop. Specifically, niche opportunities were suggested. These included such things as organic farming, along with the possibility for some higher intensity farming.

There was a suggestion that restrictions on agricultural land usage may be relaxed to assist this sector.

5) Assist wherever possible small businesses and home based businesses

There was a suggestion that Hawkesbury Council develop itself as a 'small business friendly' organisation. By recognising the importance of small business and being focussed on assisting their growth wherever possible, this might lead to further employment opportunities.

Identified opportunities for assisting small businesses included setting up small 'incubation areas' for new businesses as well as reducing red tape and restrictive policies.

6) Designate specific town areas to be higher density thus allowing for further employment development

The opportunity to have designated higher density areas within towns was suggested as a means of increasing employment opportunities by way of achieving population increase with only limited impact on the area. This suggestion was generally viewed as satisfactory by attendees with the designated areas suggested to be along public transport corridors.

Community concern

A strongly voiced community concern within the workshops was that by promoting local employment the local area not be 'industrialised'. This was generally defined as polluting, manufacturing type industries which were felt to be out of place with the local environment.

Improving roads/transport/infrastructure

In this section of the workshop attendees were asked to consider priorities with regards to improving local infrastructure.

Question 1:

What should Councils priorities be with regards to improving roads/transport/infrastructure?

Key points of discussion within the workshop included:

1) Reducing congestion

Congestion was identified as one of the single biggest issues facing residents in the local area. Congestion was a major impediment to lifestyle and of significant concern to attendees. Attendees suggested very strongly that any future planning and development must take into account the need to alleviate local congestion and ensure that this does not worsen.

Concern with congestion was not limited to peak hour mid week but included perceived major congestion issues in and around the main towns on weekends.

2) General road improvements

General road improvements were an obvious point of discussion within the workshops. Whilst there was a sense that the road condition could and should be improved, it was noted by the facilitator that this was not as strong as the sense that congestion be improved.

Attendees suggested that black spot areas should be identified and programs implemented for their improvement and that a feedback channel be developed whereby residents knew who at Council to discuss road condition issues with.

3) Improve public transport alternatives

Improving public transport alternatives within the local area was identified as a major requirement for future planning. Suggested improvements included:

- Increase the frequency of trains, especially at night
- Increase parking and security around railway stations
- Investigate opportunities for improving late night transport from the city

4) Improve other transport alternatives and encourage the use of alternative transport

Improving cycleways, particularly in the town areas, was identified as a means of increasing and encouraging the use of alternative transport. It was also suggested that pedestrian access issues should be investigated and future planning should develop strategies to improve these.

5) Other infrastructure improvements

Other infrastructure improvements suggested included:

- Move forward with development of the 3 towns sewer
- Identify opportunities to improve parking in towns over the weekends
- Improve infrastructure and facilities for youth. Provide more youth specific facilities
- Improve toilets in the Windsor town centre area

Question 2:

Roads/transport/infrastructure are high priced big ticket items for Council. If more money and resources are to be allocated to these items, from which other areas should this come from?

In the second part of this section attendees were asked to consider that if Council was to spend more money on roads/transport/infrastructure, from which other areas this should come from.

Overall, attendees were unable to effectively answer this question. It was quite apparent that overall their actual knowledge of Councils activities was too low to allow for detailed discussion. This led to an oversimplification of the alternatives with the only suggestions including reducing staff levels and improving efficiency.

Maintaining agriculture as a viable industry

In this section of the workshop attendees were asked to verbalise what the term 'agriculture' meant to them and to identify what sort of agriculture they felt should be maintained or developed.

Question:

From the communities' viewpoint, what does agriculture actually mean? What sort of agriculture should be maintained and/or developed?

Key points of discussion within the workshop included:

1) *There is considerable pride in the areas agricultural base*

The workshops identified a considerable level of pride in the local areas agricultural base. This base contributed to the 'rural lifestyle' and many of the features attendees loved about the area.

Agriculture was often associated with 'open space' so there is a correlation between the communities wish for agriculture to be maintained and their wish for open spaces to be maintained. The two are identified as being directly related. With this in mind, attendees were strongly in favour of rural lands being maintained and not subdivided or developed.

