



with AMANDA SPALDING

## How to get the BEST out of OUR COUNCILS

# WHAT WILL BE IN ORANGE CITY COUNCIL'S BUDGET FOR 2020 – 2021?



By the time you read this I understand that Orange City Council's proposed budget for 2020 – 2021 will have been considered by the Council meeting on 21st April 2020 for approval to go on exhibition for community comment. It will be interesting to see what proposals Council has for economic stimulus. Last year Put Orange First made a submission suggesting (among other things) that Council employ a CBD Place Manager to facilitate engagement and speed up planning processes. The Place Manager would also work with local property owners over lease costs and customer service training because of concerns from local business people a year ago about the difficulties being faced, particularly by CBD retailers. The economic situation and outlook is now much worse.

Section 404 of the Local Government Act requires that each council must have an annual Operational Plan, adopted before the beginning of each financial year, outlining the activities to be undertaken that year, as part of the Delivery Program.

The Operational Plan will include the Statement of Revenue Policy and must be publicly exhibited for at least 28 days and public submissions can be made to the council during the period. The annual statement of revenue policy is essentially the annual budget and includes details of:

- Estimated income and expenditure
- Ordinary rates and special rates
- Proposed fees and charges
- The council's proposed pricing methodology
- Proposed borrowings.

The exhibition must be accompanied by a map showing where the various rates will apply within the local government area, and I am particularly looking forward to this as it has proved impossible to obtain this information during the last year. The council must accept and consider any submissions made on the draft Operational Plan before adopting the Operational Plan.

I am also interested to see what engagement processes Council uses to seek community feedback at this unusual time. The Office of Local Government has published an Engagement Guide for Local Government that can be found at:

<https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Guideline-For-Local-Govt-engagement.pdf>

### The introduction to the Guide says:

*'Our world has changed.*

*The public health restrictions associated with the management of COVID-19 mean that we need to do things differently. For councils, this means that in some cases we need to temporarily change the way we engage with our communities and stakeholders. We have prepared this engagement guide to help you navigate your engagement options under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act).'*

#### The Guide also states:

*'Before you do anything!*

As a council, you have an opportunity to reach out to your community and stakeholders and seek to understand how they can engage with you. This is not the time for assumptions. Reach out to your communities and stakeholders and ask the question.'

It is disappointing that the Guide only refers to councils' Planning engagement responsibilities, not those under the Local Government Act, but the Guide is equally applicable and includes the following proposed methods of engagement:

- Virtual public information sessions, workshops, meetings and focus group
- Webinar
- Mail out and other postal services
- Gamification
- Graphic recording
- QR codes & augmented reality
- Blogs
- Research
- Incentives to engage
- Live/work/ play maps
- Interactive mobile apps
- Virtual post it note walls
- Alternate radio
- Polling / voting
- Live chat
- Community notice boards — radio and TV
- Feedback cards
- Front window display
- Surveys

I look forward to seeing how Council intends to engage with the community.

Next week I will analyse the contents of the draft Operational Plan and budget 2020-2021.

I have received feedback that many people find these columns informative and I am happy to receive comments from readers about this column and other issues you would like me to cover so please either contact me at Orange City Life or [aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com](mailto:aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com)