



PORT STEPHENS

C O U N C I L

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING
13 DECEMBER 2022

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SUBJECT

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COUNCIL REPORTS

9. DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN3

- Nb. **Bold** Items listed above have not been previously received or viewed by Councillors.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

ITEM NO. 9

FILE NO: 22/328785
EDRMS NO: PSC2021-04195

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

REPORT OF: JANELLE GARDNER - COMMUNICATIONS SECTION MANAGER
GROUP: DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION IS THAT COUNCIL:

- 1) Endorse the Development Application (DA) awareness campaign communication plan (**ATTACHMENT 1**) and commence the trial period.
- 2) Approves to create a criteria for advertising development applications lodged with Council weekly in the Port Stephens Examiner and locate the operational budget allocation to support this.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to provide information on Newspaper Notices. The report follows a Notice of Motion raised by Council at its 22 February 2022 meeting (**ATTACHMENT 2**).

ISSUES

The Notice of Motion of 22 February 2022 was incorrectly identified as '**ATTACHMENT 1**' and omitted from the Ordinary Council Agenda of 13 December 2022.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1) DA Awareness Campaign Communication Plan Final. [↓](#)
- 2) Notice of Motion raised by Council at its 22 February 2022 meeting. [↓](#)

Communications Plan

DA awareness campaign



Improving community awareness of development applications lodged with Council.



Introduction

In April 2020, changes to legislation in NSW no longer required Council to publish all Public Notices in print. This change was implemented to help Councils across NSW reduce costs, and redirect funds to higher priority services. At this time, Council reduced its print advertising, saving approximately \$63,000 in the first year. Council currently publishes Public Notices in print and/or online depending on the type of notice and the legislative requirements surrounding the communication of such notices as outlined in Councils Community Participation Plan.

Over the past two years, both Councillors and staff have received community feedback requesting that print advertising of development applications (DAs) be reinstated. Feedback has also referred to community members being unaware of DAs lodged with Council and open for submission.

As part of the newly developed Communications and Engagement Strategy 2022, Council continues to test and trial methods to increase opportunities for Port Stephens residents and business to contribute to broader decision making.

The DA awareness campaign is a new communications program aimed to increase the community's understanding of the development application process, DAs lodged with Council and how the community can register to be informed of and access information on DAs from both Council and the State Government.

The DA awareness program will initiate as a trial from 9 January 2023 to 30 June 2023. On completion of the trial the program will be evaluated and reported back to Council to determine whether the program remains a permanent part of Council's services.

Objectives



Create awareness and increase subscribers to the [new DA E-Subscription service](#)



[Raise awareness of development applications](#) lodged at Council through various channels



[Educate the community](#) on the development application process and the NSW Planning Portal

Scope

The DA awareness campaign includes:

- Development of a new E-subscription service
- Communication campaign for a new E-subscription service
- Weekly communication campaign through various channels
- Community education on DA process and NSW Planning Portal

This campaign raises awareness of development applications lodged by Council the previous week. This campaign does not form part of the formal notification periods as outlined in the Councils Community Participation Plan.

Audience profile

The DA awareness campaign have been developed considering a wide audience.



75,276
people

Median age of is 47 years



60 to 69

Most common age range



80%+

Australian population
own a smartphone*



79.6%

have internet access
from a dwelling (2016)



70 to 79

Largest age range
increase at 33.2%



40.1%

finished year 12

33.1%

finished year 10 or above

Communication methods

Communication methods consider the two elements of the DA awareness campaign:

1. Awareness raising of the new E-Subscription service
2. Awareness raising of development applications lodged at Council
3. Community education on DA process and NSW Planning Portal

Communication methods	
DA E-subscription service	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media release • Social media (organic) • Paid social media • Newspaper advertisements – existing notices • Your Port Rates notices • Council website page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On hold messaging • Administration building TV notification • Poster at Council venues • Your Port E-Newsletter • Biz Link E-Newsletter
DA weekly awareness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly social media (organise and paid) • Weekly newspaper advertisements (½ to full page) • Weekly E-subscription service 	
Community education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video series of DA process and NSW Planning Portal • Social media (organic) • Your Port E-newsletter 	



