

30 June 2021

COUNCIL ADOPTS BUDGET FOR YEAR AHEAD

Council has adopted its \$40.879 million annual budget, which outlines the funds necessary to deliver priority projects and services for 2021-2022.

Mayor, Cr Lesley Hewitt, said the financially responsible budget includes major projects across the Shire, along with the delivery of more than 100 services.

“It’s a challenge to develop a budget that meets the needs of so many different service areas, but I believe we have struck the right balance with our plan for the year ahead,” said Cr Hewitt.

“Thank you to the 21 people who made a submission on our proposed budget. Many people raised the importance of strategic planning. We have responded to this by allocating more than \$600,000 towards this important work,” she said.

“A portion of these funds will be used for our submission to place the Western Victorian Transmission Network lines underground, and also to develop an Affordable Housing Strategy. Two projects we know are important to our community.

“Strategic planning work will help us to prepare for future growth and ensure our community maintains the key elements that make it such a great place to live, work and visit,” she said.

Other priorities in Council’s budget include completion of the Hepburn Together project, including adoption of a Community Vision and Council Plan; development of a new Council website; updates to the Waste, Biodiversity and Sustainability Strategies; and development of a new shire-wide Walking and Cycling Strategy.

Council will continue to accept e-waste materials free of charge at Shire transfer stations, offer significantly reduced first-year animal registration fees, along with free entry to swimming pools. It will also develop an Arts and Culture Strategy and an updated Reconciliation Action Plan.

The budget includes ongoing funding for Council activities such as libraries, maternal and child health, sport and active recreation, tourism, care for the elderly, parks and gardens, programs for young people and more.

Council has allocated \$11.65 million towards the capital works program, which will see the renewal of existing and construction of new assets for the community.

“Our capital works budget is 62% of general rates, which has been made possible with significant government funding,” said Cr Hewitt.

“It includes more than \$1.62M on gravel and road reseals; and more than \$1.45M on road improvements, including upgrade to the Daylesford-Clunes Road in Smeaton, and the Cotswold and Glengower roads intersection near Glengower,” she said.

The budget also includes funding to finalise design works, procurement activities and begin construction of priority projects that have recently secured considerable State Government funding. Projects include the Trentham Community Hub, Trentham Recreation Pavilion update, Hammon Park Trail Head, and works at Bullarto train station and Wombat Hill Botanical Gardens.

“We have allocated \$600,000 for bridge renewal works; \$534,000 towards upgrades and new footpaths and cycleways; and \$763,000 on parks and open spaces works, including Chatfield Reserve landscape works at Lake Daylesford; streetscape improvements planning in Clunes and Creswick, and more,” said Cr Hewitt.

The increase to rate income is capped at 1.5% in line with the Victorian Government’s Fair Go Rates System.

“We are a lower rating Council with our average property rates around \$115 less than similar sized councils for 2019/2020, and around \$209 less than all Victorian councils*,” said Cr Hewitt.

A particular challenge for Council is the increase in the cost of waste management, which has risen considerably over the last year due to the change in kerbside collection contract rates and a 20% increase in the volume of waste produced.

For those with a kerbside collection service the waste charge will increase by \$83 to \$479 per year to ensure cost recovery of this service.

“We realise this is a substantial increase, but it is necessary to meet the rising costs of waste management. This includes the growing volume of waste collected, global recycling challenges and compulsory State Government landfill levy,” said Cr Hewitt.

“We will develop a five-year Waste Strategy in 2021/2022 to identify opportunities to create a more efficient and cost-effective waste management service for the Shire,” she said.

Council will now submit the budget to the Minister for Local Government. It also adopted a Revenue and Rating Plan 2021–2025, at this week’s Special Council Meeting, which noted there are no changes to rating differentials for 2021/2022. Council will undertake detail modelling to consider options for the 2022/2023 budget.

-ENDS-

*Victorian Government’s Know Your Council website <https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/>