

5-11-14

More cash only way to get ahead, says mayor

BY NIGEL MCNAY

QUITE dire, dangerous and just not good enough.

That is Greater Hume mayor Heather Wilton's stark assessment of the shire's deteriorating road network.

"I hope that the people can respect that we've done a lot of hard work on it and this will be one way of improving some of our roads," she said of the council's bid for a special rate variation.

Or Wilton said the council would need to get back to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal by the end of the year if it wanted to get approval in time for next year's budgetary process, which got into full swing about February-March.

"That's if we can get that community support," she said.

Or Wilton said the council was having to work in

a climate of ever-declining state and federal government funding options.

"And then there's the expectations of people," she said.

"Rate pegging really severely hampers how we can operate and how we can best deliver for the people.

"Certain things we can have reasonable charges levied, like on water and sewer and garbage, so that covers the cost of doing business."

Or Wilton said the council was already running "a pretty lean job".

"But rates don't cover all the other infrastructure that we have to deal with," she said.

"We've tightened our belt as much as we can, we've looked at every aspect of our business and we are still doing that to ensure we've got as streamlined a business as we can make it."



Greater Hume mayor Heather Wilton says the state of the council's road network is dire, and getting worse. Picture: MATTHEW SMITHWICK

BM 13.12.12

Backing for rate 'extras' strong

BY DAVID JOHNSTON

GREATER Hume Shire has extended the deadline for submissions on a special rate variation proposal that will pump almost \$1 million a year into its roads by 2017-18.

The council's general manager Steve Pinnuck yesterday said support for the rise, which needed state government approval, was running 60 - 40.

The revised deadline for submissions is Christmas Eve before the council was presented with a detailed report at next year's first meeting on February 11.

If approved, the variation will begin on July 1.

It will apply to all ratepayers in the shire for a period of three years.

An extra \$317,250 will be raised in the first 12 months, rising to \$951,750 in 2017-18.

The same amount would then be retained permanently in the council's rate base.

Earlier this year, an NRMA report revealed Greater Hume had the largest road infrastructure pressures of any council in southern NSW.

It put the work backlog at \$84 million.

The Holbrook-Jingellic Road has been listed among its high priorities.

Applications for state funding to upgrade the road have so far been unsuccessful.

"We are just trying to get more money into the road network," Mr Pinnuck said.

"Rural councils have limited avenues to bring in additional revenue.



● Steve Pinnuck

"Obviously rates is one of those.

"We believe the variation proposal we've put to the ratepayers is a responsible step."

Mr Pinnuck conceded the reaction to date had been mixed with a series of information meetings held throughout the shire last month.

"Of surveys that are coming in, it is about 60 per cent in favour and 40 per cent against," he said.

"We just want the submissions to give people a chance to have their say."

The Albury and Corowa councils have successfully applied for special rate variations in recent years but, unlike Greater Hume, they have used the additional revenue on multiple projects.

The Volt Lane multi-deck car park was Albury's big-ticket item and a long-awaited upgrade of Corowa's swimming pool is set to become a reality.

NSW council rates will be capped at 2.4 per cent next financial year.

Hume bids for rate boost to fix roads

BY NIGEL McNAY

ROADS in desperate need of repair are the motivation behind a Greater Hume push for a special rate increase.

The council has embarked on a community consultation campaign it hopes will secure widespread support.

It wants to apply early next year to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal for permission to impose the increase.

The actual increase would be an average 9.35 per cent — including the rate peg each year, for three years from July 1 next year.

If approved, this would amount to about an extra \$50 for each average rate assessment in Greater Hume.

Mayor Heather Wilton said Greater Hume had been "continually challenged" to fund the ongoing maintenance and replacement of its assets.

That included the extensive sealed and unsealed road network.

Cr Wilton said an independent research company did some work for the council two years ago on a range of issues regarding how it did business.

"The main thing that came out of that on what people wanted by far in excess of anything else was better roads and improved roads infrastructure," she said.

"Since then we've been grappling with how we can approach this vexed issue."

