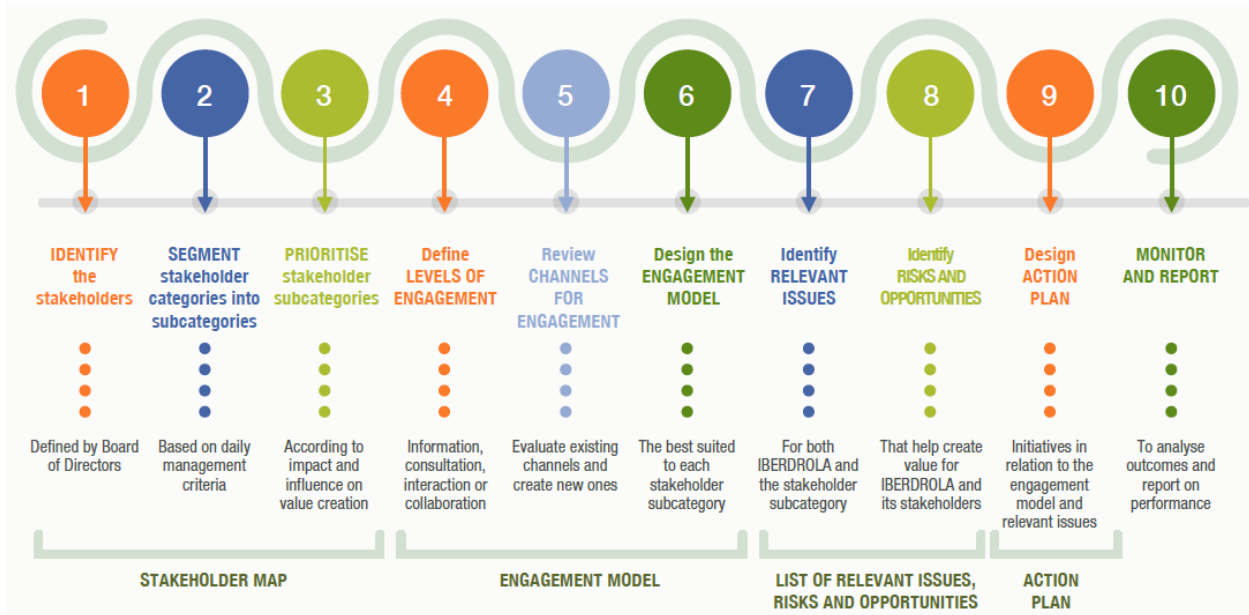Practice Area 4. Communicating and engaging with stakeholders

Option 2: Essay 'Medium-density housing consultation'

Figure 1.

IBERDROLA GROUP 2019. Stakeholder Engagement Model. Retrieved from
https://www.iberdrola.com/wcorp/gc/prod/en_US/conocenos/docs/Stakeholder_engagement_model.pdf

## Table of Content:

1 INTRODUCTION

This report sets out to demonstrate the capacity of a planner to communicate and engage with a variety of stakeholders using a diversity of approaches. It was given the task to communicate and engage with stakeholders about the Council's proposal to allow medium-density housing in existing low-density residential areas. In this scenario, the planner employed at Council is considered as a public servant, i.e. he or she represents shared values of the organisation (Council) rather than values of an individual. The primary objective of a Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions (Local Government Act, 1989, p. 19). There is no legislative requirement to have a community engagement strategy listed in this Act. However, the following changes are proposed to be included in regulations: engagement strategy must ensure that the community informs the engagement process, the community is given adequate information to participate, the scope/remit of the consultation and areas subject to influence are clear, and those engaged are representative of the council's demographic profile (Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2017, p. 4).

The timeframe to conduct consultation and analysis and report back to Council is three months. This report will maintain a focus of Melbourne middle-ring municipalities, as an example, where the majority of medium-density housing redevelopment occur, i.e. many conflicts arise. For example, Boroondara City Council is forecast to experience a strong increase in total dwelling approvals. Apartment approvals of four storey buildings and above have already surpassed the total 2017-201818 figures in the six months to December 2018 (UDIA Victoria, 2019, p. 23).

