

# COMMUNITY FORUM GUIDELINES

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WOLLONDILLY SHIRE COUNCIL

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## 1. Introduction

The Community Forum is an opportunity for members of the public to present their views to Councillors on any topic relevant to Council or Wollondilly Shire. They are open to everyone and held in the evenings the week before each Ordinary Meeting of Council.

The matters raised help inform Council's decision-making process and may include items:

- for information
- for consideration
- to gain support
- to search for a solution/s to a problem
- to highlight a concern
- to provide positive or negative feedback.

## 2. Objectives

The Aim of the Community Forum is to:

- Inform through formal presentations and responses to questions/statements raised
- Be informed by providing the platform for people who live, work, own property or have an interest in the area to regularly communicate face to face with Council
- Enhance Council's decision-making process and promote the objectives of open transparent governance.

## 3. Schedule of Community Forums

**Day held:** Second Tuesday\* of the month  
**Commencement time:** 6.30pm  
**Conclusion time:** 8.30pm

### **Opening, Webcast Notice & Welcome to Country**

**Formal Community Forum Matters**, as per the set agenda.

**Community Question/Statement Time** is on matters relating to the Ordinary Meeting agenda. Question/Statement forms must be submitted before 12 noon on the day of the Forum.

**Informal Question/Statement Time** is for general issues. Question/Statement forms must be submitted before 12 noon on the day of the Forum.

### **Conclusion**

**Informal discussions** with our community over tea and coffee

The schedule of meetings and location will be advertised in various formats. Notice will be provided of any amendments to the advertised schedule.

\*Note: In the event that a Community Forum falls on a designated as a public holiday, the Forum will be held the next business day.

#### 4. Meeting Rules

The Community Forum Guidelines (this document) and associated Rules of Conduct (Appendix A) detail how Community Forums will be run. These meeting rules have been established to ensure forums are effective and efficient and held in an organised and controlled manner. Copies of these documents are available at every Forum and on Councils website – [www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au).

#### 5. Style of Meeting

A chairperson will guide each forum in order to maintain order and direction however they are not run according to formal meeting procedures therefore no resolutions, recommendations or motions will be passed.

Community Forums seek to be welcoming occasions where people can come together and explore matters and question activities or policies that affect them and their community. However, they are not a debate night.

##### 5.1 Chairperson

Community Forums are chaired by Councillors as appointed by the Mayor. The Chairperson is selected according to Councillors surname in alphabetical order. Any Councillor that declines his/her opportunity will not be selected until their name is called again alphabetically.

The Chairperson's role is to maintain control and guide the Forum. The Chairperson will adopt a balanced approach that will:

- Allow opportunity for discussion
- Ensure that the Forum is not dominated by particular persons to the detriment of others present
- Be consistent in the application of Forum rules and procedures
- Maintain decorum and order
- Generate confidence in the Chair

In the event the Forum loses its focus or moves away from the aims or purpose of the Forum, the Chairperson has the discretion to apply the *Community Forum Rules of Conduct (Appendix A)*. (cl 5.8 Meeting Rules).

The Chairperson is responsible for clearly communicating any discretionary changes to the Community Forum Agenda or procedure to the Minute Taker and Community Forum Participants.

Where a question/statement is retracted or amended the Chairperson will advise the participant to provide an alternative question/statement form to Council within 24 hours to be placed into Councils Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS).

## 5.2 Formal Community Forum Matters

Formal Community Forum matters will be as per a set Agenda and typically supported by a presentation. Community feedback on these topics is welcomed and encouraged.

Council's Executive and the Forum Chairperson will determine the Formal Community Forum matters to be placed on the Agenda.

~~An Example of a~~ Formal Community Forum Matters could be:

- Public exhibition items
- Strategic matters
- Community safety.

The time limit for Presentations is ten (10) minutes which may be extended by a maximum of ten (10) minutes, at the discretion of the Chairperson. The length of time for questions on each presentation is five (5) minutes.