Cr Wilton said on top of that was the issue of general infrastructure and just how the council could keep up with work that had to be done.

"The best way we've come up with is this increase in the rates, over and above the rate pegging," she said.

Cr Wilton defended the extra impost on ratepayers.

"It's not an onerous amount of money," she said.

"I know that ratepayers don't want to pay any more than they absolutely have to."

Nevertheless, Cr Wilton said she was

THE ARGUMENT

FIRST OPTION: A RATES INCREASE ABOVE THE RATE PEG:

- Will reduce frequency of rural road resurfacing from 31 to 21 years, for gravel resheeting from 29 to 21 years

- Urban sealed roads would meet industry standards

- This would allow council money to be used for renewal of other assets, such as swimming pools, public halls and community buildings:

SECOND OPTION: NO INCREASE IN RATES ABOVE THE RATE PEG:

- Built assets will continue to deteriorate

- Other services likely to be reduced to free up money to pay for asset renewal

- A greater reliance on grants to pay for road improvements

"reasonably confident" the council would win the community's support.

"By going down this path, by giving them all of the information they need so they can get a better understanding of why and how and when."

This has involved the council releasing what it has called its "community engagement guide" on "options for achieving a better road network".

The 16-page guide is going out to households across Greater Hume this week, with the document seeking to argue the council's case for the special rate.

This will be backed up by an independent phone survey this month to further gauge community attitudes.

The council will also run community sessions in Jindera, Holbrook, Culcairn, Henty and Walla from November 20 to 28.

44 The best way we've come up with is this increase in the rates, over and above the rate pegging ... It's not an onerous amount of money ... I know that ratepayers don't want to pay any more than they absolutely have to. HEATHER WILTON

THE HAUS

MEGA ME
Up to 5

10 for
\$20 Lamb
Cutlets

12 for Yearling
\$25 Porterhaus
Steaks

24 Haus Made
for Beef, Honey
\$8 & Rosemary
Lamb or
Chicken
Sausages

\$3.75 NEW
each Avocado

YOUR VIEW

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Letters

Put archway in Noreuil Park

THE boomerang archway is an important (and now vital) part of the Albury-Wodonga region of Australia.

This creation for Charles Pollard symbolises the joining of two states and two cities — opened September 16, 1959 by Princess Alexandra, the first royal personage to visit here, it continues to honour and preserve the ceremonial occasion when every school kid in Albury assembled at the sportsground to see the royal limousine drive through the cheering crowd.

The removal of the archway to make way for the causeway virtually relegated it to obscurity, away from the continuous view of the public.

This is a monument that needs to be seen all the time and it needs to be located in an area that affords this icon full recognition of its seemingly overlooked significance.

It would be appropriate to have the structure done over with new paint work — bright colours that would make the design stand out.

Aboriginal colours would turn this sculpture into a true landmark — a unique attraction for Albury-Wodonga — something for all Australians to be proud of.

I wish it was relocated at Noreuil Park — a perfect setting for this heritage asset.

— JOHN M. STEVENS,
Albury

Two rules on phone use

I WAS driving north on Friday on the highway between Racecourse Road and Thurgoona Drive exits when passed by a NSW Police vehicle, with the female driver happily chatting on a mobile phone.

Seems there are rules for some and rules for us mere mortals.

— CHRIS ROUJKE,
Lawington

Rates rise devil is in the detail

IN Saturday's *Border Mail* it was reported that a proposal for a special rate rise in the Greater Hume Shire to pay for rural road repairs had majority support of residents.

The council's case for the rate rise is compelling but the devil is in the detail, with residential ratepayers facing 40 per cent rate rises over three years while rural ratepayers, those who will gain the most from the increase, are facing rises of less than 20 per cent.

