

# Community Consultation requirements

## Projects with amenity impacts

### Guidance Note

#### Introduction

Recent Sport and Recreation Victoria community sports infrastructure programs have included requirements to evidence community consultation where there is a potential foreseeable impact from the project activities on residential or community amenity.

The Victorian Planning Authority defines amenity as 'the pleasant or satisfactory aspects of a location which contributes to its overall character and the enjoyment of residents or visitors. This may include access to services and well-designed public spaces.'

Amenity impacts are often present with projects and initiatives that may attract local resident or wider community concerns and opposition which may then cause reputational damage for the Minister and delays for projects.

#### Does the project have an amenity impact?

Some projects may have adverse amenity impacts for neighbouring residents or users of an existing public space. These may include perceived amenity impacts which could be addressed through early community engagement and information.

Potential amenity impacts may include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Re-purposing existing public space for a specific use. For example, converting existing green space used by residents for a more specific activity that may limit broader use i.e. fencing off an area for a synthetic playing field
- ✓ Removal of significant vegetation/trees that may impact on local wildlife and the attractiveness/appeal of the area, including tree canopy and shade
- ✓ Introducing major new activities or increasing intensity of use that significantly adds noise or traffic to an area i.e. large numbers of people and events, additional days of formal use, potential road closures, parking issues
- ✓ New or significantly upgraded lighting that is close to neighbouring properties that may potentially create an actual or perceived light spill effect (light that falls outside the area intended to be lit)
- ✓ New developments such as a skate park introducing new users to an area.

If any of the above are identified, the project is considered to have a potential amenity impact and a higher threshold of consultation evidence is required.

It is important that informal users (i.e. dog walkers), formal users (i.e. sporting clubs) and local residents are engaged so that all potential impacts are understood, acknowledged, and addressed through the project's development.

## Where is amenity impact less likely?

Many other projects have no potential foreseeable amenity impact on neighbouring residents, or users of an existing public space, or no impact that could be reasonably expected. These include projects such as:

- Upgrades to a facility within the existing footprint (unless of a larger scale)
- Minor extensions to a facility that may align with a recent endorsed masterplan (that included consultation) or where there is no other existing usage/removal of trees/landmarks in the area subject to the extension
- Existing court and oval upgrades (non-lighting) where these facilities have been used for this existing purpose i.e. recreation reserves
- New lighting or lighting upgrades where there are no neighbouring properties.

It should be noted that some of the projects above will have amenity impacts during construction (i.e. oval upgrade, and these impacts should be communicated to informal and well as formal users).

## Evidence of community consultation

While the Local Government Act 2020 has stronger community engagement requirements for Local Government Authorities (LGAs), it is recognised that the grant requirements related to evidencing community consultation may exceed LGA policies in some areas.

Recent program guidelines require applicants to detail the community consultation and stakeholder engagement that has occurred on the project - this is for all applications.

Evidence of community consultation must be provided where there is any potential foreseeable impact of the proposed project on residential or community amenity. Evidence must include:

- How the community has been consulted/informed about the proposed project (i.e. on-site consultation, letter box drop, social media posts)
- Community consultation findings and outcomes of any formal engagement (i.e. community consultation, report, recent master plan, Council report).

## Further considerations

- Where evidence of community consultation is required this should be **project specific** and recent (within the last 2-3 years for endorsed Master Plan implementation and within 12 months for projects not identified in a Master Plan or similar).
- Where there are significant potential amenity impacts, a mix of engagement and consultation approaches should be used. Online information alone will not be considered sufficient to meet consultation requirements i.e. provision of information within LGA report on a LGA website. It is unreasonable to expect that residents will actively search out information on a LGA website unless they have reason to do so.

- Where there are likely to be residents significantly impacted by project activities (i.e. lights close to properties) there is a higher threshold for the minimum information required. This should include evidence of direct engagement with residents, including:
  - a summary of the engagement (for example numbers of properties targeted) and findings of any feedback should be provided with an application (it is insufficient to simply advise in an application that a notice has been provided).
  - information that is specific enough that residents understand any potential impact. For example, where lights will be close to a residence there should be some indication of the placement of a pole and the level of lighting, and the increased use for formal sport.
- Master Plan community consultations can only be drawn on as the sole evidence where the endorsed Master Plan is recent (within the last 2-3 years). Where this is the case the endorsed Master Plan report should specifically demonstrate that wider community consultation has occurred about the proposed facility/infrastructure that is subject of the application.
- It should be noted that it is not necessary that a project is supported by every single resident, however, the LGA needs to demonstrate that residents impacted by the project are aware of it and have had the opportunity to provide feedback and their feedback is acknowledged.

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