Key messaging

General

- Our newly developed Communications and Engagement Strategy aims to increase opportunities for Port Stephens residents and business to have input into our decision making.
- Our community have informed us they would like information about development applications reinstated in the newspaper for residents without internet access.
- To complement our current development application notification requirements under NSW legislation and our Community Participation Plan, we are trialing a new approach to make sure our community is aware of what development applications have been lodged with us.
- Our new approach will be trialed from 9 January to 30 June 2022 to make sure it is meeting both Council and community needs before we make this a permanent approach for the future.
- The DA awareness campaign is a new communications program aimed to increase the community's understanding of the development application process, DAs lodged with Council and how the community can register to be informed of and access information on DAs from both Council and the State Government.

- The DA awareness campaign trial is externally funded through the NSW Governments Faster Local Assessment Grant Program.

DA E-Subscription service

- We have a new service in place to help keep you informed of development applications lodged with Council.
- Sign up to our E-subscription service to receive a weekly email informing you of the development applications lodged with Council the previous week.
- The E-Subscription service will list the development application lodged the previous week and give you direct links to application information and where you can provide feedback.
- Register for the new E-subscription service by visiting portstephes.nsw.gov.au or calling our us on 4988 0255

DA weekly awareness

- We want to make sure you are aware of the development applications lodged last week.
- For more information visit Councils DA Tracker at datracker.portstephes.nsw.gov.au or contact 49880255.



Key risks

Risk	Mitigation strategy
Community and staff perception on reversing previous decision to remove newspaper advertisement notification of development applications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear messaging relating to recently adopted Communications and Engagement Strategy • Clear messaging in campaign about community feedback received. • Clear messaging in campaign about the new approach complementing the formal notification process, not replacing it.
Community and staff perception of increased budget for awareness campaign in current financial environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear messaging in campaign about community feedback received. • Clear messaging in campaign about the trial being externally funded.
New E-subscription service isn't accessible for community members not comfortable with or without technology or internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of the weekly ½ or full page advertisement in campaign methods informing community of development application lodged the previous week
Community not satisfied that weekly newspaper advertisement doesn't form part of the notification process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear messaging in campaign about the new approach complementing the formal notification process, not replacing it.
Community expectation the campaign becomes a permanent service delivered by Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear messaging the campaign is a trial • Evaluation report outlining the campaigns success.
Community education campaign is complex and technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple messaging with use of video and images where possible

Key milestones

Milestone	Date
DA awareness campaign trial commences	9 January 2023
E-subscription service launched	9 January 2023
DA awareness campaign trial concludes	30 June 2023
Evaluation report completed	14 July 2023
Report to Council	22 August 2023

Budget

Budget item	Budget
DA E-subscription service	
• DA E-subscription service development and subscription	\$7,880*
• Paid social media advertising	\$1,000*
DA weekly awareness	
• Option 1 - Weekly newspaper advertisement – all DAs lodged (½ page)	\$29,625
• Option 2 – Weekly newspaper advertisement – DAs above certain criteria) (1/4 page)	\$15,500
• Paid social media posts (25 weeks)	\$1,220*
TOTAL (option 1 inclusive)	\$39,725
TOTAL(option 2 inclusive and recommended)	\$25,600
External funding*	\$10,000
Internal funding	\$15,600



Success criteria



10% increase in visits to development applications on exhibitions webpage and DA Tracker



Minimal negative community feedback on awareness campaign



High reach across communications methods



1,500 subscribers to DA E-subscription service during trial period

Action plan

Activity	Date
DA awareness campaign commenced	9 January 2023
DA E-Subscription	
Updated Council web page live	9 January 2023
Media release distributed	9 January 2023
Organic social media post	9 January 2023
Paid social media	9 January 2023, 3 April 2023
Posters distributed	9 January 2023
Administration building TV screen slide uploaded	9 January 2023
On hold messaging live	9 January 2023
Newspaper advertisement (existing notices)	12 January 2023
E-Newsletters articles distributed	14 January 2023
Your Port article	January and April notices
DA weekly awareness	
Weekly newspaper advertisement	Weekly 12 January 2023 – 29 June 2023
Weekly social media post	Weekly 12 January 2023 – 29 June 2023
Weekly E-Subscription email distributed (automated)	Weekly 12 January 2023 – 29 June 2023
Community education	
Education series developed	3 February 2023
Education series promoted through various channels	6 February 2023 – 29 June 2023
Evaluation report completed	14 July 2023
Business paper report to Council	22 August 2023





PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL

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**ITEM 9 - ATTACHMENT 2 NOTICE OF MOTION RAISED BY COUNCIL AT ITS
22 FEBRUARY 2022 MEETING.**

MINUTES ORDINARY COUNCIL - 22 FEBRUARY 2022

NOTICE OF MOTION

ITEM NO. 2

FILE NO: 22/45926

EDRMS NO: PSC2021-04195

NEWSPAPER NOTICES

COUNCILLOR: LEAH ANDERSON

THAT COUNCIL:

- 1) Notes that on 30 April 2020, by “operational decision”, the General Manager directed that advertisement of community notices, including Development Applications, be removed from the Port Stephens Examiner.
- 2) Agrees that this should not have occurred, considering the older demographic in Port Stephens, and those less fortunate than others, who rely on public information appearing in the free local newspaper to stay informed.
- 3) Requests a report from the General Manager:
 - a) Outlining savings since 30 April 2020, by ceasing the purchasing of a full page advertisement in the Port Stephens Examiner
 - b) Outlining the number of editions of the Port Stephens Examiner printed since then, and details about the size and cost of Council's advertising in each of those editions.
 - c) Outlining the cost of both a half page, and a full page advert in each weekly edition of both the Port Stephens Examiner and Port Stephens News of the Area, which is to be gained through a written quote from each publication.
 - d) Providing a report and a recommendation as to whether Council should re-commence advertising in the Port Stephens Examiner and extend it to Port Stephens News of the Area

**ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING - 22 FEBRUARY 2022
MOTION**

055	Councillor Leah Anderson Councillor Giacomo Arnott It was resolved that Council: 1) Notes that on 30 April 2020, by “operational decision”, the General Manager directed that advertisement of community notices, including Development Applications, be removed from the Port Stephens Examiner.
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**ITEM 9 - ATTACHMENT 2 NOTICE OF MOTION RAISED BY COUNCIL AT ITS
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MINUTES ORDINARY COUNCIL - 22 FEBRUARY 2022

	<p>2) Agrees that this should not have occurred, considering the older demographic in Port Stephens, and those less fortunate than others, who rely on public information appearing in the free local newspaper to stay informed.</p> <p>3) Requests a report from the General Manager:</p> <p>a) Outlining savings since 30 April 2020, by ceasing the purchasing of a full page advertisement in the Port Stephens Examiner</p> <p>b) Outlining the number of editions of the Port Stephens Examiner printed since then, and details about the size and cost of Council's advertising in each of those editions.</p> <p>c) Outlining the cost of both a half page, and a full page advert in each weekly edition of both the Port Stephens Examiner and Port Stephens News of the Area, which is to be gained through a written quote from each publication.</p> <p>d) Providing a report and a recommendation as to whether Council should re-commence advertising in the Port Stephens Examiner and extend it to Port Stephens News of the Area</p>
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Councillor Peter Francis left the meeting at 8:22pm.

Councillor Peter Francis returned to the meeting at 8:25pm.

The motion was carried.

**BACKGROUND REPORT OF: JANELLE GARDNER – COMMUNICATIONS
SECTION MANAGER**

BACKGROUND

Port Stephens Council is home to 74,506 people with a median age of 45 years. As part of Council's commitment to engaging and informing the local community, Council publishes Public Notices in print and/or online depending on the type of notice and the legislative requirements surrounding the communication of such notices.

