

# The District Council of Mount Barker



## **Putting you in the Picture**

Strengthening Community Engagement in the Mount  
Barker District



## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR MAYOR

The *Community Engagement Framework* is a demonstration of Council's commitment to informing, consulting and involving you in issues that affect your daily life.

Over the past 2 years Council has been increasing the number and range of issues it consults you on. We are now strengthening the ways we consult you to improve the opportunities for everyone to discuss, debate and influence local issues and directions.

I believe this *Framework* will go a long way to meeting your needs, and your rights, to influence decisions about the way Council manages District resources - the services and facilities you enjoy and the future look and feel of our area.

Unlike the community engagement documents of many other councils, the *Framework* does not contain academic definitions and principles. Instead it proposes a range of real improvements and initiatives to make Council consultations work well in our District.

The *Strategy* responds to the issues you have raised with me and other Councillors. It focuses on the real challenges:

- building an engagement program that is meaningful, that you have confidence in;
- designing consultation processes that energise people's interest and desire to be involved in community life; and
- ensuring that the engagement program offers real value-for-money, and is tailored to our District rather than simply adopting the latest techniques, technologies or best practices.

The things you will find in this document are:

- *information* –clarifying how Council makes decisions, when an issue 'goes' to community consultation, and how you can make your influence felt; and
- *initiatives* – the key actions for improving the way Council currently informs and consults you, and responds to your input.

The *Strategy* does not make idle promises – we have a long way to go to implement the changes – but we will ensure those changes reflect your priorities for community engagement in our District.

**Ann Ferguson**  
**Mayor**



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## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Imagine our District ten years from now. What will you see? What will your children see? How will it look and feel to be a resident, a worker, a visitor?

The decisions we make today will influence the look and feel of our District tomorrow. We know that our District is growing – and we know this will bring both opportunities and risks.

### **GOOD OPPORTUNITIES** for

- local employment, sustainable living
- critical mass for a range of services
- better facilities, shopping, leisure activities
- more ideas and innovation
- retaining young people

### **POTENTIAL RISKS** to

- rural character and identity
- friendly, small town atmosphere
- community spirit and belonging
- environmental footprint

Council is responsible for maximising these opportunities and minimising potential risks for the District. You have a right to have a say in these decisions, so they reflect your aspirations, concerns and knowledge of what works best for our area and community.

In ten years time what part will you have played? Will you have influenced the directions for:

- community events and activities?
- open space and parklands?
- health and safety?
- transport and traffic?
- business and tourism?
- community facilities?
- arts, leisure and recreation?
- the local environment?

This is what this *Framework* is about – helping you to make a difference – to get involved and make your influence felt in a way that is comfortable for you and works best for our diverse community.

It is about attracting a broad section of the community to take part in 'local governance'. After all, our community has a rich history, diversity and record of innovation – so together we have the capacity to both honour our past, and prepare for a vital future.

## A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP

Like many other communities, the issues facing our District are complex. We have multiple, often conflicting objectives and an increasing number of stakeholders wanting to influence the future of our District.

Council is responsible for making decisions to maximise outcomes for the *whole* community. This is why it is so important for all citizens to contribute their views and take part in forums to discuss issues with other citizens.

However, community engagement can be more than an exercise in collecting community input for Council decision-making. It is an opportunity to build a potentially powerful partnership where Council and citizens can work as a team, where the perspectives of 'technocrat' and 'grass roots' can come closer together, and where we can work cooperatively to shape the District's future.

In this partnership, Council has the *responsibility* to listen and respond to community views, make its decision-making processes clear and provide feedback on the reasons for its decisions.

Citizens have both a *right* and a responsibility - to be informed about the issues affecting you, make your views known, contribute openly to discussions and respect the views of others.

Some people may think it is easier to make decisions without consulting, just as some find it easier to organise resistance than to reach agreement, or to oppose a proposal than come up with constructive alternatives.

However, community engagement is NOT a way to 'legitimise' decisions that have already been made, NOR is it a forum for protest, pressure, divisiveness or advocacy by special interests. This can reduce the value of consultation for all.

