



**SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDE TO
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**
A FOCUS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Who are we?

The Retirement Living Council (RLC) is the national leadership group of the retirement living sector, championing policies that deliver more senior Australians purpose-built age-friendly homes and services in retirement communities. The RLC is the representative voice for the sector, harnessing the expertise of both not-for-profit and commercial village owners and developers. RLC is a specialist division of the Property Council of Australia. Together, both entities represent more than 100 retirement community owners, operators and developers, as well as associate members with a direct interest in the retirement living sector. RLC members currently operate across 60,000 independent living units which house hundreds of thousands of older Australians who call retirement communities' home.

For more information on RLC activities visit www.propertycouncil.com.au/RLC

Acknowledgement of Country

The RLC acknowledges the tens of thousands of years of continuous custodianship and placemaking by First Nations peoples and their proud role in our shared future.

We thank them for their custodianship of Country – land, seas and skies.

We acknowledge the diversity of First Nations cultures, histories and peoples. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Ahead of the 2022 Victorian State Election, the Retirement Living Council (RLC) released a local guide for retirement village developers, operators and managers on how to engage with elected federal, state and local representatives and other political candidates during election campaigns.

Local government is the most pervasive level of government. For this reason, it is in everyone's interest for retirement village developers, operators, managers and residents to have a good working relationship with the Mayor, local Councillors and Council officers.

This document is prepared as a supplement to the federal, state and local election guide and:

- ▶ provides more specific detail about the role of local governments and explains key terms
- ▶ identifies how local governments can support healthy ageing and retirement living communities
- ▶ outlines the role of local Councils in town planning and approving the development of retirement villages
- ▶ answers common questions from village managers and operators about how to engage with elected local government representatives and candidates during an election.



Above: *A Guide to Political Engagement: How to be a strong advocate for healthy ageing*. The guide can be found on this link – <https://tinyurl.com/bde55tv3>

Key Terms

Local Government Area (LGA) – a defined geographic area for which a local Council is responsible. It can encompass multiple suburbs or localities with different postcodes.

Council – the local government body – made up of elected representatives and staff – that supports the delivery of Council services and the enforcement of local government laws. Their powers vary from state to state but are governed by Acts of State Parliament.

City, Shire, Borough – names used to describe the decision-making body of local government. For example, Melbourne City Council, Sutherland Shire Council or Borough of Queenscliffe.

Ward or division – the name given to a part of an LGA. Each ward or division is represented by one or more elected Councillors depending on their size. For example, the City of Newcastle has four wards represented by 12 Councillors.

Councillor (Cr) or Alderman (Ald) – the elected representatives of a Council. This is different to the title – Member of Parliament (MP) – given to elected state and federal political representatives.

Mayor, Lord Mayor or Shire President – the leader of a Council.

Administrator – an individual legally appointed by a State Government to replace and perform the duties of an elected Mayor and Councillors. There have been a number of instances in recent years where State Governments have appointed Administrators to replace poorly performing Councils.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) / Council General Manager – oversees the day-to-day management of the Council and its services in accordance with its strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies and advises the Mayor and Councillors on all Council-related issues. They are not political representatives like Councillors and are appointed by Council based on their management and leadership expertise.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Australia has three levels of government – local, state and federal. All six Australian states and the Northern Territory have local Councils. The Australian Capital Territory is the only jurisdiction not to have a separate system of local government.



1 Federal Government



8 State and Territory Governments



537 Local Councils

There are 537¹ local Councils overseeing communities across Australia. They are the grassroots level of government because they operate closest to their citizens.

Local governments are typically responsible for making and enforcing local laws and providing services such as:

- ▶ town planning and development approvals
- ▶ building approvals and inspections
- ▶ footpaths, cycle ways, street signage and lighting
- ▶ waste management, including rubbish collection and recycling
- ▶ recreational facilities such as parks, sports fields and swimming pools
- ▶ cultural facilities, including local libraries and festivals
- ▶ local roads, traffic, transport (i.e., local bus services) and parking
- ▶ pet permits, noise complaints and pest management.

Councils fund these services from income generated through property rates and other fees and charges.

Planning and development

Local Councils are responsible for setting, administering and enforcing town planning legislation, including determining land use zoning and approving development applications. Some Councils are more pro-development than others, with some Councils becoming increasingly hostile to approving certain types of developments, such as retirement villages.

It is important that retirement village developers, operators and managers build relationships with their local Mayors, Councillors and political candidates to remind them that your local retirement village has a good story to tell. One that offers significant opportunities for all governments, especially with regards to providing better and more affordable health and aged care policy solutions, meaningful climate action, local economic benefits and building local housing supply (capacity and capability).