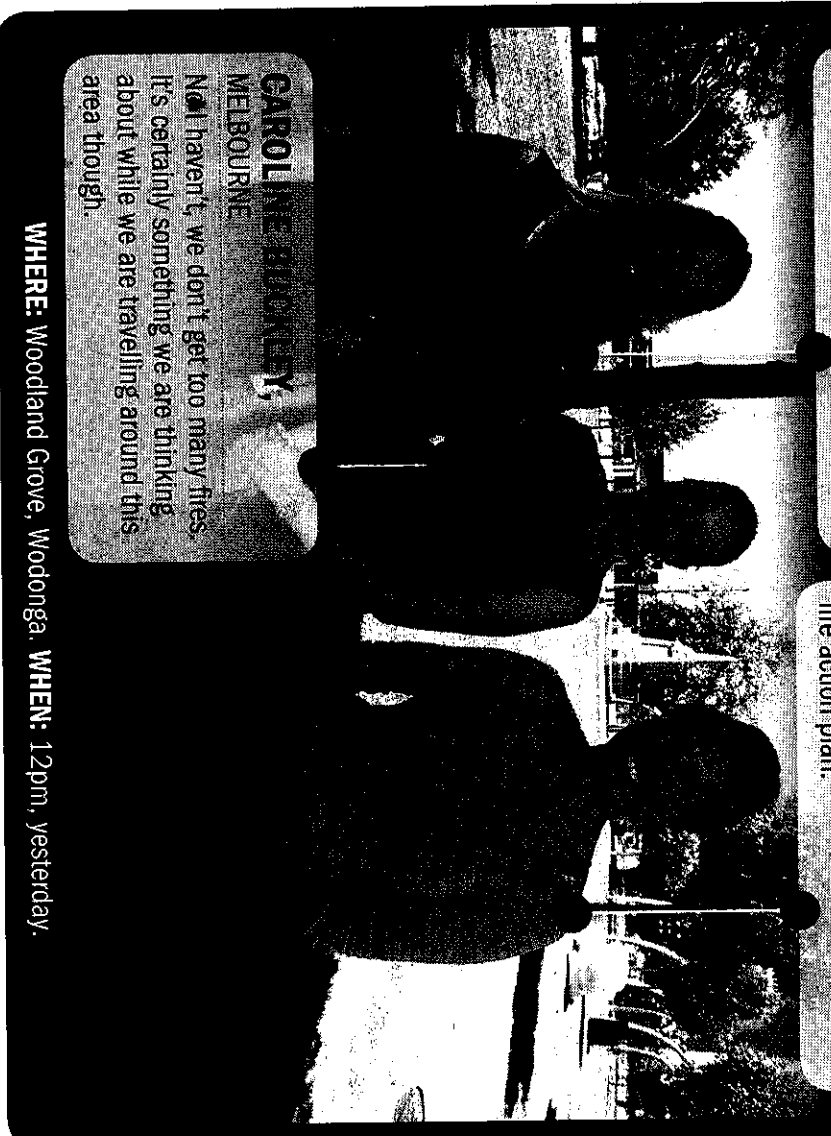
The cumulative increase in rates runs into hundreds of dollars a year in extra rates, not the \$50 the council claimed in *The Border Mail* back in November.

THE TOPIC

Have the fires in Wodonga made you think about your own fire plan?

JENNY O'HARA,
LAWINGTON
No, because I'm more in town I don't feel like I'm at risk.

ELISE ARMITAGE,
MOUNT BEAUTY
Yes — we have cleaned up the house, got our safe places to go to and have a fire action plan.



CAROLINE BUCKLEY, MELBOURNE

Not haven't we don't get too many fires. It's certainly something we are thinking about while we are travelling around this area though.

WHERE: Woodland Grove, Wodonga. WHEN: 12pm, yesterday.

Ratepayers should again read the charts in the expensive and complex brochure the council sent out to them.

This shift in the rate burden is explained in the fine print in the brochure — at present, 36 per cent of ratepayers pay 64 per cent of the rate and the council thinks this is unfair.

What the council fails to mention is that this 36 per cent owns in both area and land value vastly more than 64 per cent of the shire and the present rate share reflects that.

Most rural ratepayers also are able to claim land rates as a tax deduction, something very few residential ratepayers can do.