Stakeholders engagement is based on trust. The most efficient way to build trust is to set up a shared value base. Middle-ring LGA's values were investigated. Monash City Council values are accountability, respect, and teamwork. Maribyrnong City Council values

are respect, courage, and integrity. Moreland City Council values are customers and community first, respect, personal accountability, integrity, and one team. The most common values of middle-ring municipalities are respect, teamwork, accountability, and integrity. The engagement strategy aims to incorporate these values. These values are also consistent with the Community Engagement Strategy 'Principles Checklist' (Mosman Council,2016) as respect, commitment, accessibility, inclusiveness, etc. These values and principles have a purpose of trust-building to demonstrate that the Council shares the values with key stakeholders. Additionally, the consistent value proposition will ensure that key concerns of stakeholders are addressed (Strategyzer, 2019).
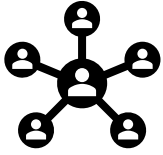
2 STAKEHOLDERS GROUPS

Stakeholders are 'those people who can influence how a decision is implemented, and who may be affected by the decision' (Bassler et al., 2008, p. 12). The following factors below are considered in the decision-making process. It is necessary to acknowledge that the percentage of medium-density housing is relatively low compared with detached houses and high-rise apartment delivered in metro Melbourne (UDIA Victoria, 2019, p.21). This trend causes associated issues with the infrastructure provision and construction industry. The construction industry is not prepared to deliver medium-density housing on an industrial basis. Having industrialisation medium-density housing areas will be designed as a medium-density city block surrounded by streets segregating this type of housing from other areas. This approach is different from a solitary medium-density building redevelopment surrounded by low-density residential areas within the same city block. Moreover, higher development density will result in increased pressures on engineering (gas, water, and electricity) and transport (the number of car parking places and street bandwidth) infrastructure. Further, energy efficiency and sustainability standards are applicable to apartments mostly. Globally these standards were developed in Europe where medium-density housing is the most popular housing type in metropolitan areas. There is a mismatch between these standards and low-density housing mode delivered in Melbourne. Also, there is a Policy 2.2.2 in Plan Melbourne (2017) to support affordable and social housing in appropriate locations (City of Boroondara 2015, p.64). Having all the considerations above, key stakeholders' groups are as follows (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2015, p.3, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2015, p.127):

• Municipal authorities (LGA and the State Department of Environment, Water and Energy (DELWP);

• Community housing organisations;

• Local community representatives based on inclusivity, diversity, and equality;

• Developers and investors involved medium-density housing projects;

• Architects and construction industry representatives;

• Transport and engineering consultants (LGA Infrastructure Department and DELWP); and

• Environment and energy efficiency consultants (DELWP).

Professional Academy (2016) acknowledges three groups of stakeholders internal, connected, and external. In the local government decision-making, LGA's employees are internal stakeholders who can influence how the decision will be implemented, local community representatives are external stakeholders who are affected by the decision, and all the rest are connected stakeholders who can help to influence how the decision will be implemented.
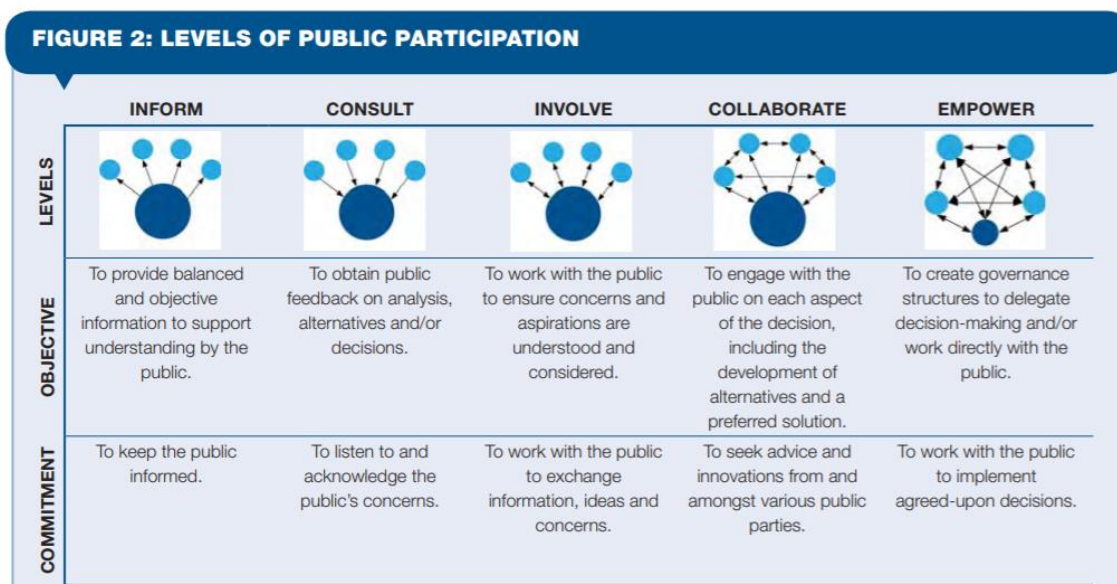
3 METHODS