It is apparent that when attendees think of agriculture they do not really consider high intensity farming.

2) *Improving the ease with which agriculture is conducted*

With an identified pride in the areas agricultural base, attendees to the workshops suggested that the industry should be assisted wherever possible. Suggestions for this included:

- Relaxing restrictions on agricultural land usage
- Assisting the industry in identifying niche opportunities for growth
- More effective branding of the Hawkesbury to be based around the river and the areas agriculture, thus benefiting the industry
- Council could play a role in developing co-ops and other initiatives to assist producers in selling their produce
- Council to support the industry wherever possible in areas such as their rates policies

3) *Ideally agriculture is green and clean*

Overall, attendees were of the opinion that environmentally friendly agriculture was optimal. There was also significant discussion regarding the value of high intensity farming and significant concern around such issues as 'local smells' and 'unsightly buildings', in relation to this type of farming.

Council improving its community consultation

In this section of the workshop attendees were asked to consider how Council can improve its community consultation.

Question:

How can Council improve its community consultation?

Key points of discussion within the workshop included:

1) *The community requires considerable education about what Council's role is*

One of the key outcomes of the entire workshop process was that the general community has considerable knowledge deficiencies regarding what it is that Council does, where Council's responsibilities lie and how Council can assist local residents.

It is this lack of knowledge that exasperates many consultation issues. Improving the communities' knowledge of Council was therefore identified as a major means of Council improving its community consultation.

Suggestions for improving the communities knowledge included:

- Develop and post a quarterly community newsletter to all households
- Conduct more community forums on specific issues
- Make Council meetings more accessible by holding them later at night
- Conduct more community surveys on key/specific issues
- Develop community notice boards in specific high traffic areas
- Continually update information on the website
- Develop e-newsletters for residents
- Advertise council information in more than one newspaper

2) *Improving the residents knowledge of the future direction of the Hawkesbury LGA*

Attendees were of the belief that their actual knowledge of the future direction of the Hawkesbury LGA is very low. This lack of knowledge is identified as of real concern and attendees expressed a desire for more detailed future planning from Council. Lack of knowledge is said to lead to some consternation within the community, a 'level of suspicion' and a concern about 'what we are not being told'. This heightens community suspicion as to Councils future plans and may create an unnecessarily hostile community/council relationship.

Ultimately this has a negative effect on community consultation.

3) *Improving the accessibility of Council staff and Councillors*

It was suggested that 'lack of knowledge issues' may also be exacerbated by not knowing who to approach within Council. Attendees suggested that measures should be taken to improve the ease of accessing Council staff and also Councillors. Suggestions for this included:

- Make Council meetings more accessible by holding them later at night
- Have specific Council representatives within each department that are identified and accessible as 'Community Liaison Officers'
- Annually conduct community meetings in each specific region of the LGA
- Have Council representatives attend more public meetings and groups

4) Increase the level of public consultation

Attendees suggested that by increasing the level of consultation, education and knowledge issues could be further improved. Specific suggestions included:

- Increase public consultation on the use of land (bush land)
- Improve communication to ensure adequate notification of key issues and reduce 'surprises' to residents
- Annually conduct community meetings in each specific region of the LGA

5) Improve the post consultation communication to residents

Of particular importance to attendees was that residents and participants were notified of the outcomes after consultation. It was suggested that this should become a standard facet of Councils consultation program.

Caring for our environment

In this section of the workshop, attendees were asked to consider how Council can provide leadership with regards to caring for and improving our local environment.

Question:

How can Council in conjunction with the local community provide leadership with regards to caring for and improving our local environment?

The key point of discussion within the workshop was:

1) *Caring for the environment is a significant issue for residents*

Outcomes from these workshops identify that the environment and its condition is an integral part of the 'rural lifestyle' sought by residents in the local area.

From the attendee's perspective, caring for the environment is a key issue within the Hawkesbury LGA and should be highly prioritised by Council. It was suggested Council should be a leader among the community in sound environmental practices, that a comprehensive environmental plan should be developed and the Hawkesbury area should be positioned and promoted as a leader in environmental management.

