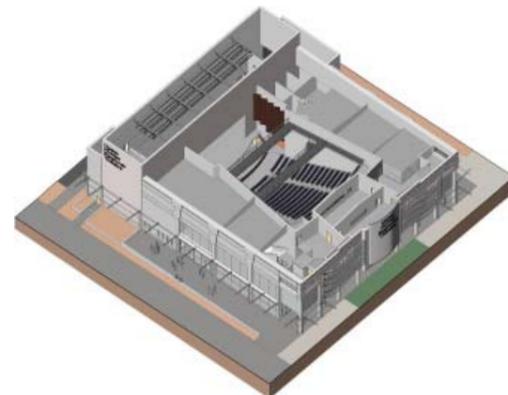
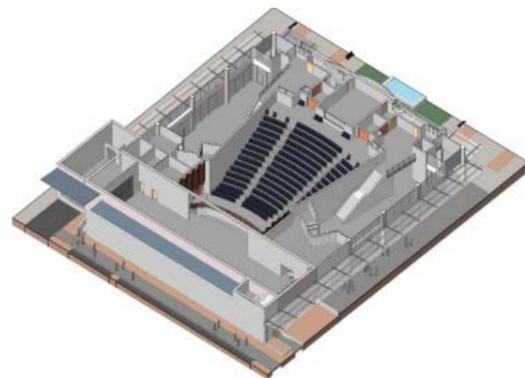


What will the Regional Convention and Performance Centre look like?

The concept for the project includes a 400+ seat theatre, atrium, foyer, bar area, conference rooms, which will be capable of hosting travelling performances and regional conventions.

It is proposed to be constructed at the site of the Muswellbrook Plaza and it is the intention of Council to relocate existing tenants to new tenancies with equivalent shop frontage, car parking, floor space and access to facilities before any work is commenced.

A conceptual image of the ground floor, first floor and exterior from Brook Street is depicted below:



Regional Convention and Performance Centre Concept Masterplan.
TOP: Artist's view of building exterior; BOTTOM-LEFT: cutaway view - first floor; BOTTOM-RIGHT: cutaway view - bio box

What options did Council consider as alternatives to the Special Rate Variation?

Although the three projects proposed to be funded by the Special Rate Variation have been identified as priorities by both Council and the community, Council's forward budget is committed to even higher priorities, such as critical road, water, recreation, waste, job creation and education programs. Council's revenue options are largely limited to Special Rate Variations and grants. Whilst Council invariably seeks grants for a range of projects, funding from the State and Federal Governments is very competitive and is typically not a reliable funding source. Nonetheless, if the Special Rate Variation application is not supported or unsuccessful, Council would seek to progress the projects through grant applications. However, without ongoing sources of revenue for the operational and maintenance costs for the Convention and Performance Centre and Aquatic Centre upgrades, these projects would not be able to proceed unless savings were identified through reductions in other core levels of service, which is unlikely to be met with community support.

How will the community be consulted on the detailed design of each of the projects?

Each of the projects will be driven by a Council Steering Committee which consists of both Councillors and Council staff, as well as key stakeholders from the community. For the Aquatic Centre upgrade, for example, the Muswellbrook Amateur Swimming Club would be invited to participate; for Denman Town Centre Revitalisation Project, the Denman Chamber of Commerce and the Denman and District Development Association; and for the Regional Convention and Performance Centre, the Muswellbrook Amateur Theatre Society, the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music would be invited to participate – amongst other groups. The Committees will be required to identify steps in their processes where they will need to consult the wider community about their planning.

Muswellbrook Shire Council's Proposed Special Rate Variation FAQs

What are the key elements of Council's proposed four year delivery program?

The proposed four year Delivery Program funds Council's core responsibilities – those things that the community has identified as being of the very highest priority. This includes road and footpath maintenance, parks, recreation and buildings, water and waste water services, domestic waste, companion animal management, and human health regulation amongst other community services. Some of the key elements of the Delivery Program are as follows:

- A balanced budget over the four year period;
- \$34.2M over four years for road, bridge, footpath and drainage renewal and upgrades and a further \$21.3M for maintenance, including an additional \$1.44M for rural roads maintenance (30% increase), urban roads maintenance (35% increase) and stormwater drainage maintenance (50% increase);
- \$3.6M over four years for recreation and building renewal and upgrades and a further \$13.8M for maintenance, including an additional \$40,000 for Denman sporting fields, \$120,000 for Muswellbrook passive recreation areas and \$200,000 for Shire parks maintenance;
- \$96.4M over four years for water and waste water renewal, upgrades and maintenance, including \$35M for a new state-of-the-art Recycle Water Treatment Plant to replace the 80 year old Muswellbrook Sewerage Treatment Plant;
- \$2.06M for job creation initiatives over four years;
- \$830,000 for major land care projects;
- \$6.5M over four years for town centre upgrades in Muswellbrook and Denman and the village of Sandy Hollow;
- \$1.9M upgrade of Council's Information Technology systems;
- The continuing use of revenues from Council's Future Fund to expand training, education and cultural opportunities in the Shire.

What is Council asking the community to decide?

The community has also indicated its desire for a number of additional projects including:

- A regional quality water park at the Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre, including the replacement of the 87 year old 50m outdoor pool;
- Full delivery of the Denman town centre revitalisation plan; and
- A Regional Convention and Performance Venue in Muswellbrook's town centre.

Council also believes that these projects are worth funding because it will help transition the Shire's position as a Regional Centre within the Upper Hunter – something else the community has sought in its survey responses and feedback. However, Council cannot fund these three projects within the funds presently available to Council.

Council is asking the community to decide between two options. The first option includes a Special Rate Variation of 2.5% each year for four years (10% over four years) proportionately over all rating categories, to fund the above projects. The second option proposes to keep rates as they are and not fund the above three projects. Either way, your rates will remain amongst the lowest in the Hunter.

Residents are being 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 Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre, including the replacement of the 87 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 87 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).

Impact of Option 1 and Option 2 on the average residential rate	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Cumulative increase
	Average residential rate with OPTION 1	\$723	\$752	\$790	\$829	\$870
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
Weekly increase		\$0.58	\$1.29	\$2.04	\$2.83	\$2.83
Weekly increase (real terms)		\$0.35	\$0.70	\$1.07	\$1.44	\$1.44

Why is Council going through this process at this time of year?

Council is making the application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for a Special Rate Variation in line with the timetable set by the NSW Government's 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.

In order to meet this timetable, Council has had to place on public exhibition for 28 days, its draft Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program to meet the statutory requirements set out in the Local Government Act. Council acknowledges that the public exhibition period falling over the holiday season is not ideal. However, in order to meet the timetable set by the NSW Government, Council has had to undertake the exercise now. The public exhibition period has been extended to 34 days to provide the public with as much time as the process will allow.

Does Council need a rates increase to remain fit for the future?

Pleasingly, Council remained stand-alone after the NSW Government's amalgamation process by being able to satisfy IPART's rigorous assessment of Council's finances. About half of all councils in NSW are the subject of amalgamations as a result of that process. Council does not need a rates increase to remain Fit for the Future and Council is giving the community the choice of funding additional projects not contemplated in its Fit for the Future Plan. In that regard, Council noted that it had sufficient resources to meet planned levels of service and the renewal of community infrastructure. It also noted, however, that:

Council would consider as an option, and in consultation with community, making application for a Special Rate Variation to fund any new infrastructure identified by the community.

What are the Special Rate Variation funds going to be used for?

The proposed Special Rate Variation, with the support of the community will fund three regionally significant projects: a Regional Convention and Performance Centre – a major component of the Muswellbrook Town Centre Plan, an expansion and upgrade to the Regional Aquatic Centre and the full delivery of the Denman Town Centre revitalisation plan. These projects will not proceed to completion without the proposed rate increase.

How were the projects identified?

Over the past twelve months, Council has undertaken a comprehensive consultation program to seek community 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 residents' 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.

That consultation has confirmed ongoing community support for Muswellbrook as 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, main street upgrades and a new exhibition and show facility. Further details have been included in the draft four year Delivery Program, which together with the draft Community Strategic Plan is on public exhibition until 24 January 2017 (www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au).

How has the community been consulted?

Over the past twelve months, Council has undertaken a comprehensive consultation program to seek community 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 residents' 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.

What happens if the community does not support the special rate variation?

Council's decision will be heavily influenced by the wishes of the community. If the Special Rate Variation is not supported, Council will continue to fund the identified priority infrastructure set out in its four year Delivery Program but will not be in a position to fund the Regional Convention and Performance Centre, an expansion and upgrade to the Regional Aquatic Centre and the full delivery of the Denman Town Centre revitalisation plan.

What is the time line for the process?

Over the last twelve months, Council has undertaken a range of consultation activities with the community and other stakeholders of the Shire to identify the priorities for the forthcoming Council term. These have been captured in the draft Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2017-27 and Delivery Program 2017-21, which are currently on public exhibition. Council has also indicated to IPART its intention to apply – subject to community support – for an increase in rates of 2.5% each year for four years to fund three key priority projects. IPART will consider Council's application and the feedback provided by the community and will determine what, if any increase is to be granted. The timeline for this process is as follows:

- 16 January 2017 : Random telephone survey of 500 residents commences;
- 24 January 2017 : End of public exhibition of draft Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program;
- 31 January 2017 : Council to adopt Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program;
- 3 February 2017 : Online survey of residents closes;
- 13 February 2017 : Subject to community support, application for Special Rate Variation due with IPART;
- April 2017 : IPART determines Special Rate Variation application (if applicable); and
- May 2017 : Council adopts its budget, whether with or without the Special Rate Variation.

How can the community have its say?

Council is seeking community feedback now on this proposed increase. To better understand the views of residents on this matter, Council has commissioned Jetty Research to conduct a random 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. The community will also be able to participate in an online survey (www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au), write (PO Box 122, Muswellbrook NSW 2333), email (council@muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au) or leave a comment on Council's Facebook page expressing views to the General Manager.

What is the Denman Town Centre Revitalisation Project?

The Denman Town Centre Revitalisation Project has received almost unanimous support from key stakeholders, the Denman Chamber of Commerce and the Denman and District Development Association, together with significant support in the wider Denman community. Denman is developing as an Upper Hunter Regional tourism destination because of the quality of its tourism product and town centre businesses. The Revitalisation Project is primarily aimed to enlarge its

destination draw by enhancing the public domain. The Denman Town Centre Revitalisation Project is also a strategic planning framework to facilitate the development of the Denman town centre. It sets urban design principles and identifies opportunities for improved retail, commercial, public and other potential activities within town centre. The objectives of the Project are:

- To improve access in and around the town centre, particularly for walking and cycling;
- To promote and enhance community identity, pride and sense of belonging, and safety of patrons of the town centre; and
- To create high quality public spaces within the town centre – focussing on visibility, a mix of users, climate and amenity;
- Specifically, it includes:
 - Additional parking north and south of Ogilvie Street;
 - A service lane on the south side of Ogilvie Street and partial service land on the north side of Ogilvie Street;
 - Widened footpaths, pedestrian crossings and a one-way travelling lane in Ogilvie Street between Palace and Paxton streets;
 - Significant drainage upgrades; and
 - RV amenities, signing and park upgrades.



Denman Town Centre Masterplan

What will the Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre upgrade include?

The Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre with water park has the following conceptual elements:

- Replacement of the 87 year outdoor 50 metre swimming pool, which will also include additional recreation facilities at the southern end;
- The construction of a dry/wet or wet children's play space (water park) adjoining the indoor facility replacing the children's learn-to-swim pool;
- The construction of a new children's learn-to-swim pool at the northern end;
- The installation of an elevator and other all-access improvements;
- Additional café space;
- Additional shade structures; and
- Associated new pumps and water reticulation equipment.



Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre Concept Masterplan