## 5.3 Community Question/Statement Time

Community Question/Statement Time will be for those matters that relate to the Ordinary Meeting of Council Agenda.

Questions/Statements not supporting a matter will be addressed prior to those from the proponent or in support of a matter.

The Chief Executive Officer or appropriate Director will read the Executive Summary for each Item from Councils current Agenda where a question/statement has been submitted.

The Chairperson will invite each person in turn to present their question/statement, or where requested, the question/statement may be read out on their behalf.

Two (2) questions/statements will be accepted for and against each issue, with each speaker allowed a maximum of 5 minutes.

In order to address Council at the Forum you must submit a Community Forum Question/Statement Form prior to 12pm on the day of the Community Forum. Further information on how to lodge a Question/Statement Form is detailed at clause 9 of these guidelines.

## 5.4 Informal Question/Statement Time

Informal Question/Statement Time will be for any general issues as well as those matters that were not raised during the Formal Community Forum section.

The Chairperson will invite each person in turn to present their question/statement, or where requested, the question/statement may be read out on their behalf.

Two (2) questions/statements will be accepted for and against each issue, with each speaker allowed a maximum of 5 minutes.

In order to address Council at the Forum you must submit a Community Forum Question/Statement Form prior to 12pm on the day of the Community Forum. Further information on how to lodge a Question/Statement Form is detailed at clause 9 of these guidelines.

### **5.5 The Answering of Questions/Statements**

Every attempt is made to provide answers on the night. Situations may arise where this is not possible and the question may be taken on notice. The level of detail warranted for each response varies and is largely dependent upon the complexity of the matter. The type of response provided is at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer, appropriate Director or the Chairperson. On occasion correspondence will be sent to the individual or party concerned. Statements are generally accepted as advice only. Councillors are provided with copies of the questions/statements for their information.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

This section of the Forum will allow the Chairperson to bring the Forum to a close.

### **5.7 Break and Discussions with Councillors**

This section of the Forum will allow time for our community to have a cup of tea or coffee and speak openly with Councillors and Council Officers about any matter they wish to raise.

This section of the Forum will not be recorded.

## **6. Agendas, Record of Proceedings and Webcasting**

A Notice of Community Forum (Agenda) will be prepared for each Community Forum. The agenda will set out the order of business, which the Chairperson should follow. The Chief Executive Officer or their representative and Chairperson will determine the Formal Community Forum matters that are to be placed on the agenda.

The Record of Proceedings will document the business that has been conducted at the Forum. The information recorded for each section is as follows:

Presentations - The outcome, for example:

- A presentation was conducted by (Council Officer) - slides from PowerPoint presentations or a brief overview may be included
- Discussions were held on the matter of (Item discussed)
- Members of our community raised questions and these were addressed by Council Officers and/or answered on the night

Community and Informal Question/Statement Times:

- The name of the person raising the Question/Statement
- Whom the person raising the Question/Statement is representing
- The matter/item discussed
- Note any additional documentation handed in on the night.

No verbal comments will be recorded from the floor. Responses from staff may be captured where appropriate.

Where a question from the floor is accepted at the discretion of the Chairperson the Record of Proceedings will only note the speakers name and the topic discussed.

Community Forums will be webcast live, archived and documented, with the Record of Proceedings being the official record of the business that has been conducted at the Forum.

Copies of these documents are available from the Council customer service foyer and/or on Council's website.

## 7. Promotion

Community Forums will be promoted. This includes via social media, local media, Council's library and mobile library and on Council's website, [www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au).

Council's website has a dedicated *Community Forums* page listed under *Council - Meetings*. This page contains all associated information relevant to these meetings.

## 8. How to lodge a request for a Presentation Topic and/or Question/Statement Form

All requests to speak at Community Forums are required to be made in writing in advance.

Questions/Statements must be submitted on Councils prescribed question/statement form by 12 noon on the day of the Forum.