They will just have to cop the 40 per cent increase on the chin.

The present support for the Greater Hume Council's special rate rise might not be so strong had the council more fully explained the shifting rate burden and the accumulative effect of the rate rises over three years.

The rate rise is needed to fix rural roads so surely the beneficiaries of this work, the rural ratepayers, should shoulder the same degree of pain as residential ratepayers.

— DAVID CARTER,
Henry

Back to the bad old alpine ways

IT looks like rural Victorians are to once more be the sacrificial goats of the Labor and Green voters of the cities.

Two weeks into a new government the new Premier, Daniel Andrews, and his environment minister Lisa Neville have banned the continuation of the scientific alpine grazing trial in the Wonnangatta Valley.

They have also announced that they intend to drop the bounty on wild dogs.

Ms Neville has based her decision on the report of the alpine grazing taskforce from May 24, 2005.

The taskforce was made up of four Labor MPs, none of them rural, who appeared to have been given a mandate to rid the mountains of grazing and all management.

The Warby Ranges and Mount Buffalo are worth visiting if you want to see a fire bomb waiting for ignition.

The one precious commodity that's continually overlooked in this debate is water yield.

There is up to 28 per cent more run-off from grazed or slashed

country and regrowth from bushfires will soak up another 20-40 per cent for about 30 years.

To remove fuel to abate the fire intensity risk surely makes sense.

If the number of cattle grazing is controlled and managed, cattle can be the best management tool we have for maintaining the balance of large tracts of remote country within our Alps.

Talking to a government wild dog controller a while back, he said the \$100 wild-dog bounty had made a huge difference to the dog numbers, at a very cheap cost to the state.

Here are some important facts worth pondering:

● Fuel reduction does lessen fire intensity.

● Fuel reduction heightens water runoff, thus healthier river systems.

● The 2003-2006-07 bushfires continually went out when sections of the fires reached grazed country — aerial pictures support this.

● Under parks management, there has been significant increase in fire, blackberry, other weeds and feral animals.

● The Wonnangatta grazing site is less than 0.025 per cent of the national park.

— NEVILLE WRIGHT,
Bohnawerah

Join the debate @ bordermail.com.au

Zaknich's pay rise goes higher

What a joke! An absolute insult to the ratepayers of Albury. What's wrong with CPI increases? For crying out loud the guy's on nearly \$300K! Really disappointed with the lot of you. Better not raise rates next year.

— local resident

I can see another rate increase coming up well done Albury Council, I'm

so proud of you guys. You go in wanting to reduce his pay and come out increasing it well done (NOT).

— cranlyv01

What is going on in Albury Council when these same councillors that voted for only a 2 per cent increase for Zaknich thought nothing of paying the previous GM way over the award.

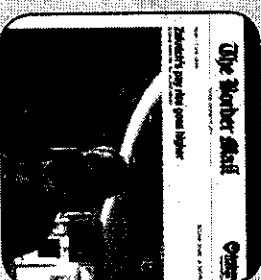
— HRH

Well, well, well. So three councillors who opposed

the 2 per cent pay rise have cost Albury City Council/citizens an additional 2 per cent. May I suggest this additional 2 per cent now be deducted from the nine councilors' allowance.

— KMTIC

You pay peanuts, you get monkeys. Albury City is in competition with councils across the country for professionals. If Mr Zaknich can reach the targets he is being set, then his pay



should be in line with this. This man's bonuses and salary is in line with his colleagues around the country. Yes it's a lot of money. And

yes, he earns more than you. Are you managing a local authority with hundreds of millions of dollars of assets, millions of dollars of debt to service, hundreds of staff, and multi-million-dollar infrastructure projects? You aren't? Thought so.

— concerned

Mr Zaknich is not highly paid for the position he has. Many are paid more. I am happy for him to get the increase.

— worth every cent

The diary

email: diary@bordermail.com.au

■ Wodonga View Club Christmas lunch, today, 11am for 11.30am, RSL Clubrooms, Reid Street, Wodonga. Visitors welcome. Bookings: 0412 043 435.

