

# Significance and Engagement Policy 2024

## Purpose of this Policy

This Policy sets out how the Council will determine the significance (importance) of its proposals and decisions – and hence, how it will ensure that its engagement on these proposals and decisions meets community preferences. It also lists Council’s strategic assets.

It is a requirement of s76AA of the Local Government Act.

## Context for this Policy

Council’s aim is to have greater community participation in decision-making. Robust decisions are made when the aspirations of all our communities are heard by Elected Members. Participation is not only voting, it is about taking opportunities to voice opinions, make formal submissions, get involved in local projects and initiatives. This is where the benefits of a small city can really be seen.

The purpose of local government is to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities and to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. The Local Government Act was amended in 2019 to make the Chief Executive of the local authority responsible for “facilitating and fostering representative and substantial elector participation in elections and polls held under the Local Electoral Act” Section 42 (2)(da).

Appropriate engagement leads to good planning and effective solutions which reflect community aspirations.

A city with ‘active citizens’ is a place where residents choose to engage and serve their community; where there is access to good information; and where diverse voices contribute ideas and experience to collaborate on inclusive solutions which will benefit this generation and the next. Active citizenship contributes to a healthy democracy where individuals and communities are empowered to have a say; where elected officials are accountable; and where decisions are transparent.

The Council is also committed to engaging with Rangitāne o Manawatū.

The Council and Rangitāne signed a Partnership Agreement in 2019 that formally acknowledges the status of Rangitāne as mana whenua. This has created a reciprocal working relationship with iwi leadership to align their priorities with those of Council across the suite of strategies and policies that guide our collective decisions. It sets out how Rangitāne and Council will work together and understand each other’s aspirations.

## The Meaning of Community Engagement in Decision Making

Community engagement is a very important part of Council’s decision making.

Community engagement means Council and people connecting together to share ideas and build understanding.

Key elements of good engagement are:

- Council involving people throughout the process
- Council giving people the time and information they need to have their say
- Council and people listening to each other and feeling listened to
- Council valuing and genuinely considering peoples’ ideas
- Council giving people information about the decisions it has made and the reasons for these
- That it is purposeful and aimed at shaping the decisions and actions of Council.

In good community engagement, peoples’ ideas may or may not be fully adopted, but they know that they have been genuinely listened to and that their ideas have been fully considered.

Community engagement is a planned process that occurs right through the decision-making process. Hence it is a wider process than consultation, which tends to be more formal and to happen towards the end of the decision-making process.

## The Council’s General Approach to Community Engagement

The Council uses a model based on the IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) continuum to guide its engagement (see the diagram on the following page).

This shows that community engagement for decision making is a continuum. At one end of the continuum the Council gives people information about what it is doing. At the other end Council delegates decision making to the public. In the middle it uses a

range of techniques to gather community views and to involve people in making its decisions.

Most of the Council's engagement will be in the middle of the continuum - at the Consult, Involve or Collaborate levels. In general, the more important (or significant) the decision, the more the Council will work at the Involve or Collaborate level.

In some cases the Council will use engagement techniques from a mix of levels and it may use different levels at different points of the engagement. For example, when it is exploring issues and options Council could use Collaborative techniques, and then use techniques from the Consult level to get community views on these options.

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	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 influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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.

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The Council also has a set of Community Engagement Principles to guide its community engagement. These principles sit alongside the

consultation principles from s82 of the Local Government Act (see Appendix 1), and the wider decision making and consultation requirements in sections 76-90 of the Act.

The Council's Community Engagement Principles say that when it engages with local residents and organisations it will:

- Engage in a way that shows people that their contribution is valued and will be fully considered
- Be clear about the process being used and the level of influence that people have
- Encourage as many people as reasonably possible to take part from the start to the finish of the process, especially affected and interested people
- Make it easy for people to give their views to the Council
- Engage in the community by going to where people are and not always expecting them to come to the Council
- Give people time to think about the issues and respond to them
- Use honest and easy to understand information
- Listen to everybody who engages with the Council and gather other information so that it understands a reasonably wide range of peoples' views
- Tell people what it decides and why
- Use relevant information from previous engagement processes
- Take a common sense, cost effective approach.

## **The Local Government Act Meaning of Significance**

The LG Act (s5) says that significance means the degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by the local authority, in terms of its likely impact on, and likely consequences for:

- a) the district or region;
- b) any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in, the issue, proposal, decision, or matter;
- c) the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so.

Significance is a continuum that ranges from decisions of low significance to decisions of high significance. The Act says that a decision of high significance is 'significant' (s5). The legislation does not contain any specific criteria to distinguish between significant and non-significant decisions. Instead, the legislation says that that is a decision for each Council to make in each instance.

The Council will ensure that its community engagement and decision making is appropriate for the significance of each decision it makes, irrespective of whether or not the decision is significant.

If a decision is significant (under s5) then the Council will meet a higher standard of engagement and (as required by s76(3) of the LG Act) will ensure that the decision making and consultation principles of s77, 78, 80, 81 and 82 have been appropriately complied with.

## **Council's Approach to Significance**

Based on the above definitions the Council will determine the significance of a decision by assessing:

- Its impact on the achievement of the Council's Long-term Plan (10 Year Plan). The Long-term Plan sets out what the Council is aiming to achieve (see the following table). In general, a significant decision is one that has high and ongoing impact on the achievement of the Council's Long-term Plan
- Its impact on those persons who are particularly affected by or interested in the decision. In general, a significant decision is one that has high and ongoing impact on or interest from many people across the community
- Its impact on the Council's resources and capacity to perform its role. In general, a significant decision is one that has high and ongoing cost.