The Community Forum Question/Statement Form is available online on Councils website for electronic submission or download. Hard copies are also available from Councils Customer Service Department.

All requests received will be evaluated prior to acceptance. At a minimum the information provided should include the following:

- Name
- Address
- Contact Number
- Subject Matter
- General information as to the statements to be made and/or questions to be asked

Where an incomplete form is lodged Council will endeavour to assist submitters to make a valid request up until the cut-off time for submissions closes via the contact number provided on the form.

Acceptance of all Questions/Statements lodged is in accordance with clause 12 of the attached Community Forum Rules of Conduct (Appendix A).

The person requesting to speak or their representative must be in attendance at the Community Forum for the matter to be addressed and recorded in the Record of Proceedings. A copy of all requests accepted will be provided to all Councillors for their information regardless of attendance.

Discretion to deter from these guidelines lies with the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor and/or Chairperson.

**9. Councillor Contacts**

A list of Councillor Contact details will be available for participants at every Community Forum.

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## Appendix A

### Community Forum Rules of Conduct

#### 1. Definitions

In these rules:

##### **Chairperson**

In relation to the Community Forum, means the person presiding at the Community Forum.

##### **Councillor**

Is an elected member of the Council.

##### **Tabled (Tabling of Documents)**

The Tabling of Documents is usually done when the document is long or if it is relatively unimportant, if its nature prevents it from being read, for example, graphs, tables of statistics, photographs or is a document relating to a Development Application in the Business Paper. Persons tabling documents merely state as they do so that they are tabling the document. The tabled documents will not become part of the official Record of Proceedings, but will be given to Councillors for their information.

##### **The Act**

Means the Local Government Act 1993 (as amended from time to time).

The *Community Forum Rules of Conduct* incorporates relevant provisions of the Regulations and Act. In the event of any inconsistency between the Rules and the Act or Regulations, the Act or Regulations (as the case may be) prevails to the extent of the inconsistency.

#### 2. Who is Entitled to Attend

2.1 Every person is entitled to attend a Community Forum.

2.2 A person (whether a Councillor or another person) is not entitled to be present at a Community Forum if expelled from the Forum in accordance with clause 11 of these Rules.

- By the Chairperson presiding at the Community Forum exercising the power of expulsion in accordance with these rules

### **3. Notice of Community Forum**

3.1 The Chief Executive Officer will send to each Councillor, at least three days before each Community Forum, a notice specifying the time and place at which and the date on which the Community Forum is to be held and the business proposed to be transacted at the Community Forum.

3.2 Proceedings at a Community Forum are not invalidated because of a failure to give notice of the Community Forum to any Councillor.

3.3 Council will give public notice of the times and places of its Community Forums.

### **4. Agenda for the Community Forum**

4.1 The Chief Executive Officer will ensure that an agenda is prepared for the Community Forum.

4.2 The Chief Executive Officer must not include in the agenda for a Community Forum any business of which due notice has been given if, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, the business is (or the implementation of the business would be) unlawful. The Chief Executive Officer must report (without giving details of the item of business) any such exclusion to the next meeting of the Council.

4.3 The Chief Executive Officer must cause an agenda to be delivered to Councillors and be available for the community not later than three days prior to the Community Forum.

4.4 Copies of the Community Forum and Ordinary Meeting of Council agenda will be made available to the public no less than three days prior to the Community Forum on Council's website – [www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au). A reasonable number of hard copies will be made available for collection from Council's Customer Service department free of charge. Copies are also available for viewing at Council's Library.

4.5 The use of various mediums for the distribution of the agenda is available upon request and nothing in this code shall be construed as limiting the means of distributing information to any one medium.

### **5. Access to Records**

5.1 The press and the community shall, during or at the close of a Community Forum, be allowed reasonable access to the correspondence and reports tabled at or submitted to the Forum.

- 5.2 The Chief Executive Officer may withhold access to the correspondence and reports referred to in subclause 5.1 if it is not in the public interest to provide access.
- 5.3 Council's Access to Information Protocol and Guidelines apply.

