

COMMUNITY FORUM GUIDELINES

WOLLONDILLY SHIRE COUNCIL

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Rural Living

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Introduction

Council is committed to the establishment of Community Forums in the Wollondilly Shire as a means for any interested party to advise Council of their collective views on matters relevant to Council or the Shire.

Council provides information to our wider community by a number of means. These include:

- The Bush Telegraph
- Council's website
- Public exhibitions
- Media releases
- Paid advertising
- Mobile library and information service
- Macarthur community radio
- E-kiosks
- Community meetings
- Social Media

The Community Forum will enable Council to receive information on an informal face to face basis.

Council recognises the diversity of views, needs and opinions of our community which can often assist in deciding and implementing the best approach to delivering two way communications.

Community Forums will act to provide an opportunity for people to discuss and present a variety of matters to the Council. The purpose of the Forums can also be varied, for example, someone may raise a matter for information, for consideration, in the search for a solution (or solutions) to a problem, as a concern or to elicit support.

Objectives

The objectives of Community Forums are:

- To promote community dialogue with Council and to encourage positive relations between Council and our community
- To identify the needs of residents and landowners and those people who are directly affected by activities of the Council through two way communication
- To increase the awareness levels of community members regarding actions proposed by Council
- To ensure that the local community are adequately informed of Council's activities
- To strengthen the mandate of Council in dealing with bodies outside the Shire such as Federal and State Government and private organisations

Aim

The aim of Community Forums is to assist Wollondilly Shire Council to become more effective, efficient and equitable by encouraging inclusiveness, enhancing understanding of current activities and future needs.

Schedule of Community Forums

Day held:	Second Monday* of the month
Doors Open	6.15pm
Commencement time:	6.30pm
Conclusion time:	8.30pm

Opening & 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

*Note: In the event that a Community Forum falls on a Monday which has been designated as a public holiday, the Forum will be held the next day, being on the Tuesday.

The monthly schedule of meetings may not allow for the provision of the full course of meetings to be held every month, particularly during the months of January and December. When the full course of meetings cannot be held in a given month, the General Manager will determine those meetings which will be held and notification will be provided accordingly.

Style of Meeting

The main difference between Ordinary Meetings of Council and Community Forums is that people speak on a matter in front of Councillors and Staff. This allows for more informed decision making and is not a debate night.

Community Forums will not be run according to formal meeting procedures with motions introduced then speakers taking the floor to talk for or against the motion. There are to be no resolutions, recommendations or motions passed at Community Forums.

One of the main objectives of Community Forums is to encourage the involvement of all landowners and residents in providing Council with information on Forum matters. To do this, formal motions supporting or opposing a matter are not to be submitted. A Forum should be a means by which people can come together and explore matters and question activities or policies that affect their community.

Community Forums seek to be welcoming and informal occasions. If a meeting is conducted too strictly, many people feel restricted and often too unsure to speak. On the other hand, if a meeting is too informal, it may lack a sense of purpose and direction and people will tend to lose interest hence, a balanced approach will be adopted.

5.1 Chairperson

That the Community Forums be chaired by the Mayor or another Councillor as appointed by the Mayor. The Community Forum Chairperson be selected according to Councillors surname in alphabetical order and any Councillor that declines his/her opportunity will have to wait until their name is called again alphabetically.

While Community Forums should be welcoming and informal occasions, the Chairperson must still maintain the traditional role of controlling and guiding the Forum.

A Chairperson will need to 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)*. Please refer to point 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. During this time input from our community is welcomed in an endeavour to maximise community feedback to the Council.

An Example of a Formal Community Forum Matter could be:

- Public exhibition items
- Strategic matters

Formal Community Forum matters will be pre-determined by Council and are typically supported by a presentation.

The General Manager, Deputy General Managers and the Forum Chairperson will determine the Formal Community Forum matters that are to be placed on the Agenda.

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.