Communication is a transfer of information, thoughts or ideas to create a shared understanding between a sender and a receiver. This process involves a sender, receiver, message, channel and feedback (Faculty of Health, 2013). The key issue raised regularly in communication situations is communication noise or misinterpretation. There are two major types of communication verbal and non-verbal. People trust the accuracy of nonverbal behaviours more than verbal behaviours (Carpenter et al., 2016). Therefore, face-to-face meetings, drop-in sessions, workshops, panels will limit the potential for misinterpretation. Similarly, there are two major levels of communication or engagement: one-way which is informing and two-way which is open for the conversation and feedback collection (Byrd, 2009, p. 63). As the stakeholder engagement aims to collect the feedback the two-way communication will limit the potential for misinterpretation having the direct input and reaction from key stakeholders (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. (*Victorian Auditor-General's Office. (2015). Public Participation in Government Decision-making. Retrieved from https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150130-Public-Participation-BPG.pdf

FIGURE 2: LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

LEVELS	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
OBJECTIVE	To provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To engage with the public on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and a preferred solution.	To create governance structures to delegate decision-making and/or work directly with the public.
COMMITMENT	To keep the public informed.	To listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns.	To work with the public to exchange information, ideas and concerns.	To seek advice and innovations from and amongst various public parties.	To work with the public to implement agreed-upon decisions.

The local government releases the draft of the Housing Strategy to collect the feedback using various levels of engagement, engagement channels, and communication methods which are shown for three stakeholders' groups in Table 1. The levels of engagement from Figure 2 are chosen to commit to two-way communication.

Table 1.

Indicators	Internal Stakeholders	Connected Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Levels	Involvement	Collaboration	Empowerment
Channels	**Internal** Emails Meetings Briefings E-newsletter	**Internal** + **External** including Social Media for skilled professionals (Twitter and LinkedIn)	**External** including Social Media for all groups of the population (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube)
Methods	Roundtable Discussions (focus groups) + Key Contact Interview (discussion)	Study Circles (action forum) + Delphi Technique (stimulate public debate) + Nominal Group Process (brainstorming)	Citizens Panels (jury) + Charrettes (workshops) + Community Task Forces (public meeting) + Electronic Methods of Deliberation

Communication methods presented in Table 1 were selected in accordance with 'A How-to Guide for Community Leaders' by Bassler et al. (2008, pp. 6-12) and Australian practical experience based on the following medium-density housing policies. ACT Government (2018) considered the following methods: written submissions, internet and social media (views on YourSay, visits to website, views of YouTube video, social media posts), stakeholder and community and industry workshops, stakeholder presentations to each of key stakeholders groups, kiosk engagements, postcards, online survey, and YourSay website. City of Whittlesea (2013, p. 15) used the following methods: focus groups, design workshops, pop up workshops, drop-in sessions, meetings with community groups, radio broadcasts, and newspaper articles. Moreland City Council (2018, pp.9-11) approached the following methods: literature review, building occupant survey, case

studies, interviews with architects and building designers, internal workshop and inspections of completed developments, external workshops and forums, and review of resources allocated to medium-density housing.

These methods have limitations and could create biased results unless the following aspects are considered (Bassler, 2008, pp. 6-12): to provide an atmosphere of trust and equality, to ensure selection process represents diversity, and to provide the universal access to all groups of population or inclusivity. These aspects are highlighted in more detail in the next section.

4 ENGAGEMENT

'Citizens of a community are "engaged" when they play an effective role in decision-making. That means they are actively involved in defining the issues, identifying solutions, and developing priorities for action and resources' (Bassler et al., 2008, p. 12). Therefore, it is necessary to measure an engagement rate (Hootsuite,2019) as a result of implementing stakeholders engagement strategy to reveal the most effective methods and channels. These methods and channels will help to evaluate success and enable improvements to the strategy.

