

9 September 2019
Stakeholder update 1

Listening to our community

For a while now, council has been receiving strong feedback from the community on the challenges of navigating its planning and development services. After listening to the feedback, we wanted to delve deeper to learn more about people's experiences – both good and bad – so that we can apply the feedback to make our services better and our processes easier to navigate.

We've been working with independent consultants over the past few months to develop an engagement strategy that will draw on the knowledge and experiences of our community. It was important for us to use independent consultants because we want the people we are engaging with to feel free to speak openly and honestly. We also want to reassure our community that we are listening with open ears and without bias.

Our engagement with the community began a little over a week ago and this is the first of our stakeholder updates that are being developed specifically to give feedback to the individuals, businesses and organisations who are participating in this community engagement process.

I am very grateful to all those who have agreed to participate and so generously give of their time to support this project. Thank you. I hope that you find this update informative. I expect to forward another update within the next week or so. Watch this space ...

Bernard

Bernard Smith
CEO, Gympie Regional Council



Project snapshot

BROAD PROJECT STEPS

1. Conducting one-on-one interviews
2. Facilitating focus group sessions to explore the issues raised during interviews
3. Developing draft improvement strategies based on all the feedback received
4. Presenting Councillors with the feedback received and sharing the recommended improvement strategies for the Councillors' review and feedback
5. Developing a *Have-Your-Say* survey seeking the broader community's feedback on the recommended improvement strategies
6. Presenting a final report to Council for endorsement
7. Developing an action plan for immediate implementation

Project update

The project's independent consultants met with 16 people and companies from the Gympie region over the past week and heard of their experiences interacting with council's planning and development services. Some of the common themes that emerged from the in-depth, one-on-one interviews have been summarised below.

- ✓ **A shared vision for development in the region**
Interviewees are seeking clarity and certainty when dealing with council.
- ✓ **Working in partnership**
Interviewees shared the challenges of dealing with council requirements and processes. When some decisions and processes are made or changed, these can directly impact the viability of their business.
- ✓ **Understanding the region's planning scheme and approval processes**
Interviewees highlighted the need to make the process easier to understand with suggestions such as improving the existing pre-application meetings, on-site meetings and using language they can understand.

The Council's independent consultants will be seeking further input from the community this coming week through a series of focus groups. A summary of the feedback received through the focus group sessions will be shared in the next stakeholder update.

If you have any questions about the Better Pathways to Planning project, you are welcome to contact council on 5481 0958 or by email: communications@gympie.qld.gov.au.

Project snapshot (continued...)

PARTICIPANTS

Interview and focus group participants were nominated by local chambers of commerce and Council. They are people who have navigated Council's planning and development services within the past 12-18 months and include residents, small, medium and large business owners, planning consultants, developers, and others.

They are a mix of one-off and occasional applicants through to regular applicants for whom liaising with Council's Planning and Development Department is a critical part of their business.

TIMEFRAMES

It is expected that the interviews and focus group sessions, as well as the workshop with Councillors, will be completed by the end of September.

During October, the general community will be invited to complete the survey so they can provide feedback on the recommendations for service and process improvement.

It is expected that the engagement components of the project will be completed by the end of November, after which time the action plan will be developed.