Hunter's Hill Council, NSW

Heritage Meets High-Tech: Hunter's Hill Council's Modernisation Journey

68%	**14x**	**<5 mins**	**33%**
decrease in manual payment transactions over three years	growth in rate of applications submitted online in one year	to complete a form (down from 20-60 minutes)	decrease in annual phone calls

OVERVIEW

Hunter's Hill Council, located just outside Sydney's city centre, serves a close-knit community of 14,000 residents. As the smallest council in New South Wales by area, it faced a unique challenge: preserving its heritage charm and community values while meeting the growing demand for modern, digital services. To address rising resident expectations, the council partnered with Granicus to embark on a bold digital transformation.

SITUATION | BRIDGING GAPS AND ADDRESSING RISKS

The council faced mounting challenges. Residents felt disconnected from council activities, citing a lack of communication and transparency. Frustrations grew as outdated tools and manual processes slowed operations. **Key issues included:**

>> **Gap in community engagement:** Feedback showed the community felt disconnected, while engagement was not an established priority in the organisation. Meanwhile, the council was spending more than $12,000 annually on a community engagement platform that wasn't fit for purpose.

>> **Website challenges:** The website was difficult to navigate and vulnerabilities in the platform were increasing. The situation was complicated by having multiple vendors for hosting and managing the website, creating inefficiencies and risks.

>> **Lack of digitisation:** Manual, paper-based processes caused delays in services. Forms were inconsistent and outdated. Payments were handled manually over the phone and in person.

It was evident that the council needed to modernise its operations to streamline services, engage the community, and enhance security.

MUST HAVE SOLUTIONS

Forms & Workflow (OpenForms)
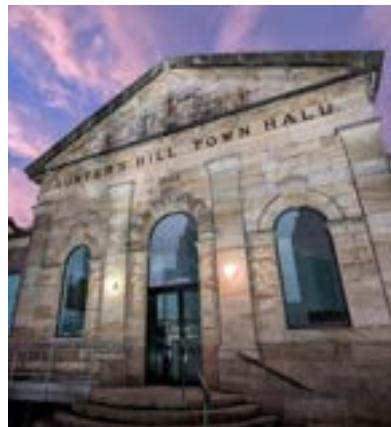
Sentiment & Feedback (EngagementHQ)

Websites & CMS (OpenCities)

"
Granicus emerged as the ideal solution, offering a modern, secure website, a dedicated community engagement platform, and integrated online forms with payment capabilities. This comprehensive platform directly addressed the council's pain points and opened doors for future enhancements, making the decision straightforward and strategic."

– Jade Reed,
Manager of Digital and Customer Information

GRANICUS

Discover tailored solutions: Visit granicus.com/au or email us at info@granicus.com.

Led by the Digital and Customer Information team — comprising IT, records, and customer service staff — Hunter's Hill sought out a solution to achieve its goals to halve the use of paper forms, enable 24/7 online form and payment processing, enhance security, and reduce general inquiries by 20%.

"We needed one platform and one partner, to address all our concerns — engagement, website, and online payments," said Jade Reed, manager of digital and customer information. "Granicus emerged as the ideal solution, offering a modern, secure website, a dedicated community engagement platform, and integrated online forms with payment capabilities. This comprehensive platform directly addressed the council's pain points and opened doors for future enhancements, making the decision straightforward and strategic."

SOLUTION | UNIFIED SERVICES FOR A MODERN COUNCIL

Hunter's Hill Council partnered with Granicus to implement a tailored digital transformation strategy, executed through a collaborative and detail-driven process.

The Granicus team worked closely with council leaders to identify pain points, craft a unified vision, and implement solutions designed to meet the council's unique needs. **Key highlights of the implementation included:**

- ⊘ **Modern, user-friendly website:** Using Granicus' Websites & CMS solution (OpenCities), the council launched a redesigned website that was intuitive, mobile-responsive, and easy to navigate. It consolidated fragmented information, streamlined online services, and significantly improved accessibility for residents.

- ⊘ **Community engagement tools:** A new engagement platform through Granicus' Sentiment & Feedback (EngagementHQ) capability was introduced to facilitate consultations, gather feedback, and track community sentiment in real time. These tools enabled the council to make more informed decisions based on resident input.

- ⊘ **Digital forms and workflow automation:** Outdated, paper-based processes were replaced with customised digital forms through Granicus' Forms & Workflow (OpenForms) tool, including key services like road applications, access to information, planning, and rates certificates. Automated workflows reduced processing times and improved staff productivity.

- ⊘ **Enhanced security framework:** Robust cybersecurity measures were implemented to protect sensitive data and ensure compliance with modern data protection standards, rebuilding trust among residents following a previous breach.

- ⊘ **Comprehensive support and training:** Council staff received hands-on training, ongoing technical assistance, and tailored recommendations from Granicus' team of experts to fully leverage the new systems and maximise their benefits.

G GRANICUS

Discover tailored solutions: Visit **granicus.com/au** or email us at **info@granicus.com**.

By taking a step-by-step, collaborative approach, the council ensured the transformation was effective while minimising disruption to residents and staff.

"What stood out to us wasn't just the platform we chose, but the way the project was delivered. Granicus managed the project with discipline — we had regular check-ins, clear milestones, and a project plan that was always kept up to date," said Danielle Keating, customer service manager at Hunter's Hill. "We didn't need to be technical experts, which meant customer service could really lead this project. Granicus was flexible ... They worked with us instead of against us. That made a huge difference to our confidence and the success of the implementation."

RESULTS | FROM BACKLOGS TO BREAKTHROUGHS

The transformation delivered impressive results, drastically improving service efficiency:

- **Form completion times dropped from 20–60 minutes to fewer than 5 minutes,** with services available to the public 24/7. The average turnaround time for informal GIPA applications dropped from 12.5 days to 5.4 days.

- **Online application submissions increased** from under 4% to over 50% in just one year.

- **Manual payment transactions decreased** by 68% over three years.

- **Annual phone calls reduced by 33%.** Routine inquiries decreased significantly, freeing up staff for higher-impact projects and more strategic initiatives that benefit the community.

The team noted an array of additional benefits, including more accurate data collection, better compliance and audit readiness, reduced environmental impact, greater transparency, and a more seamless user experience with improved accessibility for all.

Community engagement also saw a notable boost. Residents are empowered with better tools to provide feedback and participate in consultations, fostering stronger connections with the council.

> "The benefits are tangible across community, staff, and cost dimensions. Community members now complete forms much faster and online at any time," said Jade. "Staff have seen a significant reduction in manual transactions, with many payments processed digitally. This automation has freed up staff time and reduced operational costs, demonstrating the value of the digital transformation."

Through its digital transformation, Hunter's Hill Council demonstrated that even the smallest councils can achieve big results. By embracing technology, they modernised their operations, enhanced community relationships, and set a new benchmark for local government transformation.