■ Wodonga Family History Society Christmas party, today, 6pm, Wodonga Golf Club. Research room will re-open January 20, meeting same day, Feltrimber Community Centre.

■ The Association of Independent Retirees, Albury-Wodonga Regional Branch monthly meeting tomorrow, 10am, The Albury Club, 519 Kiwara Street, Albury. Speaker from Albury Police Station. (02) 6021 7288 or 0438 658 213.

■ Albury Chess Club meets tomorrow, 8pm, Albury High School, Kiwara Street. Players of all levels welcome.

■ Hope for the holidays Christmas fundraiser for diabetics, Friday, 5pm to 8pm, QEII Square, Albury. Sausage sizzle (gluten free available), kids activities, raffle draw. Money raised to Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

■ Corowa old-time and new vogue Christmas dance, Friday, 7.30pm to 11pm, Corowa Golf Club Auditorium. Russell's dance music. Admission \$7. Lucky door prizes, supper provided.

■ Springhurst old time monthly dance, Saturday, 8pm to 11.30pm, Springhurst hall. Music by Kilo and Larson. \$7 admission. Lots of novelty dances/prizes. Plate of supper please. (03) 5726 5241.

■ Yarrowonga Mulwala Rotary club community Christmas market, Sunday, 8am to noon, Yarrowonga Showgrounds. Fruit and vegies, homewares etc. Gold coin donation. 0409 351 892.

■ Holbrook Miniature Railway Club open for passengers, Sunday 10am to 4pm, Ten Mile Creek Gardens, Holbrook. \$3 ride.

■ The Beechworth Singers and Women in Harmony Christmas concert, Sunday, 2.30pm, Beechworth Town Hall. Carols for Christmas and "Ceremony of Carols" by Britten. Admission \$20, (\$15), children free. (03) 5728 2595.

■ Special Rotary community market, Sunday, 8am to noon, Yarrowonga Showgrounds. Fruit and vegies, homewares etc. Gold coin donation. 0409 351 892.

■ Holbrook Miniature Railway Club open for passengers, Sunday, 10am to 4pm, Ten Mile Creek Gardens, Holbrook. \$3 ride.

■ New Year's Eve dance, Wednesday, December 31, 8pm to 12.30am, Wodonga Senior Citizens Hall. Bohuns music. A plate of supper to share please.

■ Tallangatta old-time dance, Saturday, January 3, 8pm, Anglican Parish hall. Admission \$5. Good music. Supper. All welcome. (02) 6027 1813.

■ National Servicemen's Association Albury-Wodonga Sub-Branch next social lunch meeting, Sunday, January 4, noon for 12.30pm, Howlong Country Golf Club. All Nashos welcome. (02) 6023 6541.

■ Rotary community market, Sunday, January 18, 8am to noon, Yarrowonga Showgrounds. Fruit and vegies, homewares etc. Gold coin donation. 0409 351 892.

■ Aglow Albury-Wodonga annual picnic at Noreuil Park near cafe, fun, fellowship, Wednesday, January 28, 10.30am. All ladies welcome. Bring food, drinks, sunscreen and friends. 0429 630 989.

■ Age Concern dance, Thursday, January 29, 1.30pm to 4.30pm, Sacred Heart Hall, Mate Street, Albury. (02) 6025 2552 or (03) 5755 1034.

Hume votes for big rates lift

BY NATALIE KOTSIOS

RATEPAYERS in Greater Hume will be slugged with rate rises of more than 7 per cent for the next three years as the shire aims to catch up with its \$84 million backlog of roads maintenance.

Councillors yesterday voted in favour of applying to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal for permission to impose the increases, which include the NSW rate peg. Residential ratepayers will face a 7.21 per cent rise in

84 positive responses not enough: Quinn

2015-16, 7.46 per cent in 2016-17, and 7.15 per cent in 2017-18.

The council had on a community consultation late last year in a bid to secure widespread support to tackle the backlog of roads in dire need of repair that has amassed over the past five years.