Engagement is, however, a way for Council and the community to work as a partnership to:

- identify the cause of problems, not just the symptoms;
- understand different perspectives on issues;
- explore what is impacting on an issue, who is impacted, and what the implications are;
- understand local circumstances - what is likely to work and what wont;
- appreciate key community values - what is acceptable, what is not;
- generate ideas and alternative courses of action - and assess costs and consequences;
- evaluate costs and benefits - so that suggestions go beyond wishful thinking;
- identify trade-offs - so that common ground can be found; and
- find ways to ameliorate the impacts of different alternatives.

## THE CHALLENGE

Community engagement is important – to you, to Council and to the future of the District. Here are some of the things you said about community engagement:

*“People want to feel part of the community by being consulted on the issues they feel strongly about.”*

*“Consultation enables residents the opportunity for input and to some extent to own the decisions of Council.”*

*“The benefit of the old-fashioned community meeting is that people hearing other people’s ideas can often develop those thoughts more fully.”*

*“Community consultation may cost dollars but in the longer term it can avoid needed changes to inappropriate policies.”*

*“It is important that people know what is going on.” “Council decisions affect the community and therefore it is important to have a say.”*

These comments came from surveys and discussions with citizens. The feedback we have received from you is that engagement needs to be meaningful – citizens must feel confident that their input will make a difference if they are to contribute their time.

You said you want processes to be improved so it easy and rewarding for a broad cross section of the community to participate. You want to be consulted on immediate, local issues, AND long term policies and directions for the District.

You also indicated that the cost and time to consult is an important investment of ratepayers money so improving the methods of engagement should be demonstrably cost effective.

In summary, the challenges we face as a community include:

- communication – helping people find out about consultation activities, providing ongoing mechanisms for discussion and feedback, and increasing responsiveness;
- transparency– ensuring people know how decisions are made and how they can influence decision-making, and how they can best make a contribution;
- broad participation – encouraging more people to participate, including those without computers, those that are less mobile, those that are time poor; and
- cost effective techniques – updating techniques so they are relevant, inclusive and demonstrably effective.



## YOUR VISION OF GOOD ENGAGEMENT

From your feedback, we understand that community engagement the 'District way' needs to be meaningful, inclusive and represent value-for-money:



### Meaningful

You want:

- to see the 'big picture'
- understand where each issue fits
- know how the decision will be made
- know what you can influence
- hear back about the results



### Inclusive

You want:

- to see the relevance to you
- be involved, not overwhelmed
- contribute in an easy, practical way
- interact in an informal atmosphere
- receive recognition for your efforts



### Value-for-money

You want:

- lots of people to participate
- everyone to get a fair say
- input to be representative
- input to be informed
- processes to be cooperative

In order to translate your vision into real action, Council has developed:

- a strategy for building on its current engagement program and improving organisational systems to underpin that program; and
- a set of engagement standards, which will drive the improvement of internal processes and provide the focus for staff guidelines, standard templates and training.

## ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

### Priority (short term) actions:

- widely distribute *Community Engagement Framework* and prepare staff guidelines for a consistent whole-of-council approach to meeting engagement standards.
- introduce an online status board advising citizens of recent, current and upcoming consultations, and providing an update 'at a glance' on progress and important milestones.
- continue the implementation a computerised customer service system to log and track customer enquiries and requests and provide a mechanism for ongoing feedback on services.

### Next steps:

- identify forums where citizens can meet informally with Councillors and staff, learn more about local matters, contribute ideas and debate issues.
- assess different communication avenues to supplement the use of Courier advertisements and Council's website, and implement the most practical, cost effective, and preferred avenue for citizens to regularly receive Council news.
- incorporate a section within the existing Council report template to summarise the decision to be made, key factors to be considered, and the area of community influence. Establish further templates for reporting community input, and for providing community feedback on the reasons for decisions.
- investigate the opportunity to undertake joint projects with residents associations and community groups for encouraging high levels of community participation.

