

5 September 2013

WCC Engagement Policy (COCE01)  
Freepost  
Wellington City Council  
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**Re: WCC Engagement Policy**

This submission is from the Architectural Centre, an incorporated society dating from 1946, which represents both professionals and non-professionals interested in the promotion of good design.

In general the Architectural Centre supports the draft policy on community engagement, and has the following additional comments:

1. We strongly appreciate the Council's efforts for comprehensive public engagement, and agree that strong public engagement and investment in Council decision-making is key to a strong and vibrant city.

2. The Centre believes that the Council could make its public engagements and consultations more effective by:

(a) ensuring that consultation and engagement documents are well-researched, well-written, are without repetition, and limit vague and imprecise policy statements. We appreciate the need for policy intentions to be expressed, but these need to be succinct. We frequently find these to be repetitive, vague and unhelpful. Tighter editing would often improve the ability to read documents efficiently.

(b) ensuring that there is a real need for documents prior to investing council (and then community) time and energy. For example this policy document will spawn at least four more documents. More succinct document management, including combining some documents, may be productive in enabling the community to effectively respond to issues.

(c) ensuring careful timing of submissions, including an awareness of other time-critical needs on community organisations' and individuals' time. There is frequently conflict between submission deadlines for local, regional and central government on related issues. A simple example is that the deadline for submissions on this draft Engagement Policy (Friday 6 September) co-incides with the submission deadline for the Board of Inquiry submissions on the NZTA Basin Bridge Project. There are likely many active and interested community groups who will not submit on this document because their energies are focussed on the ramifications of the NZTA project at the Basin.

(d) implementing an RSS feed, social media (or similar) to assist in the notification of interested parties of consultation processes in specific areas (e.g. resource consents; District Plan; culture and arts etc.)

3. It is well known that public engagement at local government elections is appallingly low. This is a critical aspect of community participation in local government. We consider that there is a hierarchy of engagements and that the Council ought to set



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engagement targets for participation, including the most important one of Wellingtonians voting in local elections.

4. We are not convinced that the categorisations of "Critical strategic questions," "Key Projects and activities" and "Business as usual" (3.2; 6.1) establish a sufficiently nuanced hierarchy and corresponding levels of engagement. We consider that establishing this hierarchy ought to include:

(a) a definition of participants (e.g. stakeholder, community group, neighbourhood group, business, affected groups; the distinction between key partners and partners or key stakeholders and stakeholders).

(b) specific numerical targets for engagement.

(c) specific engagement techniques (e.g. public meetings, survey of ratepayers, use of social media, submissions called for via council website/newspapers, limited (non-notified) consultation with invited stakeholders).

(d) how invited stakeholders are identified (i.e. what criteria determine who it is appropriate and relevant to consult with).

(e) feedback mechanisms to let Wellingtonians know the results of consultations, and that feedback should be as comprehensive as the effort for engagement. We consider this to be particularly important so that people know the impact of their views on decisions and the degree to which they were taken into account.

(f) how the Council will ensure that the "engagement is not dominated by single organisations or sectors of the community" (6.2).

(g) who in Council is responsible for making these decisions and overseeing/administering these processes. We assume this is Democratic Services but this is not explicit in the policy.

(h) whether or not the engagement will be open to all members of the public.

5. The Centre also considers there might be new ways to activate citizen engagement, for example, an "Afternoon tea with the mayor and councillors" for a randomly selected group of ratepayers monthly might be productive to get people who would not normally get involved in local council decision-making thinking about it, and hopefully participating in it.

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission on this draft Engagement Policy. The Architectural Centre always appreciates the opportunities we have to comment on policies and other documents, such as this, and overall consider that the Council is doing a solid job at public engagement.

Yours faithfully

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