## **6. Presence at the Community Forum**

A Councillor cannot participate in a Community Forum unless personally present at the Forum and within the physical confines of the room, in which the Forum is being held.

Exceptions may apply if the meeting is to be held online remotely due to exceptional circumstances such as Natural disasters, or Public Health and Safety. This will be at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer and Mayor.

## **7. Community and Informal Question/Statement Time**

Community Question/Statement Time will be for those matters that relate directly to the upcoming Ordinary Meeting of Council agenda.

Informal Question/Statement Time is for general matters of interest.

Community and Informal Questions/Statements will be allowed at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor. If a Community Question/Statement Time form contains substantial inappropriate content, such as abusive or threatening language (or adverse personal reflections on individuals) the Chief Executive Officer will advise the sender that the matter will not be received nor dealt with.

## **8. Matters May be Put to Councillors and Council Employees**

- 8.1 A person present:
- (a) May through the Chairperson put a matter to a Councillor
  - (b) May through the Chief Executive Officer put a matter to a Council employee.
- 8.2 However, a Councillor or Council employee to whom a matter is put is entitled to be given reasonable time, if required, to enable reference to be made to other persons or to documents. In this event, the matter may be answered directly to the person enquiring at a later time after such information has been researched and gained by a Councillor or Council employee.
- 8.3 The person must put every such matter directly, succinctly and without argument.
- 8.4 The Chairperson must not permit discussion on any reply or advice of a need to research information (in accordance with subclause 8.2) in response to a matter put to a Councillor or Council employee.

## 9. Expectations on how we interact with each other

9.1 In line Council's Statement of Business Ethic's Council expects that all submitters have a mutual obligation in observing the following principles:

- To provide accurate and reliable information
- To declare actual or perceived conflicts of interest as soon as you become aware of the conflict
- To act ethically, fairly and honestly in all dealings with Council
- To act with moral conscious
- To at all times be respectful and courteous.

## 10. Acts of Disorder

10.1 Community members who are deemed as having no regard for the principles outlined in clause 9 above or who insult, make personal reflections or impute improper motives to Council or Councillors, or do or say anything that is inconsistent with maintaining order, or exhibit any other behaviour deemed disorderly by the Council will be deemed to have committed an act of disorder.

10.2 Council reports are written by council officers and state the views of the applicants' proposal, community views and legal aspects and where appropriate, comments. Inflammatory, derogatory or derisive comments against a report writer or council officer will not be tolerated and will be deemed acts of disorder.

10.3 Failure to take direction from the Chairperson when a participant's time limit is reached or other forms of disruptive or disrespectful behaviour will be deemed an act of disorder.

10.4 Councillors and Council employees must, at all times, observe the provision of Council's *Code of Conduct*, as adopted.

## 11. How Disorder at a Community Forum May be Dealt With

11.1 If disorder occurs at a Community Forum, the Chairperson may adjourn the Forum for a period of not more than 15 minutes and leave the Chair. The Chairperson, on reassembling the Forum, must decide without debate whether the business is to be proceeded with or not. This subclause applies to disorder arising from the conduct of members of the community as well as disorder arising from the conduct of Councillors.

11.2 A member of the community may be expelled from a Community Forum for engaging in or having engaged in disorderly conduct at the Forum.

11.3 A Community member who fails to follow a direction from the Chairperson after successive requests at a Community Forum or over several Community Forums may be issued a formal warning. No more than two warnings will be issued following which subsequent requests to speak at Community Forums will be denied and Community Question/Statement Forms will not be accepted.