A report prepared for council states 60 per cent of residents involved in consulta-

tions agreed with the proposed rates rise.

But Cr Tony Quinn — the only councillor to vote against the proposal — argued the council had not presented a strong enough case of community support for the rate increases.

“If we want to shoot ourselves in the foot, we proceed with this today,” he said. “I have a lot of anecdotal

evidence that a lot of people didn't receive this information — I just don't believe the response is good enough to go through with it.”

Part of the council's consultation included a direct mail-out to 4800 resident ratepayers; of those, just 144 responses were received with 84 in favour of the special rate variation.

Cr Quinn argued this response amounted to just 2.5 per

cent of the entire Greater Hume population. “That's just not good enough to make any sort of decision,” he said.

But Cr John McInerney said the response rate was “quite outstanding” for survey engagement.

“I know it's not what we want, we want 100 per cent, but that just doesn't happen,” he said.

Mayor Heather Wilton

pointed out the mail-out was not the only form of communication to residents, with street stalls, community meetings, news articles and the council's website all available.

Cr Denise Osborne agreed, saying the number of residents who missed the chance to respond was likely minimal.

“I've never been a person who liked rate rises ... but I think we have an obligation to look at the future of our area,” she said.

“If this is what we've got to do then we must do it.”

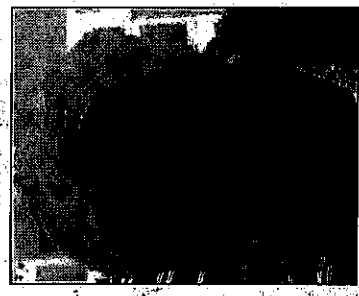


Hardware stores

ERC WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER

VOX POP

Greater Hume Shire Council (GHSC) have asked ratepayers to accept a three year rate increase in order to improve the roads, however if ratepayers do not accept this GHSC say there may be a reduction of service levels in some areas - what are your thoughts?



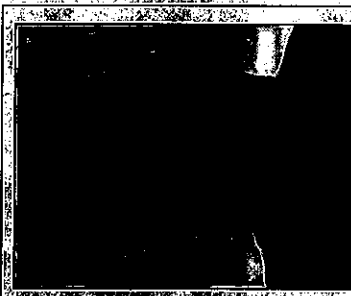
**Ruth Dinsdale,
Holbrook**

Council do not listen to the ratepayers; they planted trees that have stopped residents and tourists parking and street sweepers can no longer keep some streets clean as they cannot get in. Some residents have to put their bins on the road as the garbage truck can no longer get into the kerbs. In future years Holbrook will be a leafy town but it will be dead. I feel council are blackmailing us with the two options.



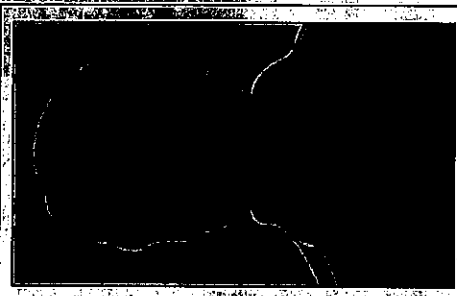
**Meredith
Johnstone.
Culcairn**

If they do what they say they will do I will agree, but they must go through with it.



**Ian Cumming,
Culcairn**

I agree with the rise providing it is not channelled into non-urgent areas such as the purchase of trees that are not suitable for their location.



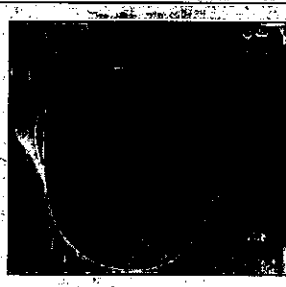
Ken Dale, Henty

I would have expected a normal rate increase to continue our normal shire upgrades of services and infrastructure.



**Stephanie
Hanckel, Henty**

I am fifty fifty on the whole option and will be contacting council.



