

INTRODUCTION

Urban development is a complex undertaking that inevitably impacts the everyday life of individuals and communities. Recognising the responsibility that our actions entail, we choose to operate under a model of long-term stewardship, where critical thinking about how places are made, inhabited and sustained is valued. Public participation is a significant part of Molonglo's development process. It helps us to better understand how our development projects can deliver the broadest benefits and reflect a shared vision of the future.

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

We define public participation as the practice of actively seeking and facilitating the involvement of people in decisions that will affect them. It requires us to identify a specific set of stakeholders for each project and create participation tools and methodologies that are most appropriate to the audience and context.

Molonglo pushes beyond the standard approach of informing and consulting with stakeholders. Instead, we create spaces for the public to be more directly involved with the development process. By reframing local people as the experts and facilitating purposeful engagement with critical thinkers from different demographics and backgrounds, public participation can deliver real benefits to individual participants, the wider neighbourhood, a development project and the developer.

WHY WE DO IT

Molonglo undertakes public participation to achieve the following:

- Understand needs and develop project briefs that are more responsive.
- Communicate the benefits of a project and be transparent about challenges.
- Build trust and lay the foundation for positive long-term relationships.
- Gather feedback and a range of perspectives to inform and challenge approaches.
- Identify new opportunities as a design develops.
- Build consensus.

OUR APPROACH

Site-specific

Molonglo's public participation strategies are site-specific. The best results are derived from tools and methods that are custom-designed for each context. Our approach is inherently collaborative, curious and cross-disciplinary.

Who is missing?

To identify primary and secondary stakeholders, we begin by asking a series of questions. Who lives here? Who works here? Who has a connection to the land? Who is missing and

who needs access? Which civic organisations support the local community?

By understanding these nuances, we are able to design and invest in a range of ways and spaces for people to participate that are inclusive and layered, maximising their reach.

Mixed-method

Molonglo uses a range of participation methods, drawing from a diverse toolkit of ideas that we constantly add to. Past Molonglo public participation programs have included targeted engagement with community groups, drop-in spaces and mobile installations, roundtable discussions, exhibitions, design presentations, electronic surveys, neighbourhood surveys, public event series and symposia, advisory groups, thematic working groups and artist commissions.

Slow is better

We understand that places evolve and lessons are learned, especially on large projects. As a result, meaningful public participation requires an appropriate investment of both time and money. Molonglo is committed to taking the time to properly talk, share, reflect and respond.

Ongoing evaluation

The public participation approach for a project should be subject to constant evaluation and re-evaluation. For Molonglo, this includes evaluating the information collected within each public participation activity and evaluating the effectiveness of a public participation process, in order to refine and improve our approach over time.

Transparent

Transparency is crucial to ensuring that participants understand the extent and impact of their involvement. We communicate clear “rules of engagement” for our public participation programs and will continue to document and share the outcomes of these activities through transparent reporting.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE

Make Good Neighbourhood

Dairy Road is a neighbourhood slowly developing in Canberra’s East Lake, currently made up of warehouses, some office buildings and vehicle yards. Molonglo is currently developing the masterplan and conceptual layout for the 14-hectare site. Our vision is for an interconnected and diverse neighbourhood that emerges over the next 10 to 15 years.

Make Good Neighbourhood was a public exhibition and series of events on neighbourhood building generally, but also a forum for community input into the future of the Dairy Road precinct. Taking place in August and September 2018, we sought to better understand the wants and needs of all Canberrans by having as many conversations as possible (roughly 600 all up). The program’s methodology included an exhibition, survey, public events, roundtables, commissions and drop-in sessions. Learnings were recorded and are publicly accessible.

In September 2020, an extension of the Make Good Neighbourhood program, Possible Futures, shared our evolving vision for Dairy Road with the public through a series of online talks, site tours and a physical drop-in space.

Rupert Street

Located at 81-89 Rupert Street in Collingwood, Walk Up Village is a 2,000 square-metre site that will support an interconnected web of uses, including workspace, retail, accommodation, social and cultural tenancies. A densely planted ‘ravine’ will create a public circulation route through two buildings, encompassing a network of streets in the sky that interweave between different spaces and uses, culminating in a public rooftop garden.

From March 2018 to May 2019, Molonglo undertook a public participation program to understand the complexity of the neighbourhood surrounding the site and facilitate public input to the project. The program looked at different tension points among residents and workers, current and predicted economic trends, local opinions on gentrification, Indigenous history, botanical landscape and environmental sustainability. It did this through research and analysis, public events, group discussions and one-on-one conversations, which were documented and distilled in a publicly available [report](#).

In October 2021, we hosted an accessibility roundtable with a range of participants to identify opportunities to make Walk Up Village more enjoyable and functional for people with non-normative bodyminds. Insights from the roundtable will inform aspects of the design as well as approaches to future Molonglo projects.