

RESPONSE ON DRAFT POLICY: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (PP) SWELLENDAM MUNICIPALITY (24 PAGES)

25 November 2025

OVERVIEW

In summary this policy is quite comprehensive and addresses several issues which should clarify communication between relevant parties concerning municipal service delivery within the Swellendam municipal area, including the towns of Swellendam, Barrydale and settlements such as Suurbraak, Infanta/Malgas, Buffeljags and rural agricultural areas.

The purpose, scope and objectives are stated clearly albeit in a very *legalese* manner. This approach raises the concern that, in its present form, it would generally be difficult to read. Within the first chapters it became clear that the level of language was above the average level of education and reasonable interpretation to be expected from within the target community and even the average councillor. This was further exacerbated by using words out of context which increases possibilities of misinterpretation.

Some examples illustrate the problem:

- The *object* of local.... Instead of *objective*
- Chapter 10 *expounds*.... The basic values.... Instead of *explains/clarify*
- ...principles ...*enshrined* in it... Instead of *contained* in it....
- *Promulgate* legislation... Instead of *promote* or *make widely known*...

FURTHER COMMENTS

Chapter 1: Intro to PP in local government (P5-8)

To achieve these objectives will require a paradigm shift from both parties (Municipality & Community) which has to include educating ALL involved, in detail to obtain any form of useful result.

Chapter 2: What is PP?

Given the progress over the past 30+ years and the present status of PP, this is a major challenge. In order to improve the perceived benchmarks, this could take a number of years. Changing the present situation: Transparency and accessibility (*the quality of being easy to approach, reach, enter, speak with, use or understand*) is a major challenge!!

SMA (Swellendam Municipal Area)

Barrydale ✦ Buffelsjags ✦ Malgas ✦ Stormsvlei ✦ Suurbraak ✦ Swellendam

We communicate in 3 languages, predominantly English, but are prepared to translate to Afrikaans or isiXhosa on request

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Point 3.1.1.3: Swellendam Budget Strategic Summit:

An impressive description for a country town the size of Swellendam.

The prescriptive nature of nominated participants is not achieving the required results. It is clearly an orchestrated, selected group and past experience has proved that outside inputs are not considered nor valued, even if serious discrepancies and errors have been identified. Are these nominations *appointments* or *democratically elected representatives*?

Point 3.1.1.4: Electronic and printed media:

This medium of communication does not function and has to be revised and adapted to be made accessible and practical. The requirement to pay for such an IDP document is just not acceptable, affordable or practical. (Page 13) In addition, the present system where numerous inputs are selectively ignored, has to change. Members from the community who submit inputs on any subject to Swellendam Municipality have to receive a response.

Page 16/24: What guarantee is there that personal information will be kept confidential? Refer the ID numbers of signatories of any Petition.

Consultation Page 17/24: The IDP Document in its present format is impractical, expensive to produce and distribute, is not read in any way and thus seen as insignificant wasteful expenditure. Thus, it needs a complete redesign in an A4 format (max 1-2 pages) with relevant information that the man in the street can understand in a meaningful presentation. Given the diversity of the residential population and the fact that literacy and comprehension is a challenge, a more effective method needs to be determined.

Page 18/24 Para 3.4: Untrue.

Chapter 5: Page 22/24: Communication:

In summary, communications in general, are in dire need of a complete overhaul and largely outdated and ineffective for two-way communication.

For instance, close to 100% of inhabitants interacting with SM (accounts, services, etc) utilise cellphones and are thus contactable. Cell phones were introduced about 1996. Yet, SM 2025, has still to complete a database!!!

In addition, the SAPO is defunct and does little (if any) postal deliveries. However, SM still mail important notices such as property valuations to ratepayers.

Pertinent points:

1. All public meetings need to be recorded and Minutes distributed (Electronically)
2. Priority IDP items to be budgeted as “no funds available” is unacceptable as an excuse as these meetings are normally pre-budget. Consider including a maximum cost?
3. Community obtained alternative quotes to be considered where municipal items appear excessive.

Conclusion

The draft policy is a step in the right direction but the present format and content needs an overhaul. The prescriptive participation does nothing for democratic values, and impartiality is missing. If residents are not allowed to speak freely and get feedback on any subject raised, two-way communication is dead in the water.

Furthermore, the draft policy in its present format does not outline a specific strategy to achieve the stated objectives and improve the public participation process to become a meaningful management tool. Unfortunately, in its present format, it is more of a legal guide which is guaranteed not to be read by the residents from the outset. That is the only certainty that can be deduced.

It is thus proposed that the strategy be revised and be based on a more ontological approach with a view to being universally acceptable by the target community.

In addition, and this is the second most important factor to ensure success: the manner in which Swellendam Municipality responds to inputs is a huge cause for concern. Simply because it is ineffective and a source of frustration amongst the residents/ratepayers who are effectively carrying the costs of the municipal administration including the political positions.

Thus, the efficient management of such communications within the Public Participation Process is of utmost importance to ensure results.

Refer a response to an SM request for comments in 2023 regarding Performance Bonuses, where the Organogram was reviewed, some 139 (+-) vacancies were identified. It was also noted that the position of Corporate Management (The description may not be correct) was not filled since the previous incumbent retired (Mr Dana Du Plessis?). He handled Policy Documents and reviews. The decline in the quality of Policy Documents was obvious. The prime example was the Indigent Policy where a response was submitted directly to the Mayor and no reply received until this policy was cited as the “...cause of the riots which resulted in the torching of the municipal buildings.” (As per ENCA News broadcast on TV.)

At present the debacle around the water situation is yet another example of poor communication. This raises the question: Does Swellendam Municipality have the managerial skills and competencies within their organisation?

It is thus a serious concern how SM plans to manage this policy.