The Record of Proceedings will only record the outcome for this section of the Forum, for example:

- A presentation was conducted by (Council Officer)
- Discussions were held on the matter of (Item discussed)
- Members of our community raised questions and these were addressed by Council Officers

5.3 Community Question/Statement Time

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

Questions/Statements must be submitted in writing on Councils prescribed question/statement form and must be submitted by 12 noon on the day of the Forum. Late forms will not be accepted. The person or their representative must be in attendance at the Community Forum. Only items addressed at the Community Forum will be included in the Record of Proceedings.

The General Manager will read the Executive Summary for each Item from Councils current Agenda.

Questions/Statements not supporting a matter will be dealt with in the first instance and the proponent or person speaking in support of a matter will be dealt with in the second instance.

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. Failure to take direction from the Chairperson when a participants time limit is reached or other forms of disruptive or disrespectful behaviour will be dealt with in accordance with Appendix A, point 9.6 of these guidelines.

In this section of the Forum the name of the person raising the Question/Statement, whom they are representing and the matter/item for each written question/statement submitted for the night will be recorded in the Record of Proceedings. Any additional documentation handed in on the night will be noted in the Record of Proceedings. No verbal comments from the speaker will be documented.

In the event a participant wishes to amend/retract their written question/statement they will be given 24 hours to submit an alternative question/statement form to be placed into Councils Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS).

Where a participant is granted the right to speak on the night at the discretion of the Chairperson the Record of Proceedings will only note the participants name and the subject matter.

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.

Informal Questions/Statements will be allowed at the discretion of the General Manager and the Mayor.

Questions/Statements must be submitted in writing on Councils prescribed question/Statement form and must be submitted by 12 noon on the day of the Forum. Late forms will not be accepted. The person or their representative must be in attendance at the Community Forum. Copies of all questions/statements are given to Councillors for their consideration. Only items addressed at the Community Forum will be included in the Record of Proceedings.

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. Failure to take direction from the Chairperson when a participants time limit is reached or other forms of disruptive or disrespectful behaviour will be dealt with in accordance with Appendix A, point 9.6 of these guidelines.

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In the event a participant wishes to amend/retract their written question/statement they will be given 24 hours to submit an alternative question/statement form to be placed into Councils Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS).

Where a participant is granted the right to speak on the night at the discretion of the Chairperson the Record of Proceedings will only note the participants name and the subject matter.

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. 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.

A firm conclusion to the Forum is necessary with emphasis being placed on thanking those who attended for their feedback and their interest in contributing to the future of the Wollondilly Shire.

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.

5.8 Meeting Rules

As stated in point 5 of these guidelines titled "*Style of Meeting*", it is Council's intent to provide a Community Forum in the manner as outlined. In the event the Chairperson is required to call the Forum to order, the Chairperson will refer to Council's *Community Forum Rules of Conduct*.

A copy of this document (Community Forum Guidelines) which incorporates the *Community Forum Rules of Conduct* (as *Appendix A*) is available at every Forum and on Councils website – www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au.

Agendas and Record of Proceedings

The provision of an Agenda and the Record of Proceedings for Community Forums will be as per Council's *Community Forum Rules of Conduct*.

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 General Manager, Deputy General Managers and Chairperson will determine the Formal Community Forum matters that are to be placed on the agenda.

Community Forums will be documented, with the Record of Proceedings being the official record of the business that has been conducted at the Forum. The Record of Proceedings will record the name, representative and matter discussed only as per clause 5.3 & 5.4 of these Guidelines. Verbal comments will not be recorded from the floor.

Copies of these documents are available from the Council customer service foyer. Alternatively, they can be accessed via Council's website.

Promotion

Community Forums may be promoted through the Bush Telegraph, the local media, the Council library, the mobile library and information service and on Council's website, www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au.

Council's website has a page entitled *Council Meetings* which has a link to a Community Forum Page. This page contains the dates of Community Forums, Agendas, the Record of Proceedings and Question/Statement Forms.