In April 2020, changes to legislation in NSW no longer required Council to publish all Public Notices in print. This change was implemented to help Councils across NSW reduce costs, and redirect funds to higher priority services. This period also coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic; which placed significant financial constraints on the

ITEM 9 - ATTACHMENT 2 NOTICE OF MOTION RAISED BY COUNCIL AT ITS 22 FEBRUARY 2022 MEETING.

MINUTES ORDINARY COUNCIL - 22 FEBRUARY 2022

organisation. At this time, Council reduced its print advertising; saving approximately \$63,000 in the first year.

The Port Stephens Examiner is part of the Australian Community Media Group and is published every Thursday. The paper has an average readership of 28,630. The Port Stephens News of the Area has a circulation of approximately 10,000.

The Port Stephens Examiner continues to increase its online presence and as at February 2022, has a digital readership of 36,837. News of the Area has approximately 8,000 followers on Facebook.

Although Port Stephens has a higher population of older residents, data indicates that 79.6% of the Port Stephens population have internet access available from their dwelling (Remplan 2022). Based on the data, and an analysis of costs surrounding distribution and readership, the following changes were implemented in April 2020:

- Reduce the size of print advertising
- Remove the weekly advertising of Development Applications from print media
- Email or mail distribution of Public Notices to community members who can only access information in specific formats
- Distribute hard copies of all public notices to all Council libraries for public display each week.

Since this time, Council has continued to advertise a range of public notices and general information to the community. From 30 April 2020 to 30 January 2022, 91 editions of the Port Stephens Examiner have been printed. Port Stephens Council has advertised in 80 of these editions with a total of 155 individual advertisements at a cost of \$116,745.

More recently, Council has reviewed opportunities to increase advertising in local print publications, however, costs for print advertising remain high. Based on current advertising rates, a full page advertisement in the Port Stephens Examiner is estimated at \$162,000 per year and a half page \$81,224 per year, whilst the Port Stephens News of the Area is estimated at \$109,200 per year for a full page advertisement, and \$65,884 for a half page advertisement.

By reducing the scale of print advertising since April 2020, Council has made savings of approximately \$200,000. Savings made have been redirected into projects which deliver long term communication outcomes, including the upgrade of the public website, our Integrated Engagement Program and an increased digital presence.

As part of the development of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy, Council continues to test and trial methods to increase opportunities for Port Stephens residents and business to contribute to broader decision making.

A key element of this program will be increasing the community's understanding of the Development Application (DA) process and communicating how they can register

ITEM 9 - ATTACHMENT 2 NOTICE OF MOTION RAISED BY COUNCIL AT ITS 22 FEBRUARY 2022 MEETING.

MINUTES ORDINARY COUNCIL - 22 FEBRUARY 2022

for notifications and access information on DAs from both Council and the State government. As part of this, from March 2022, the following actions will be trialed:

- Individual advertising of DAs on exhibition via social media including paid boosts for residents within the locality of the proposed development
- General advertising of weekly DAs approved via social media
- Paid social media awareness campaign to encourage a greater understanding of the DA process and NSW Planning Portal
- Regular communications via social media, newsletters and other communications platforms on the opportunities for residents to submit feedback on developments.

Council's Communications and Engagement Team is currently investigating paid social media advertising on local news platforms (including News of the Area and Port Stephens Examiner) to increase online readership and engagement across the community.

If Council was to recommence advertising in the Port Stephens Examiner and extend this to the Port Stephens News of the Area, it is estimated that an additional \$174,000 would be required to secure a weekly full page advertisement in both publications. This would have a significant impact on the Communications and Customer Experience budget, and reduce Council's ability to engage via digital platforms with a broader cross section of the community.

As such, Council officers suggest the following processes be implemented:

- 1) Maintain the current process for print advertising of Public Notices.
- 2) Implement new strategies to increase awareness and engagement with the community on the notification of DAs.
- 3) Engage with local print media to seek opportunities for increasing awareness through their digital platforms.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Source of Funds	Yes/No	Funding (\$)	Comment
Existing budget	Yes		
Reserve Funds	No		
Developer Contributions (\$7.11)	No		
External Grants	No		
Other	No		

ATTACHMENTS

Nil.