Possible suggestions for how this may be achieved include:

- Place specific emphasis on the beautification and cleanliness of the Hawkesbury River
- Protect identified sensitive environmental areas
- Develop a clean up the Hawkesbury campaign
- Assist community groups with applying for grants and funding with Council offering the skills required in putting together the grant applications
- Ensure that future development is environmentally friendly/sustainable
- Work closely with the community and business on educational programs and better environmental practices
- Identify and educate the community with regards to sensitive environmental areas
- Develop programs to assist with the maintenance of 5 acre and larger blocks
- Provide people moving into the area with information on good environmental practices
- Improve opportunities for the cleanup of major/larger items thus reducing illegal dumping

Appendix A

Key issue 1

Community priority

Develop more local employment opportunities

Conflicting community concerns

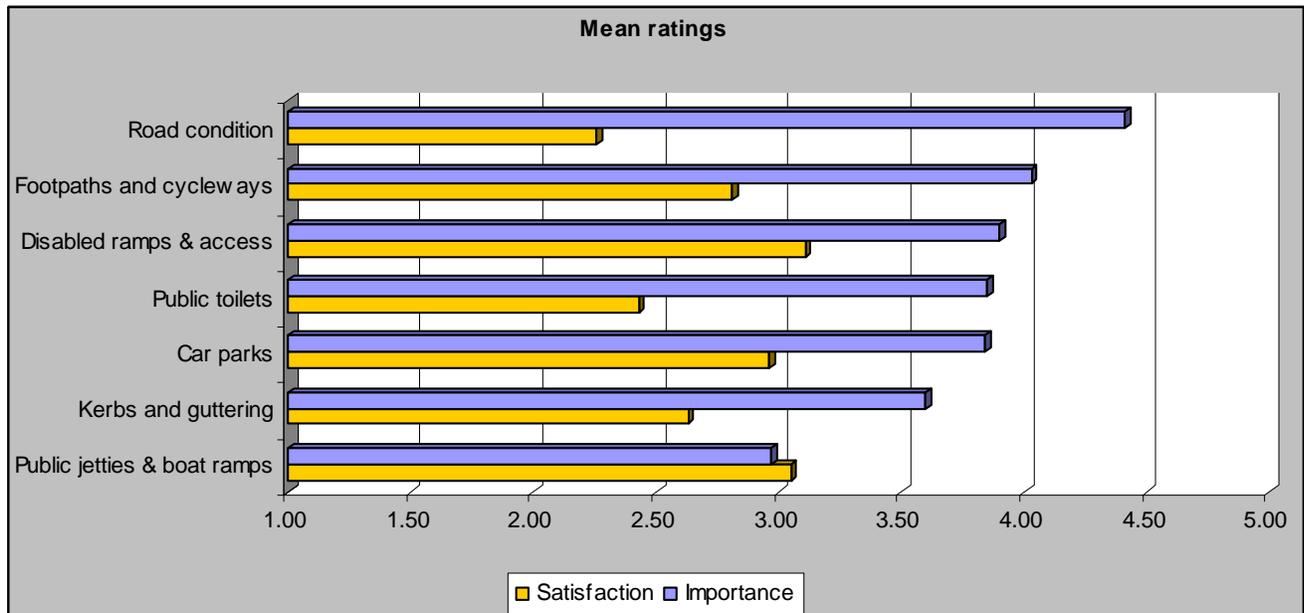- Development
- Population growth

Question:

How should we be developing our local economy to achieve more local employment opportunities?

Key issue 2

Community priority   Improving roads/transport/infrastructure

Question 1:

What should Councils priorities be with regards to improving roads/transport/infrastructure?

Question 2:

Roads/transport/infrastructure are high priced big ticket items for Council. If more money and resources are to be allocated to these items, from which other areas should this come from?

Key issue 3

Community priority

Maintain agriculture as a viable industry

Question:

From the communities' viewpoint, what does this actually mean? What sort of agriculture should be maintained and/or developed?

Key issue 4

Community priority

Council improving its community consultation

Question:

How can Council improve its community consultation?

Key issue 5

Community priority

Caring for our environment

Question:

How can Council in conjunction with the local community provide leadership with regards to caring for and improving our local environment?