

11 May 2022

COUNCIL RELEASES DRAFT BUDGET

Hepburn Shire Council has released its \$58.06M draft budget for 2022/2023, which has a total revenue increase of \$15.24M or 37 percent on the current budget due to a considerable injection of State and Federal capital grants and stimulus project funding, along with reimbursement of the high costs related to storm recovery.

Mayor, Cr Tim Drylie said this budget is the result of an extensive process by Councillors and staff to develop and deliver a fiscally responsible budget.

“The draft budget aims to achieve actions identified in our Council Plan, whilst balancing community expectations and the physical and financial resources available to Council,” said Cr Drylie.

“The past two years have been particularly challenging for our community and Council acknowledges the significant social and economic impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and severe weather events in our Shire,” he said.

“Along with allocating funding for the provision of more than 100 services to our community, this budget includes considerable investment in asset renewal and construction, all of which will support the social and economic recovery of our Shire.”

The \$58.06M budget includes \$21.25M of capital works.

“This record investment of capital works will improve, renew and create new infrastructure for our community. This is the largest capital works budget that has ever been delivered by the Shire and is supported by an unprecedented \$15.22M stimulus grant funding from State and Federal Government for which we are very grateful. Without Government support, all these projects would not be possible,” said Cr Drylie.

“We look forward to delivering some important projects in 2022/2023, and we know many in the community are keen to see these underway,” he said.

New funding allocated in this budget will build on significant allocations for key projects in the current financial year. Major projects in the draft budget include renewal of the iconic Creswick Town Hall (\$681,000), construction of the Trentham Community Hub (\$4.4M, including \$2.5M in grants), works to upgrade the Bullarto Railway Station (\$277,000), and investment in Council buildings (\$220,000) and the Creswick Mechanics Institute (\$170,000).

Council has allocated \$3.4M towards recreational, leisure and community facilities, including construction of the Hammon Park trailhead (\$1.4M) to complement the Creswick Trails development, building renewal and repair works for the Lee Medlyn Bottle Museum in Clunes (\$458,000), a playground for Jubilee Lake (\$144,000), floor renewal at Hepburn Pavilion Café (\$120,000), and works to enhance the visitor experience at Wombat Hill Botanic Garden in Daylesford (\$188,000).

“We’re also allocating \$263,000 towards implementation of the Aquatics Strategy, which includes initial work to develop a feasibility study for an indoor aquatics facility for the Shire, building on our commitment to deliver the strategy was only adopted in April this year,” said Cr Drylie.

“We’re investing \$3.80M on roads, which will benefit all community members. This includes \$2.06M for pavement rehabilitation, \$1.05M for road renewal, \$200,000 on road upgrades, and \$570,000 for our gravel road re-sheet program,” said Cr Drylie.

Council is allocating \$3.2M for bridge renewal works on Creswick-Lawrence Road (subject to grant funding).

“We are also allocating \$414,000 for drainage and kerbing projects across the Shire, including several projects in Creswick,” said Cr Drylie.

In order to support active lifestyles, Council is investing \$648,000 on footpath and cycleways improvement, renewal and extension. Projects are earmarked include Falls Road in Trentham, Ligar Street in Clunes, Williams Street in Creswick and East Street in Daylesford, and more.

While the capital works spend is supplemented by \$1.50M in new borrowings from Council, Council’s debt position is low.

“Council is committed to our community and will be exploring what services we can deliver to support people who need assistance, particularly older people, people living with a disability and vulnerable members of the community. We will work closely and constructively with the new aged care and disability service provider and will continue our advocacy support on behalf of our community,” said Cr Drylie.

Council will also fund and deliver a range of programs and services as part of the Positive Ageing Strategy, Disability Action and Inclusion Plan, Reconciliation and Gender Equality Action Plan.

“This is of course in addition to our existing programs such as libraries, community grants, tourism, reconciliation, youth and many more,” said Cr Drylie.

The budget has a strong focus on the environment, with Council allocating additional, new funding of \$225,000 for initiatives relating to actions from the Sustainable Hepburn strategy across areas of climate change, natural environment and biodiversity, climate and water resilience, and low waste. This builds on funding already allocated and includes funding for a Circular Economy Officer to investigate and drive investment in circular economy initiatives relevant to the Shire.

Rates will increase at 1.75% in line with the Victorian Government’s Fair Go Rates System. Council has not applied to the Essential Services Commission for a rate cap variation.

“We recognise that many households are experiencing ongoing financial challenges, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Cr Drylie.

Council will continue to fund an additional rates rebate of \$21 for pensioners who qualify under the State Government’s Pensioner Rebate Remission scheme.

Waste charges will increase on average by approximately 12%, or \$56 per property per year, to meet increased service costs to users of the service. The standard annual fee for a residential property (weekly garbage collection and fortnightly recycling) will be \$535 or the equivalent of \$10.28 per week.

This increase allows for rising costs of waste management, global recycling challenges and payment of the State Government landfill levy. Additionally, Council has also had to factor in a significant increase in waste volume generated (approximately 20%).

“Council has been and continues to be in a tight financial position. This budget will return Council to a positive unrestricted cash balance and the waste reserve will again be in surplus following being in deficit over the past couple of years,” said Cr Drylie.

“Our budget is balanced and financially sustainable and allows Council to fund the programs and projects that align to our Community Vision and Council Plan, whilst continuing the repair of our financial position,” he said.

Council will consider adoption at the Ordinary Meeting of Council on Tuesday 28 June 2022.

Get involved

An important part of the budget process is the community’s opportunity to provide feedback.

Feedback: Read the draft budget via the Participate Hepburn website at <https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au> and make a submission. Submissions will be accepted until 5pm on Tuesday 31 May 2022.

Budget webinar: Join Mayor Drylie and Council Chief Executive Officer Bradley Thomas as they outline major highlights and answer questions about the draft budget. The webinar will be held live on Council’s Facebook page from 5.30pm to 6.30pm on Wednesday May 18. Questions can be emailed to shire@hepburn.vic.gov.au by 5pm on Tuesday 17 May.

The draft budget is available on the Participate Hepburn website and from Council hubs and libraries around the Shire.

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