### Further investigations:

- Review and update Council's Community Consultation Policy ensuring consistency with and incorporating any gaps as a result of the Community Engagement Framework (E.g. address any relevant governance issues).
- implement further initiatives and steps for enhancing the engagement program by assessing the relative benefits of:
  - a representative community panel of citizens who agree to be surveyed by post or email;
  - enhancements to Council's community development program targeting the involvement of young people, new residents and local workers;
  - a reference group of interested long term residents, who have knowledge of the history, heritage and development of the local area;
  - avenues for feedback on satisfaction with Council services, facilities and programs;
  - longitudinal research into community needs and lifestyle as a basis for planning; and
  - quarterly strategic planning summits.
- investigate the establishment of an integrated data base of consultation results and qualitative information to maximise use of community feedback and input.

## ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS

### **Transparency:**

Council will decide when to consult the community based on the significance, sensitivity, substantiveness, urgency and complexity of issues, and the opportunities to increase community ownership and build social capital, as outlined on page 10. At the outset of each consultation, Council will clarify the decision to be made and the key factors it will consider in making that decision. The factors that are fixed and those for community debate will be specified, as a guide for community engagement and discussion.

### **Feedback:**

At the conclusion of consultations, community input will be reported to Council against the key decision factors, to assist Council's deliberations on different views and perspectives. Feedback will be provided on the final reasons for a decision, including the community's influence.

### **Communication:**

For all consultations, Council will be clear about the aim, decision process and who should be consulted. Advertising will target stakeholders likely to be affected, and stakeholder lists will reach out to people who have registered their interest in topics.

### **Timeframes:**

Council will avoid the use of simple 'formula' to plan its consultations. Timeframes and methods will vary according to the nature of an issue - its complexity, significance, sensitivity – allowing sufficient time for citizens to provide a considered response.

### **Inclusiveness:**

Council recognises that the District's diverse citizens have a range of preferences for expressing their opinions. Within resource limitations, Council will use a variety of consultation techniques, including avenues for informal discussion, to encourage citizens to participate.

### **Projects with long timeframes:**

Council will clarify the results of previous consultations, what new information has emerged, and the value to be added in the next consultation step. Council will record citizens who want to stay involved and regularly update them on progress.

### **Controversial issues:**

For controversial issues, Council will use facilitators who are trained in meeting processes, to ensure everyone is given a fair say, there is active listening and respect for differing views, and possible areas of agreement / compromise are explored.

### **Complex issues:**

Council will use clear, concise language and make information interesting and accessible, using graphical material wherever possible. Consultations will encourage mutual sharing of knowledge and the exercise of judgment, rather than self interest on issues.

### **Networks:**

Council will continue to support the development of community networks and will facilitate communication within and between different community interest groups as an key aim of its engagement program.

### **Planning and continuous improvement:**

Council will adopt the guidelines of the Local Government Association for planning and conducting engagement activities, tailored to the District's needs. It will evaluate the effectiveness of every consultation to ensure continuous learning and improvement.



Information on how your Council governs



## WHEN DOES COUNCIL CONSULT?

Not all matters that are considered by Council go to consultation. When a new issue arises *that is a Council initiative or project*, Council uses the following criteria to determine whether to consult:

- Council does not generally consult on projects run by other government bodies (e.g. the State Government such as a proposal to change a speed limit on a road);
- The matter is outside of the decision making jurisdiction of Council (e.g. process and decision making is prescribed such as a development application where the decision is made by the Development Assessment Panel or Development Assessment Commission, not Council.)