Research in Victoria showed that most council consultations engage only a small section of the community that is often not representative of the council's demographic profile (ISF,2015, p.23). Therefore, the principles of inclusivity, diversity, and equality are used as key aspects of the community engagement strategy. Past negative communication experiences, lack of knowledge, lack of access to the information channels, and cultural context can limit involvement by some groups (Bassler, 2008, p.4). The engagement strategy aims to reach out to people with restricted participation to ensure the views of the stakeholders are fairly represented and enhance the level of empowerment, i.e. to empower and integrate people from different backgrounds. Principles listed in 'A How-to Guide for Community Leaders' transparency, legitimacy, deliberation, substance, influence, on-going, and accommodating are incorporated into engagement strategy to ensure effective stakeholders' participation and high engagement rate.

The local community has the weakest position among other stakeholders as this is the group of people who are affected by the decision and have limited tools to influence. The potential power imbalance is addressed via the stakeholder's groups prioritisation. Stakeholders groups are prioritised in accordance with the 'end user' concept, i.e. views of external stakeholders' (local community) are the most important as the local community will use the area after the redevelopment. In accordance with Boroondara Housing Strategy

(2015), Housing Choices Discussion Paper (ACT, 2018), and Housing Diversity Strategy (City of Whittlesea, 2013) most citizens support medium-density housing. However, the community raised key issues via the consultation process. They are a lack of housing affordability, a lack of housing choice, poor housing design quality including universal accessibility for all groups of the population, loss of native vegetation, traffic congestion and lack of parking in local streets, the necessity for the infrastructure upgrades, and associated planning scheme amendments. These issues should be addressed in the final draft of Housing Strategy with development alternatives. The second round of the community consultation should be done to identify the preferred solution.

It is evident from key issues raised by the community that key concerns are the project design and project delivery. The community supports the idea of medium-density housing. However, the implementation of this idea is a subject of a good variety of housing choices, qualitative design accessible for all groups of the population, sufficient infrastructure provision, car parking, landscape, and planning scheme regulations in place to ensure a smooth development approval process. Therefore, the complex situations will occur in communication with internal and connected stakeholders to address project design and project delivery issues: DELWP, community housing organisations, developers and investors, architects and construction industry representatives, transport and engineering consultants, and environment and energy efficiency consultants. This will be communication between professionals with various skill sets. To negotiate potentially conflict and complex situations the planner would employ the following communication strategy (Byrd, 2009, p.21): bring together all of the participants, ask the participants if they agree to the conditions for successful resolution of conflicts, develop a list of objective statements that are background to the conflict that everyone can agree with, develop a limited number of expectations for resolving the conflict, ask each participant to suggest a way to resolve the conflict, evaluate how each suggestion meets the expectations, identify the suggestion preferred by most participants, and modify this suggestion to meet the needs of all participants.

Additionally, areas of difficulty in the medium-density housing scenario are highlighted in the literature review. The international literature review on medium-density

housing issues (Allen, Bryson, 2018, p.16) states that Australian studies tend to focus on intensification typologies, changing demographics, liveability issues, and preferences or affordability issues. Another popular research theme is the policy issues, i.e. changes in local and state legislation to deliver medium-density housing mode. Regularly legislation changes are made via planning scheme amendments to address rezoning, design and development controls, height controls, and potential overlooking and overshadowing issues which may arise. To address these legislation changes the planner will assess policy and development implications using a SWOT analysis (City of Port Phillip, 2011, p.15).

5 CONCLUSION

This report demonstrated the capacity of a planner to communicate and engage with a variety of stakeholders using a diversity of approaches on medium-density housing consultation example. Key stakeholders are determined in section two. Methods of communication and reasoning for the choice of these methods with their limitations are described in section three. The potential power imbalance, critical reflection about areas of difficulty, and issues what would constitute best practice for fairness and equity are drawn in section four. This report had demonstrated the capacity of the planner to communicate and engage with a variety of stakeholders using a diversity of approaches to ensure that stakeholders are actively involved in defining the issues, identifying solutions, and developing priorities for action and resources.
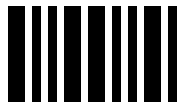
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