Retirement living communities are located within the geographical boundaries of an LGA. You can find the Council, ward or division in which your village is located on your state or territory electoral commission website (see Handy resources on page 8).

¹ <https://alga.com.au/facts-and-figures/>

SHARED INTERESTS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND RETIREMENT LIVING COMMUNITIES

It's good politics for local Councillors to proactively support the delivery of more affordable age-friendly housing choices in their communities.

In dealing with dual challenges of an ageing population and climate change, age-friendly design and planning policy presents local decisionmakers with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve the socially and financially sustainable – and low carbon – future to which we all aspire.² Indeed, the right homes in the right areas enable people to live healthy and happy lives, driving growth for all and preventing public service challenges and costs.³

While it is important to recognise some of the older residents are as local as the streetscape, other reasons why local politicians should work hard to deliver more affordable and accessible age-friendly communities, include:

- ▶ About 7.4 million people were aged 55 and over in 2021,⁴ which is about 29 per cent of the population and 38 per cent of potential eligible voters.
- ▶ The over 55 years-of-age cohort own about 60 per cent of Australian households' net worth, including 51 per cent of the value of residential dwellings and land (i.e., biggest local investors).⁵
- ▶ About 76 per cent of people aged 65 and over are local homeowners (i.e., direct local ratepayers), with 12 per cent renters (i.e., indirect ratepayers) and the remaining 11 per cent in other tenure arrangements.⁶
- ▶ Health and aged care services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively to older Australians who live in age-friendly communities.⁷
- ▶ Specialist retirement properties create more local economic value and more local jobs than any other type of residential housing, while also reducing local congestion.⁸
- ▶ It is difficult to contemplate a form of development that could be more "sustainable" than retirement housing.⁹
- ▶ Seniors who "right-size" into age-friendly communities will often free up older housing stock, typically larger homes, that are more suitable for young families.

² Homes and Communities Agency (UK). (2009). The Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI Final Report).

³ Local Government Association, UK. (2016). Building our homes, communities and future (The LGA Housing Commission Final Report). December.

⁴ ABS. (2022). Census of Population and Housing: Population Data summary, 2021 (Table 3. Age by Sex). 28 June.

⁵ ABS. (2022). Australian National Accounts: Distribution of Household income, Consumption and Wealth (Table 1 Household (excluding non-profit institutions serving households) income, consumption and wealth, by household distributional indicator, \$millions, current prices). 13 December

⁶ The Treasury. (2020). Retirement Income Review (Final Report). July

⁷ Productivity Commission. (2011). Caring for Older Australians (Inquiry Report). Volume 2, No. 53.

⁸ Walker, C. (2021). Silver saviours for the high street: How new retirement properties create more local economic value and more local jobs than any other type of residential housing (A report by WPI Strategy for Homes for Later Living). February.

⁹ All Parliamentary Group on Housing and Aged Care for Older People (UK). (2016). Housing our ageing population: Positive ideas (HAPPI 3 – Making retirement Living a Positive Choice). June.

How local governments can support healthy ageing and retirement living communities

Local governments are responsible for the delivery of key services residents and villages use on a regular basis such as local public transport and waste collection.

Typically, local governments are also responsible for developing and implementing land use plans at the local level, which means Councils process the vast majority of development applications, including for retirement villages.

The types of issues Councils and local Councillors could help retirement village operators or residents with include:

- ▶ lack of recognition or compensation on rates bills for village operators that maintain local roads, footpaths, streetlights and rubbish collection, as well as grass verges outside homes
- ▶ long-term leaseholder residents who do not hold freehold title for their property are ineligible for seniors/age pensioner Council rates rebates
- ▶ availability of land for the development of age-friendly communities in well-located areas that are near transport, shopping and community, health and aged care services
- ▶ review planning regulations to facilitate and encourage development of local age-friendly communities in the neighbourhoods that older people live
- ▶ reduce red tape and decision-maker bias for development approvals.

Local government representatives can also act as advocates for residents and communities on issues that fall outside their responsibility, such as in-home health care (federal government responsibility), or disaster recovery support (state and federal government responsibility).

“Age-specific housing development is often disadvantaged relative to other housing or commercial development. Planning rules that constrain the development of smaller, higher density residential properties inhibit downsizing, and innovative housing proposals often face NIMBY opposition.