Community Forum Process

The Community Forum process is to allow the Council as a Local Government entity to meet the objectives of open transparent governance and community engagement and not for the best interest of any individual.

Councillor Contacts

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

Request for a Presentation Topic and Question/Statement Form

All requests to speak at Community Forums are required to be made in writing. Councils prescribed form for submitting a request to address the Community Forum is a multi-purpose form referred to as the Community Forum Question/Statement Form.

The form is available online at Councils website for electronic submission or download. Hard copies are also available from Councils Customer Service Centre.

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. Community Access to Agendas and Associated Agenda

- 3.1 Copies of the Community Forum and Ordinary Meeting of Council agenda shall be available at Council libraries and at the customer service centre by 8.00am on the Friday 10 days prior to the Community Forum. These copies are available for viewing at no charge. Copies to be taken away will be available, at no charge, from the customer service centre in reasonable numbers.
- 3.2 Copies of the Community Forum and Ordinary Meeting of Council agenda are also available on Council's website – www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The General Manager may withhold access to the correspondence and reports referred to in subclause 3.3:
- In any case where the General Manager, upon advice from the Council's Officers, so decide on the ground that the matter may not be in accordance with clause 5.3 of this Guideline.
- 3.5 The use of various mediums for the distribution of agenda is available upon request and nothing in this code shall be construed as limiting the means of distributing information to any one medium.

4. Notice of Community Forum

- 4.1 The General Manager 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.
- 4.2 Proceedings at a Community Forum are not invalidated because of a failure to give notice of the Community Forum to any Councillor.
- 4.3 Council will give public notice of the times and places of its Community Forums.

5. 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.

6. Agenda for the Community Forum

- 6.1 The General Manager will ensure that an agenda is prepared for the Community Forum.
- 6.2 The General Manager 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 General Manager, the business is (or the implementation of the business would be) unlawful. The General Manager must report (without giving details of the item of business) any such exclusion to the next meeting of the Council.
- 6.3 The General Manager 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.

7. Community Question/Statement Time

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

Informal Questions/Statements will be allowed at the discretion of the General Manager and the Mayor. If the Chairperson or General Manager receives a Community Question/Statement Time form that contains substantial inappropriate content, such as abusive or threatening language (or adverse personal reflections on individuals) the Chairperson or General Manager 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 General Manager 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. How Disorder at a Community Forum May be Dealt With

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 A member of the community may be expelled from a Community Forum for engaging in or having engaged in disorderly conduct at the Forum.
- 9.3 Community members who insult or make personal reflections or impute improper motives to Council or Councillors, or does or says anything that is inconsistent with maintaining order will be deemed acts of disorder, or any other behaviour deemed disorderly by the Council.
- 9.4 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.
- 9.5 Councillors and Council employees must, at all times, observe the provision of Council's *Code of Conduct*, as adopted.
- 9.6 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.

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

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

11. 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 General Manager.

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

12. Inspection of the Record of Proceedings of the Community Forum

12.1 Everyone is entitled to inspect the current version of the following documents free of charge:

- (a) agendas of Community Forums; and
- (b) record of proceedings of Community Forums.

12.2 The documents may be inspected at the office of the Council during ordinary office hours.

12.3 The Council must have copies of the documents available for taking away by anyone who asks for a copy.

12.4 An inspection of the record of proceedings of the Community Forum is to be carried out under the supervision of the General Manager or a staff member of the Council designated by the General Manager to supervise inspections of those records of proceedings.

12.5 The General Manager must ensure that the Record of Proceedings of the Community Forum is kept secure and in safe custody and that no unauthorised person is allowed to interfere with them.

13. Access to Records

Council's *Access to Information* Policy applies.

14. Recording of Meetings of the Community Forum Prohibited

14.1 No component of the Community Forum will be electronically recorded. 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.