



**ST PETERS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC.**

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Representing the Residents of St Peters, College Park, Hackney, Stepney, Maylands, Evandale & Joslin.

# Code of Practice - Access to Meetings & Documents

SPRA Response to Consultation

Reference: [https://www.npsp.sa.gov.au/about\\_council/community\\_consultation](https://www.npsp.sa.gov.au/about_council/community_consultation)

## Introduction

Firstly, SPRA would like to congratulate the council on improving public access to development application documents which are now consolidated into folders at the Town Hall.

In respect of the draft processes for improving access to meetings and documents SPRA would like to make the following comments.

## Confidentiality Provisions

SPRA has noted the draft approach on the use of confidentiality provisions. During the past twelve months SPRA has experienced frustration in endeavouring to access reports withheld due to an interpretation that these reports contain “commercially sensitive information”. SPRA is aware of the provision to allow for a review of such decisions in accordance with council policy. SPRA would like to see that all appeals requesting a review of council decisions in regard to the release of reports be carried out by an independent external body or person.

## Council Briefings

SPRA support council staff providing briefings to council members so that they are better informed, but are concerned that staff may be invoking unnecessary confidentiality clauses in these briefings which prevent council members from discussing issues with residents and others to seek wider advice. The declaration of matters being confidential also bars residents from attending the briefing or workshop sessions.

## Councillor Access to Documents

SPRA is concerned that councillors may not be aware of their rights to access documents held by council and this may be impacting their ability to be effective in their role. SPRA is aware that residents have documents released under freedom of information that councillors were not aware they could request. SPRA would like the Code of Practice amended to include a section setting out the rights of councillors to access documents.

# Freedom of Information

Currently on the website, a visitor must drill down through Home > About Council > Governance > Freedom of Information to find the page:

[https://www.npsp.sa.gov.au/about\\_council/governance/freedom\\_of\\_information](https://www.npsp.sa.gov.au/about_council/governance/freedom_of_information). This page contains only a brief summary of how to request a particular document. SPRA notes that other councils, government organisations and others subject to Freedom of Information requests list the documents that have been provided under Freedom of Information. Providing a list of requests and links to the documents provided would increase transparency and reduce load on the council staff. The listing of such requests should be readily available on the website, and kept up to date, on the Council website, and not relegated to the Annual Report.

## Council Meetings

SPRA has observed that the minutes of council meetings do not contain the content of deputations that are made to council. This means that people who did not attend the meeting are unaware of the matter being raised by the person. SPRA would like to see the detail of the deputation included in the minutes.

During COVID, council meetings were streamed online, but this practice has now ceased. SPRA believes that streaming meetings online would increase transparency and enable greater community participation. SPRA suggests that streaming the main display showing the agenda / minutes with audio would be sufficient.

## Budget Information

SPRA is concerned about the financial position of the council and the recent history of projects running over budget (e.g. Norwood Oval upgrade, St Peters Street upgrade, George Street upgrade, Payneham Pool upgrade). SPRA would like to see that the current state of major projects is reported in a format that makes it easy for residents to understand the initial budget, increases in budget, current spend and anticipated remaining costs. This is particularly important for projects that run over multiple financial years. SPRA would like to see explanatory notes as to the reasons behind changes to the costing of projects and data used in the long term financial plan. Such reporting should be on at least a quarterly basis.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.

David Cree  
President, St Peters Residents Association  
16 August 2024