**Phil Stokes,
Holbrook**

New trees have been planted in front of established trees which are preventing trucks and caravans parking in front of the Holbrook Stores, bakery and pizza shop which will impact on tourism. I don't think Holbrook is getting its fair share.

Higher rates for better roads

Chronicle 26-11-14.

Increase rates and get better roads or no rate increase and a possible decline in road maintenance.

Those are the two options put to residents in the Greater Hume Shire Council (GHS).

While some councils offer three options rather than two as the GHS GHS general manager Steve Pinnuck said it would be too complicated to have another option.

Three meetings held last week saw a number of people meet with council staff to get a better understanding of the options.

"The meetings are to provide additional information and an opportunity to explain how it works," Mr Pinnuck said.

"Some people accepted it

after it was explained but others just saw it as an additional tax."

All funds raised over the rate peg would be used solely for roads and the funds would be allocated to roads on a needs basis.

Jindera resident Greg Finster is disappointed with the situation but understands why it is happening.

"The bottom line is this needs to happen," Mr Finster said.

"The reality is council has a small rate base, large area and lots of roads - it's frustrating but needs to happen."

Along with the meetings there is also a phone survey being conducted about the changes.

The phone survey allows for different demographics to be

targeted across the shire leading to a more accurate response.

Residents in the GHS have until December 5 to submit their feedback before a report is formulated and taken to the council meeting in February 2015.

Council will then decide whether or not to go ahead. If they go ahead they then have a week to submit an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

This application will then be responded to by May or June 2015.

Council is holding meetings this Friday November 28 in Henty from 9.30am to 11.30am outside the Henty Library and Walla Walla from 2pm to 4pm outside the cafe and post office.



Options For
Achieving A
Better Road
Network

Community Engagement Guide

Greater Hume Shire residents rate increase

- on an average rate assessment within each category an extra \$50 cumulative for three years

Throughout this week Greater Hume Shire residents will receive a comprehensive booklet entitled 'Options For Achieving a Better Road Network' explaining the challenges facing council to adequately fund ongoing maintenance and replacement of assets including sealed and unsealed roads, bridges and drainage.

"Like many local government areas, each year when preparing its annual budget Greater Hume Shire has been continually challenged to fund the ongoing maintenance and replacement of council's assets including its extensive sealed and unsealed road network," mayor Heather Wilton said.

A large scale community survey in 2012 identified that maintenance of sealed and unsealed rural roads and town streets were three of the five top activities where council's services were not meeting community expectations.

At the end of 2013 GHSC decided it would formally advise the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

that it intended to seek a Special Rate Variation above rate pegging.

Basically this means that properties with the average valuation within each rating category will pay an additional \$50, approximately, above rate pegging each year for three years. The special rate variation will apply to rates for three years commencing July 1, 2015 with the revenue retained permanently in Council's rate base from the 2017/2018 financial year.

"We understand that rate increases of any kind are never welcomed, however, it is Council's view that a sustainable and affordable increase in rates is essential if Council is to meet the needs and expectations of the community across a range of services", added Cr Wilton.

Council is proposing two options for residents to consider -

Option 1 - a sustainable increase in rates for asset renewal and improved service levels including the Special Rate Variation or

Option 2 - no rate increase above rate

peg, which could potentially result in a decline in services to adequately fund the maintenance and renewal of roads in the shire.

The booklet ratepayers will receive covers these options in detail. In addition more information, including an online rates calculator, can be found on council's website at <http://www.greaterhume.nsw.gov.au/CouncilServices/EngineeringServices/SpecialRateVariation.aspx>

Community consultation sessions (CCS) will be held in each of the five main towns in the shire later this month.

GHSC is seeking feedback from its residents and ratepayers about the proposal either at the CCS or by return of a form contained in the booklet. Alternatively you can freecall council on 1300 653 538.

"Greater Hume Shire Council is committed to increasing its investment in the road network and believes a sustainable increase in rates is the appropriate course of action" concluded Cr Wilton.

ERC 5-11-14



ERC 5-11-2014