Consultation	No consultation
<b>✓ Significant issues</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the issue is likely to have a significant impact on the economy, lifestyle, amenity or local environment</li> <li>• it requires a major departure from previous practice</li> <li>• Council is required by legislation to consult</li> </ul>	<b>✗ Routine matters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the matter is routine</li> <li>• a clear precedent exists</li> <li>• existing policy / plan sets the course</li> </ul>
<b>✓ Sensitive issues</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is strong community concern or interest</li> <li>• the community is expressing dissatisfaction</li> <li>• disagreement/competition/conflict exists</li> <li>• differing estimates/understandings/views exist</li> </ul>	<b>✗ Routine matters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all outcomes are likely to be acceptable to the community</li> <li>• community shows little interest</li> </ul>
<b>✓ Substantial choices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there are a number of alternative courses of action</li> <li>• there are opportunities for impacts to be ameliorated</li> <li>• the issue is likely to involve a substantial redirection of ratepayers money</li> </ul>	<b>✗ Routine matters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few, if any, alternatives exist</li> <li>• views of affected stakeholders are already known</li> </ul>
<b>✓ Ownership is important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is a need for community to embrace the change or to implement or 'own' the solution</li> <li>• the matter is complex, requiring some time to resolve</li> <li>• information is needed on community or client needs, priorities or values in order to plan well</li> <li>• access for disadvantaged groups is important</li> </ul>	<b>✗ Routine matters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the 'solution' will cause minimum or short term disruption</li> <li>• impacts are minor or manageable</li> <li>• directions are clear or indisputable</li> </ul>
<b>✓ Cost benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the matter is neither controversial nor high impact but the community can add value to the process through its local knowledge and skills</li> <li>• there are opportunities for community building – eg collaboration, networking, creative problem solving</li> </ul>	<b>✗ Routine or technical matters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the decision is purely a matter of technical consideration</li> <li>• community views are already known, and consultation would add little value</li> </ul>
<b>✓ Sufficient time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is sufficient time to consult in more than a tokenistic manner</li> </ul>	<b>✗ Urgent matters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the matter is unavoidably urgent and the cost of delay outweighs the benefits or there is a public health or safety risk of a delayed decision.</li> </ul>





## HOW DOES COUNCIL MAKE DECISIONS?

Council bases its decisions on 3 principles:

- maximising benefits for all sectors of the community (equity)
- minimising impacts on current and future generations (sustainability)
- encouraging community ownership and self reliance (leadership)



### Equity

Council chooses the course of action where the benefits:

- are clear and obvious, not disputed
- accrue to the broad community, not special interest groups
- are highly valued by the community
- are strongly aligned with strategic objectives\* for the District.

### Sustainability

Council does not trade off long term benefits for short term gains. It:

- considers long term benefits such as community harmony, ecosystem health, and economic viability
- errs on the side of caution when long term impacts on these goals are unclear
- addresses the cause of problems not the symptoms
- assesses both risks and benefits of every decision
- meets legislative standards for public health and safety, law and order, environmental protection.

### Leadership

Council exercises its leadership by:

- promoting full discussion and debate of issues
- basing decisions on information from many sources
- encouraging innovative solutions that maximise community ownership and self reliance
- using judgement - not reacting to the loudest voice or vocal majority - but balancing all arguments
- trying to minimise conflict and unrest by finding areas of common ground or opportunities to ameliorate impacts

\*Strategic objectives are set out in the District's Strategic Plan, including those for:

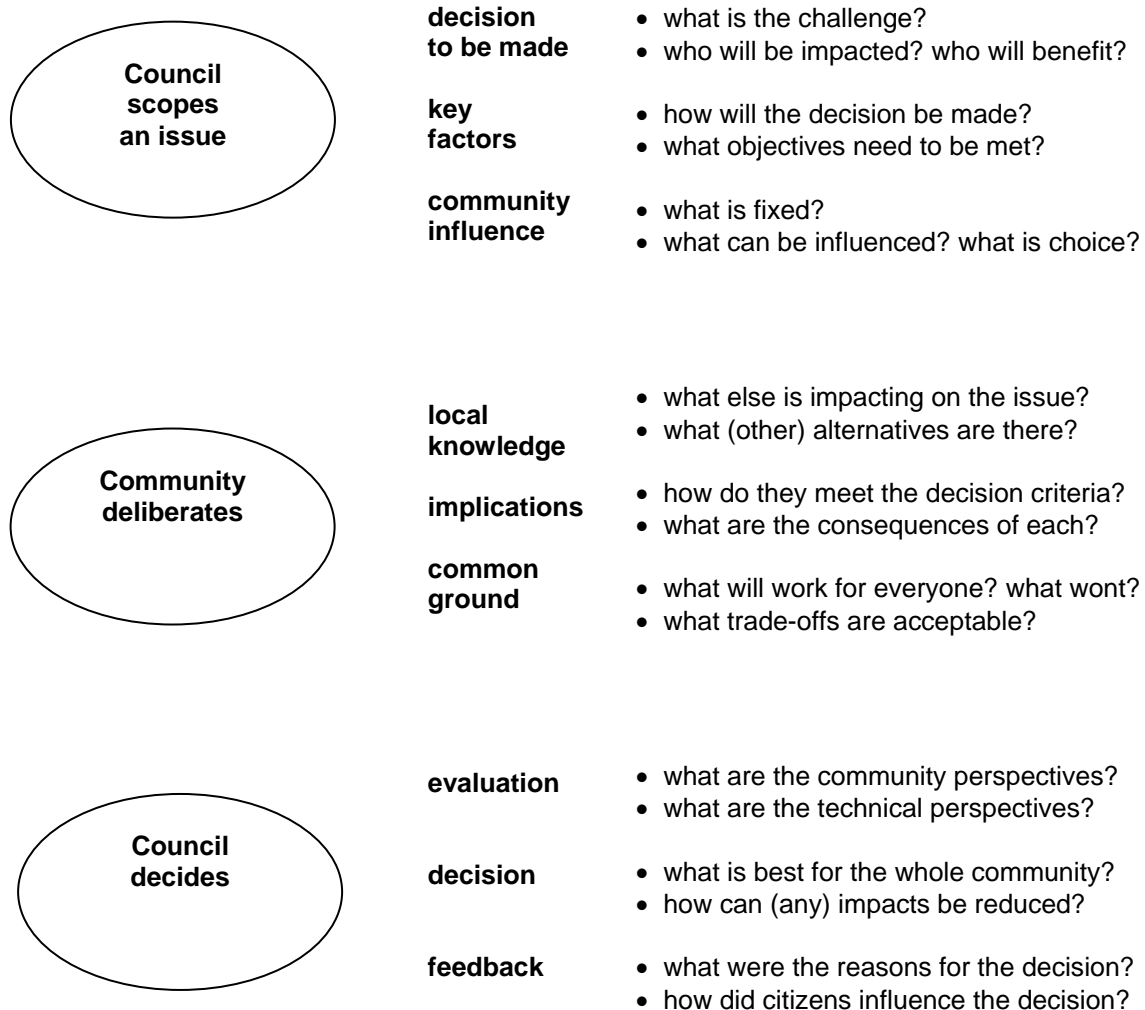
- people and communities – improved well being and quality of life
- natural environment – best practice resource management
- enterprise, business and industry – economic viability and sustainability
- infrastructure and human settlements – maintenance of landscape and character
- Council leadership – excellence, customer service and accountability.

## HOW CAN COUNCIL AND CITIZENS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP?

Successful teamwork occurs when there is a shared goal and team members know the part they play and how they will contribute to the success of the project. It is the same with consultation.

Council is elected for making the final decisions on local issues\*. Citizens and stakeholders influence those decisions by bringing different perspectives, expertise and ideas to the table.

This is the model of teamwork proposed for our community:



- 
- Council makes the final decisions on all matters that fall under the Local Government Act. Matters that fall under the provisions of the Planning Act are considered by the District's Development Assessment Panel, which is an independent body, responsible for decision-making on planning issues.

## • WHAT IS THE CURRENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM?

Council makes decisions to:

- allocate the budget between different programs and services
- develop strategic plans and policy for the management of the District
- address emerging issues and opportunities for the community.

The following table provides examples to indicate the extent of Council's engagement program.