The desire of most older people to age in place strongly signals a need for revision of state and local government planning regimes, to reduce the barriers to the supply of new housing options. Reforms in this area could potentially deliver the greatest gains in affordability and diversity of housing options for older Australians.”

– Productivity Commission, 2015



CASE STUDY

BEST PRACTICE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLANNING POLICY IN ACTION

Brisbane City Council is the largest local government in Australia with 26 Wards and 27 Councillors. It serves a population of 1.2 million people living in 190 mainland suburbs within a 1,343km² geographic footprint. The Council has several planning policies and programmes to actively encourage more inner suburban retirement village and aged care developments.

Recognising a future shortfall, several years' ago Council broadcast a clear message that it wanted more age-friendly communities in inner-city suburbs close to key amenities and services. To facilitate this, changes to the City Plan were made to encourage the development of more age-friendly communities.

To make local investment more attractive, Council offered a 33 per cent reduction in infrastructure charges and an additional two storeys height threshold in medium and high-density locations. To reduce red tape and cut decision-making wait times, the Development Approval (DA) process was streamlined. This included the provision of free pre-lodgement advice, a dedicated assessment manager and a decision on applications for age-friendly communities within 90 business days. Put simply, when developers saved time and money this made age-friendly communities more affordable. Additionally, a new code for assessing aged care and retirement DAs now allows small-scale commercial, retail and community uses (e.g., cafes, childcare and shops), while co-location with key social support infrastructure (e.g., sport and recreation facilities, churches, community and medical care) is actively encouraged. While all of this makes the business case more attractive, it also locks-in functional design features that optimise independence, health and wellbeing for future residents, as well as significant and ongoing cost-of-living savings.

SOURCES: Brisbane City Council. (2022). Retirement and Aged Care Incentives Scheme. | Grant-Campbell, H. (2018). Lord Mayor's 'sweeteners' for senior-living developments (The Senior). 28 June.



“Appropriate housing underpins the wellbeing of older Australians and reduces health and pension costs by facilitating social participation; reducing demand on health services including mental health services; enabling effective delivery of community aged care; [and] using housing equity to supplement retirement incomes and help pay for services. Maintaining independent living for as long as possible is an important priority for most older people. Older Australians' health, mobility and desire to maintain connection with friends, family and support determines where they want to live. However, this is constrained by the availability and affordability of suitable housing.”

– Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians, 2011

ANSWERS TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do I do if an elected Mayor, Councillor, Alderman or political candidate calls me during a local government election campaign?

Take their call.

If the purpose of their call is to introduce themselves, take the opportunity to find out what they know about the retirement living sector. If they call during an election campaign, find out what they're promising for older Australians and their housing needs.

Consider the key points you would tell them about your village and the benefits of age-friendly communities like yours which include:

- ▶ optimising happiness, health, and wellbeing outcomes for older Australians
- ▶ significantly reducing illness and injury for residents and visitors thereby relieving pressure on the health system
- ▶ delaying entry into residential aged care
- ▶ contributing to the local economy.

Use the conversation to share two or three challenges faced by residents and the retirement living sector that local governments can help with, such as those outlined in the previous section.

Obtain the postal address or email from the elected representative or candidate so that you can send them further information or invite them to visit your village.

You can find an example invitation letter that you can customise and send on this link – <https://tinyurl.com/2kx6fja2>

What do I do if a Mayor, Councillor or political candidate wants to visit my village?

Say yes.

Hosting a visit from an elected local government representative or political candidate is a great opportunity to promote your village and to raise issues of importance to your residents and the retirement living sector more broadly.

Set a date and time when you know residents will be available. It may coincide with a regular social event hosted at the village. Most residents are ratepayers and voters, which is why elected representatives and candidates want to hear from them.

You can find a checklist to help you plan and conduct a successful visit on this link – <https://tinyurl.com/34vfrax8>

Handy resources

- ▶ How to find my retirement village's local Council – <https://tinyurl.com/2ft6vrz3>
- ▶ The correct way to address Mayors and Councillors – <https://tinyurl.com/hukvc27j>

Who do I contact if I have a planning inquiry?

In the first instance contact your local Councillor's office (see Handy resources above). Depending on the complexity of your question they may be able to assist you themselves or they may need to refer you to experts in your local Council's planning division. If you are referred on, request the name, phone number and email of the best person to assist you with your issue. You will then have a point of contact for current and future planning queries.

Further background information and more detailed advice on engaging with local government representatives and election candidates can be found in *A Guide to Political Engagement: How to be a strong advocate for healthy ageing on this link* – <https://tinyurl.com/bde55tv3>

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