



PLANNERTech

Lake Mac

Australia's newest Smart City

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Cities like Adelaide, Melbourne and Parramatta have embraced the 'Smart City' movement, using technology to make their activities more efficient. These Cities, and others like them, contribute to the prosperity of their region by supporting digital innovation, connecting communities and taking Government online. In March, Lake Macquarie joined the club when it adopted its first tech focused strategy; the 'Lake Mac Smart City, Smart Council Digital Economy Strategy'.

Thomas Boyle is the Strategic Landuse Planner & Project Officer at Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC), and one of the champions behind its Smart City project. In working on the Strategy, Boyle wanted to bring the whole of Council on the 'Smart City' journey and by doing so, found that many great things were already being implemented by different departments. It seemed momentum for digital integration was already building, particularly given the recent arrival of fast broadband internet to the LGA. "The Executive said - how can we capitalise on the arrival of the NBN and how can we work with the community to do everything we should be doing?" says Boyle. This helped set the project tone, prioritising co-creation with staff and inspiring innovative engagement with the wider community. "Just get out there and start talking to your community as early as possible" he says.



A Smart City is one where it is easy to connect both online and in person" (Source: Lake Macquarie City Council, 2016)

As a framework, the 'Smart City' can encompass everything from apps to real estate, buildings to transport, energy to Government, and everything in between. So with such a broad lens, where do you begin?

For Lake Macquarie it was about their strengths, both natural and community based. "The economic side of the Strategy was seen as very important but Lake Macquarie has a very strong history of executing actions around sustainability" says Boyle, "The Smart City captures the digital economy but also how to apply the outcomes of digital innovation to our everyday lives, to improve sustainability and the health and well-being of our community". In doing so, Lake Macquarie has focused the Strategy on five strategic outcomes (with 18 diverse initiatives) that speak to the unique context of the LGA - it's people and place.

As such, Lake Macquarie's unique character has been recognised in a strategy that positions technology as the digital glue to bind the community, share information and help accelerate business reach, even to a global audience. "The Strategy is designed to be a tool, to help people and get them thinking more about technology, change and opportunities" says Boyle.

This people centred approach has paid off for Council with over 300 ideas contributed during the exhibition period and importantly, buy-in generated from local businesses, particularly from the digital and entrepreneurial sectors.

"People in the tech space know things are changing rapidly, and they told us you can't plan well into the future" says Boyle, "so developing flexible and open government policy is key to nurturing and supporting

start-ups. The aim is to reduce rigidity internally (at Council) to the best you can."

With many internal barriers including funding, time, leadership, communication and in-house knowledge, Boyle suggests communication is key, "Government is traditionally very hierarchical. There are lots of silos, so you need to clearly and succinctly articulate the benefits of reprioritising resources, or find new resources to have these conversations". He also suggests another way to incentivise action is to make the process enjoyable, "All throughout the project I was conscious of trying to get buy-in and you need to bring people along the journey, communicating well, making it fun and meaningful".

The 'Lake Mac Smart City, Smart Council Digital Economy Strategy' delivers a bottom up approach to an often ambiguous concept. Its proactive efforts to establish and build momentum around meaningful engagement (both internal and external to Council) has delivered a comprehensive yet focused vision for making Lake Macquarie smarter, in more ways than one.

Start your smart city journey with these first steps:

1. Download the 'Lake Mac Smart City, Smart Council Digital Economy Strategy' and see what all the fuss is about: haveyoursaylakemac.com.au/smart-city
2. Start a working group in Council and get talking about how technology is currently being used within the organisation, and how it could make your community better.
3. Visit a co-working space or digital hub and meet the entrepreneurs and companies that are pushing boundaries and pioneering in the tech space
4. Join the Smart Cities and Urban Innovation Symposium as part of Vivid Ideas on 1 June 2016. Visit www.vividsydney.com for more information and book tickets.
5. Follow the conversation on twitter by searching #smartcities ■

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