

Case Study: Environmental sustainability strategy

COUNCIL NAME

City of Parramatta Council

WEB ADDRESS

www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

84 square kilometres

POPULATION

243,276

Overview

The City of Parramatta is experiencing a period of significant growth and transformation. Currently home to more than 245,000 people, the population is estimated to increase to 400,000 by 2036. Recognising the need to manage this growth for the benefit of both existing and future communities, the Environmental Sustainability Strategy outlines key sustainability priorities to ensure that as the City grows, better quality of life is created, not just for people, but for all living things.

Background

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy was developed to address the key challenge of managing both existing environmental pressures, as well as those posed by increased development across a growing Local Government Area. It addresses key community concerns surrounding growth, the need for shared green spaces and improved transport, and the need for a holistic approach to development that sees the environment, the economy, and other social infrastructure improved at the same time.

The City of Parramatta is transforming at a rapid pace, with a forecasted growth in population of approximately 62% over the next 20 years and an equally significant increase in transient population to the area for work and leisure. Parramatta is experiencing unprecedented city-scale infrastructure investment. By 2038, the number of dwellings in the City is expected to rise by 50%, with a significant increase in high-density living.

Major new developments such as Parramatta Square, Westmead precinct, and the light rail are also underway. While this growth will bring significant benefit to the City and the Sydney Region, it will also bring a number of challenges, that with careful planning and commitment, can be turned into opportunities for more environmentally and socially sustainable city.

The Strategy provides a clear direction for the planning and mitigation of more extreme weather events, incorporating adaptive design, greening to mitigate against heat, sophisticated flood warning systems, and improving the capacity and resilience of our communities. The Strategy also supports the sustainability priorities in the Greater Sydney Commission's Central City District Plan, particularly with regards to working to reduce urban heat, improving waterway health, and investigating opportunities for high efficiency and low carbon precincts.

Implementation

The development of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy involved 2 key processes which followed a cyclical process as the Strategy was developed and refined.

a) Review of the current situation - a solid understanding of the current situation and the potential to create opportunities for improvement was critical. Extensive data collection and analysis established a baseline for carbon emissions, energy and water consumption for the LGA. Existing plans and programs were also examined to enable modelling of future scenarios so that the strategy had a strong evidence base.



b) Identification of Opportunities – in addition to drawing on staff expertise, Council also examined what other comparable cities and leaders in sustainability were doing to learn from them. External subject matter experts were also engaged to assist in outlining pathways that are both ambitious and achievable.

c) Community and Stakeholder Engagement – strategy development involved extensive and ongoing engagement with both internal and external stakeholders. Council developed a targeted engagement program which included 28 subject matter experts from the community, industry and government, a workshop with 30 internal staff, and 37 individual internal meetings to discuss key priorities, needs and opportunities. Given the Strategy's wide audience, Council engaged communications and design professionals to help ensure that the Strategy was inclusive to its full audience.

The budget for development of the Strategy, including modelling, technical assistance, engagement activities, communications and design, was \$120,000 over a six-month period.



Outcomes

The City of Parramatta Environmental Sustainability Strategy addresses fifteen key environmental topics outlining 20 goals and 98 actions to be delivered over a four-year period and beyond. The actions within the Strategy will be reviewed over four yearly cycles and updated to align with budget cycles and Council terms, to ensure that it remains current and responsive to the needs of the City and its communities.

Since the adoption of the Strategy in July 2017, Council has endorsed a 3-year implementation plan including short and medium term resourcing, and integrated the priorities of the Strategy within Council's key strategic documents. The inclusion of priorities and actions within these documents ensure that they are allocated resourcing and are included in Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting.

Implementation of over 50 of the 98 actions in the Strategy have either commenced or will be delivered as part of the 2018/19 Operational Plan. The details of these activities and their outcomes is currently being compiled for the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Progress Report, which is scheduled for completion alongside Council's Annual Report by 30 November.

Some of the key outcomes achieved include:

- delivery of energy and water efficiency upgrades at multiple sites, including installation of Solar PV systems at an additional 5 Council sites

- Participation in the Our Energy Future Program and the delivery of energy efficiency audits at 40 households and free solar PV advice
- Facilitation of recognised environmental events associated with World Environment Day, Ride to Work Day, National Tree Day, Plastic Free July, National Recycling Week, and Clean-up Australia Day.
- launch of the inaugural Sustainability Awards program with the awarding of the Environmental Citizen Award
- delivery of multiple environmental education programs including Sustainable Living Workshops, nature walks and talks. Compost Revolution and Grow Our Own Food (GOOF) initiatives, environmental grants for local primary schools, and extensive reuse, recycling and repair workshops across community
- delivery of Smart City initiatives such as improved flood monitoring systems, real time solar PV monitoring across 7 sites, and the installation of Smart Bins in key locations.
- Established partnerships with UNSW and WSU to monitor temperatures and radiant heat across the City

Key Learnings

The development and implementation of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy has provided several learnings for Council, particularly around the importance of monitoring and reporting, alignment and accountability, and collaboration and communication.

In compiling the baseline for the Strategy, Council encountered challenges around the level and quality of data available for the different areas of research. While general consumption data for both energy and water at council assets was available, gathering data for new sites post amalgamation proved difficult as did gathering data to calculate overall baselines for other environmental factors such as material use, litter and others. Recognising these gaps, the Strategy includes actions to improve data capture processes.

Council already had significant plans and programs in place which related to sustainability but it became evident that resourcing and alignment with Council plans or broader regional plans were critical for long term success. The Strategy therefore brought together and built on these existing plans and policies, and inclusion of priorities and actions from the Strategy in Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan, and the broader Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework also ensures accountability and resourcing to achievement targets and ensure continuity of programs.

Strategy development also provided learnings around effective communication and engagement. Involving key stakeholders throughout the process meant that Council was able to incorporate the full breadth of the knowledge and insight available, but also presented challenges around managing expectations. Clear communications around capacity and scope meant that these expectations were able to be managed.

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This project was the 2018 winner of the Local Sustainability Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards