

9 January 2017

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Dear Ratepayer

**HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT THE NEW COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN,
DELIVERY PROGRAM AND THE PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION**

Over the past twelve months, Council has undertaken a comprehensive consultation program to seek your involvement in shaping the future of our Shire.

Residents have been invited to attend community forums, participate in both telephone and face-to-face surveys, and to make submissions in response to strategic documents such as the Denman Town Centre Strategy, the Muswellbrook Town Centre Strategy and the Local Environmental Plan.

Most recently, we have completed a series of community engagement *Listening Posts* at key locations around the Shire asking you about your priorities for the future of economic prosperity, social equity, environmental sustainability, cultural vitality, community infrastructure and community leadership over the next ten years and beyond.

You told us that you are proud to live in Muswellbrook but are concerned about future job opportunities. You also believe that Muswellbrook should be the Regional Centre for the Upper Hunter with infrastructure that is matching – such as a Regional Convention and Performance Centre, a children’s water park and a new exhibition and show facility. Your newly elected Council has carried out a fundamental review of the current Community Strategic Plan and devised a draft four year Delivery Program to reflect your views; both these planning documents are on public exhibition until 24 January 2017 (www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au).

To deliver on your priorities of jobs and sustainable economic development, Council proposes to continue its annual \$500,000 allocation towards job creation initiatives. We will also continue using revenues from Council’s future fund to expand education and training opportunities in the Shire.

To facilitate Muswellbrook’s transition into a Regional Centre for the Upper Hunter, and provide the Regional services you expect, **Council proposes to apply to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for an increase to rates** across the Shire from the 2017-2018 financial year. This will maintain your rates among the lowest in the Hunter.

We are applying now in line with the timetable set by the NSW Office of Local Government Guidelines. These Guidelines advise councils on how to seek a rate variation. They were released on Friday 16 December and applications must be submitted to IPART by Monday 13 February 2017.

Council is seeking your feedback now on this proposed increase. To better understand your thoughts on this matter, Council has commissioned Jetty Research to conduct a telephone survey of at least 500 residents to gauge the level of community support. **Calls will commence during the week beginning Monday 16 January 2017.**

You will be asked to indicate a preference between:

Option 1: A Special Rate Variation (SRV) of 2.5% per year for four years

In return you will get:

- A regional quality water park at the Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre, including the replacement of the 84 year old 50m outdoor pool.
- Full delivery of the Denman town centre revitalisation plan.
- A Regional Convention and Performance Venue in Muswellbrook's town centre.

Option 2: No Special Rate Variation

Leaving rates as they are will mean:

- Replacement of the 84 year old 50m pool only.
- Stage 1 of the Denman town centre revitalisation only.
- Limited upgrade of the Muswellbrook town centre (with no Regional Convention and Performance Venue).

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Cumulative increase
Average residential rate with OPTION 1	\$723	\$752	\$790	\$829	\$870	20.4%
Average residential rate with OPTION 2	\$723	\$734	\$752	\$771	\$790	9.3%
Annual increase		2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	
Cumulative impact of SRV above 2016-17 levels		\$29	\$67	\$106	\$147	\$147

You can have your say about the funding of proposed projects you have identified which will support jobs and economic development, and ensure the community's ongoing economic resilience.

To **Have Your Say** about the **Special Rate Variation** proposal please complete the online survey at www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au/srv by **5:00pm Friday 03 February 2017.**

Council will review and include all community feedback in the Special Rate Variation application when it is submitted in February 2017.

Yours sincerely



Steve McDonald
General Manager