<b>Strategic Goal</b>	<b>Policy /plans</b>	<b>Services</b>	<b>Laws</b>	<b>Site/area specific</b>
People and Communities	Social Plan Facility Plans	Library Immunisation Community Transport Home Assist Mount Barker Pool Recreation Facilities	Animal management.	Recreation park plans
The Natural Environment	Parks Master Plans	Waste management	Domestic burning	Mount Barker Summit Concept Plan.
Enterprise, Business and Industry	Tourism Plan	Events program	Street signage	Town streetscape strategies
Infrastructure and Human Settlements	Residential PAR Industrial PAR Transport Master Plan	DA Assessments	Footpath obstructions	Infrastructure for new residential areas. Flood mitigation works. Traffic works
Council Leadership	Strategic Plan Corporate Plan Business Plan Long term Financial Plan	Customer Service Centre	Permits and penalties	Rating strategy for specific areas

## HOW ELSE CAN I BE INVOLVED?

### **Ask a question or provide feedback**

If you have a question, want to report a local maintenance or safety issue, or provide feedback to Council you can email [council@dcmtbarker.sa.gov.au](mailto:council@dcmtbarker.sa.gov.au), phone 83917200, write to PO Box 54 Mount Barker SA 5251, visit the Local Government Centre at 6 Dutton Road, Mount Barker (within the Adelaide Hills Homemaker Centre) or respond to surveys and questionnaires on [www.dcmtbarker.sa.gov.au](http://www.dcmtbarker.sa.gov.au). Council has introduced a Customer Request System which will ensure that all your contact with Council is acknowledged and action is tracked to its completion.

### **Contact your local Councillor**

All citizens are encouraged to raise issues with their elected Councillors. Councillors can pursue matters on your behalf and ensure that local views are considered in the development of policies and plans. The District Council of Mount Barker has three electoral districts called wards with ten Councillors and the Mayor elected to serve for a period of four years. A map of the wards and contact details for your local Councillors are provide in the following pages.

### **Invite Councillors to your community group**

If you belong to a community group you can also invite your local Councillor (and relevant staff) to join a meeting or special occasion as a way of getting to know your ward Councillors and to showcase your work for the community. Councillors currently attend a wide variety of meetings and activities and report on their attendance at the start of each Council meeting.

### **Attend Council meetings**

You are welcome to attend Council meetings to hear Council debate and decide on local issues. Meetings are held on the first and third Monday of the month at 7pm at the Local Government Centre. An agenda is published 3 days before the meeting and is available online ([www.dcmtbarker.sa.gov.au](http://www.dcmtbarker.sa.gov.au)), at the Local Government Centre and at Mount Barker library.

### **Speak at Council meetings**

For the first 15 minutes of each Council meeting, citizens are invited to ask a question of Council You can also make a deputation to Council provided you make the request in writing to Council's Chief Executive Officer.(Deputations are used when you want to raise a particular matter of concern or to voice a view on behalf of a group of citizens).

You also have a right to bring a matter of concern to your neighbourhood to Council's attention by way of a petition. Petitions are included in the next Council meeting agenda but must be legibly written or printed; clearly set out the request or submission of the petitioners and be addressed to the Council and delivered to the Local Government Centre.

### **Read about the issues**

If you cannot attend Council meetings you still have access to Council meeting agendas and minutes. Council meeting agendas includes officer reports on the issues that Council will debate and provide an indication of the range of issues that Council deals with each fortnight on your behalf. Minutes of Council meetings are published 5 clear days after the Council meeting and are available online, at the Local Government Centre and at Mount Barker library.

### **Attend meetings of Development Assessment Panel**

All councils are required to establish separate bodies called Development Assessment Panels that consider and determine development applications. Your District DAP meets every third Wednesday at 9:30 am at the Local Government Centre in Dutton Road Mount Barker. You can access the agenda and minutes of DAP meetings and opportunities to make deputations and petitions also apply.

## Mayor

### Mayor Ann Ferguson



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## North Ward

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### Cr Lindsay Campbell CSM, JP



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### Cr Lyn Stokes JP



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## Central Ward

### Cr Michael Bails



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### Cr Bruce Gamble APM, JP



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### Cr Susan Hamilton



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### Cr Joan Zanker JP



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## South Ward

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