## 12. Limits upon Acceptance of a Community or Informal Question/Statement Time Forms

- 12.1 All contributions must be relevant to the business of the Council and/or the Shire. Acceptance of Question/Statement forms lies with the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor/Chairperson.
- 12.2 Information supplied on forms must not endorse commercial products or activities; solicit business or invade anyone's privacy.
- 12.3 Where a Form contains a substantial amount of inappropriate content, such as defamatory, abusive, offensive or threatening language (or casts adverse personal reflections on individuals) it will not be received nor dealt with. The sender will be notified of such decisions.
- 12.4 Matters which are subject to a Tender process, Expression of Interest, reports in a closed meeting in accordance with Section 10A (1)(2) of the Local Government Act or considered contrary to the public interest will not be accepted.
- 12.5 All topics for discussion must be submitted in advance detailing at a minimum the general nature of the statement/s to be made or question/s to be asked.
- 12.6 Questions/statements received that duplicate or are substantial the same as those submitted to a previous Community Forum will not be accepted.
- 12.7 Multiple Questions/statements received from representatives of the same Community Group or Organisation that are substantially the same or the same as those submitted to a previous Community Forum will not be accepted.

## 13. Power to Remove Persons from a Community Forum

If a Councillor or a member of the community fails to leave the place where a Community Forum is being held:

- (a) Where the Council has authorised, through the adoption of these *Rules*, the person presiding at the Community Forum to exercise the power of expulsion, immediately after being directed by the person presiding to leave the Forum.
- (b) In the case of a neutral/independent Chairperson, the power of expulsion is to be exercised by the Chief Executive Officer.

The Police will be notified to attend in order to Keep the Peace.

## 14. Webcasting

- 14.1 All Community Forum meetings of the council will be webcast on Council's website. Webcasts will be live streamed and recordings of the meetings will be uploaded on council's website at a later time. Webcasts will be an audio visual recording.
- 14.2 At the start of each meeting the chairperson is to make a statement informing those in attendance that the meeting is being webcast. Council accepts no responsibility for any defamatory statements made.

- 14.3 The Chief Executive Officer will give notice that a meeting is to be webcast in the meeting agenda and by place signage in the meeting rooms and by any other means as required in relation to section 18 of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- 14.4 Written transcripts of proceedings will not be available.
- 14.5 The webcasts and recordings are not the official record of the meeting nor do they convey the official Minutes of a Council meeting or the position of Council. Recordings are not to be used except in accordance with this Code.
- 14.6 Webcasts and webcast recordings are protected by copyright and owned by Wollondilly Shire Council. No part of the proceedings of a meeting of the Council may be recorded, copied or made available to others without the authority of the Council however councillors may use unedited extracts of the webcast recordings for the purposes of engaging with the community and informing them of their actions. Photography at Meetings of Council will generally be permitted with the authority of the Council.
- 14.7 Any person who fails to cease recording the meeting when requested, may be expelled from the meeting as provided in clause 11 of these guidelines.
- 14.8 If a person fails to leave the place where a meeting of the council is being held immediately after they have been expelled, a police officer, or any person authorised for the purpose by the council or person presiding, may, by using only such force as is necessary, remove the person from that place and, if necessary, restrain the person from re-entering that place for the remainder of the meeting.
- 14.9 A recording of each meeting of the council and committee of the council is to be retained on the council's website for 8 years. Recordings of meetings may be disposed of in accordance with the State Records Act 1998.

#### **14. Recording of Meetings of the Community Forum Prohibited**

- 14.1 No component of the Community Forum will be electronically recorded by a member of the public. This includes but is not limited to the use of:
- Tape recording devices
  - Video recording devices
  - Computer Laptop/Notebook devices
  - Mobile Telephone devices
- 14.2 A person who is found to be electronically recording any part of a Community Forum will be requested to cease the activity. In the event the person refuses to comply with a request to stop recording, the Forum will be adjourned by the Chairperson. At the end of the adjournment the Forum will resume, however if the person still refuses to comply the Forum will be declared closed.

#### **15. Code of Conduct**

- 15.1 Councillors and staff shall at all times comply with Council's adopted *Code of Conduct*.

**16. Petition**

A person may present a petition to the Community Forum. The Chairperson may, at their discretion, permit a spokesperson to detail the nature of the petition.

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