It is the Council that decides whether or not a decision is significant. In making this decision the Council will take into account community views.

The Council has no pre-set triggers or thresholds to determine what is high or ongoing.

In making its decision the Council will take into account all three of the above criteria - a single criterion on its own does not necessarily determine significance. The Council will also consider the cumulative impact of closely related decisions.

### **Council's 2024 Long-term Plan Vision and Goals**

#### **Vision:**

*He iti ra, he iti pounamu.*

*Small city benefits, big city ambition*

#### **Goals:**

He tāone auaha, he tāone tiputipu  
An innovative and growing city

He tāone whakaihihi, tapatapahi ana  
A creative and exciting city

All reports that go to Council will contain an assessment of the significance of the recommended decisions. If the recommendations are considered to be significant a recommendation confirming this and that the Council has engaged appropriately will be included. A statement showing how the Council will (or has) appropriately observe(d) the applicable sections of the Act will also be included.

Whether or not a decision is significant, the Council will still engage appropriately. Most recommended Council decisions will not be significant.

If the Council substantially changes the report's recommendations, then it will have to assess the significance of the new recommendations before it adopts them.

## Council's Strategic Assets

The Significance and Engagement Policy must list Council's strategic assets.

A strategic asset is any "asset or group of assets that the local authority needs to retain if the local authority is to maintain the local authority's capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that the local authority determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community" (LG Act s5).

The Act also says that any housing Council owns to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy and any airport company shares are strategic assets.

In general, if Council is making a decision about a strategic asset it will use a greater degree of engagement than it will for a non-strategic asset. In particular, the Council cannot transfer ownership or control of a strategic asset unless it has first consulted with the community through a Long-Term Plan Consultation Document (LG Act s97).

The Council's strategic assets are:

- social housing as a whole (for low-income older people or people on low incomes with additional needs)
- public rental housing as a whole
- shares in Palmerston North Airport Ltd
- roading and traffic network as a whole (including footpaths, street lighting & parking)
- wastewater reticulation network and treatment plant as a whole (see note)
- water supply, treatment, storage and reticulation network as a whole (see note)

- stormwater network and land drainage system as a whole (see note)
- Turitea Reserve (the portion used for used for electricity generation and transmission and flora and fauna)
- Te Marae o Hine - The Square as a whole
- reserves zoned for recreation purposes or subject to the Reserves Act as a whole
- the Esplanade, Ongley Park, Fitzherbert Park and Manawaroa Park as a whole
- aquatic facilities as a whole
- Te Motu o Poutoa
- Central Energy Trust Arena as a whole
- Shared pathways as a whole
- Ashhurst Domain as a whole
- Memorial Park as a whole
- the parts of the Manawatū River Park owned by Council, as a whole
- Linklater Park as a whole
- Arapuke Forest Park
- Te Manawa
- the Regent Theatre
- the Globe Theatre
- Caccia Birch
- City Library (including community libraries and mobile library) as a whole
- archives as a whole
- Square Edge
- Creative Sounds
- community centres as a whole
- Hancock Community House
- cemeteries and crematorium as a whole

- that portion of the Civic Administration Building sited on The Square - Te Marae o Hine.

The Council considers each asset and groups of assets listed above as a single whole asset. This is because the asset or group of assets as a whole delivers the service.

“Strategic assets” therefore refers to the whole asset or group of assets and not individual components unless that component substantially affects the ability of the Council to deliver the service. If the Council is considering a decision on any individual component of a strategic asset that substantially affects the ability of the Council to deliver or promote its services then that component will be treated as strategic.

The Council recognises that there will be some assets that, although not fitting the legal definition of strategic asset, are of high community importance and interest. The Council will appropriately engage with the community on issues relating to these assets. In these cases proposals or decisions regarding these assets may be significant.

Note: The strategic status of the 3 waters networks may need to be reconsidered as part of Council's decisions in light of Central Government's Local Water Done Well reforms.

## Monitoring and Review

This Policy will be reviewed every three years through the 10 Year Plan.

It will be monitored as part of Council's monitoring of the Good Governance and Active Citizenship Plan.

## Appendix 1:

### Local Government Act s82 Principles of Consultation

- (1) Consultation that a local authority undertakes in relation to any decision or other matter must be undertaken, subject to subsections (3) to (5), in accordance with the following principles:
- a. that persons who will or may be affected by, or have an interest in, the decision or matter should be provided by the local authority with reasonable access to relevant information in a manner and format that is appropriate to the preferences and needs of those persons:
  - b. that persons who will or may be affected by, or have an interest in, the decision or matter should be encouraged by the local authority to present their views to the local authority:
  - c. that persons who are invited or encouraged to present their views to the local authority should be given clear information

by the local authority concerning the purpose of the consultation and the scope of the decisions to be taken following the consideration of views presented:

- d. that persons who wish to have their views on the decision or matter considered by the local authority should be provided by the local authority with a reasonable opportunity to present those views to the local authority in a manner and format that is appropriate to the preferences and needs of those persons:
- e. that the views presented to the local authority should be received by the local authority with an open mind and should be given by the local authority, in making a decision, due consideration:
- f. that persons who present views to the local authority should have access to a clear record or description of relevant decisions made by the local authority and explanatory material relating to the decisions, which may include, for example, reports relating to the matter that were considered before the decisions were made.