



Community Consultation Report

Gunnedah Shire Council Proposed SRV

October 2024

Contents

- Executive Summary..... 2**
- Engagement Methodology..... 9**
- Key Community Stakeholders10**
- Communication and Engagement Methods.....10**
 - Public Relations 12
 - Media Coverage..... 13
 - Radio 15
 - Print..... 16
 - Social Media..... 16
- Face-to-face: Community Conversations | Sessions19**
 - Internal Staff Briefings23
 - Frequently Asked Questions24
- Consultation Process, Key Themes and Feedback.....26**
 - In-person consultation26
 - Phone Survey31
 - Online Survey33
 - Community Submissions.....34
- Conclusion35**

Executive Summary

Gunnedah Shire Council (GSC) is committed to providing quality services and infrastructure to its residents, ratepayers, and visitors in an efficient manner.

Like many councils in NSW, GSC has been impacted by the effects of high inflation, rising fuel and electricity costs, ongoing cost shifting from the state and federal governments, reduced 'real' financial support from other levels of government for operational works, including the fact that the rate peg has failed to keep up with the increase in Council's expenditure as well as the impacts of natural disasters such as drought, bushfires, and flooding.

It has led to Council facing a financially unsustainable outlook without an increase in funding and/or decrease in service levels. During the preparation of Council's Operational Plan and Budget for the 2024/25 financial year, which was endorsed on 19 June 2024, Council committed to having a conversation with the community regarding a potential Special Rate Variation (SRV).

The goals of the engagement:

- provide public awareness of Council's financial position and need for additional funding to maintain Council's Infrastructure at current service levels,
- provide understanding regarding the necessity of and potential impacts of an SRV
- provide understanding and service level impacts of not progressing with an SRV
- gauge the community's opinion for the potential SRV, knowing that in the current environment, any potential increase in rates was likely to face heavy resistance from ratepayers

This report summarises the discussion that was had and outlines the community feedback regarding a potential Special Rate Variation for GSC. It highlights prominent community questions and themes that arose during community consultations, particularly around affordability, services and economic sustainability.

The report also captures the approach to this consultation, examples of GSC's due diligence provided to the community, and Council Executive's approach to balancing short-term financial burdens and long-term benefits for local regional and rural development.

In developing the 2024/25 Operational Plan (which outlines the strategic priorities and specific actions for the upcoming period) Council Executive undertook a comprehensive review of available funds, budgetary forecasting and considerations, alongside a review of the alignment of the fiscal position with Gunnedah's long-term strategic goals.

While Council is in a stable position, to ensure it can continue to maintain assets at current service levels, have a sustainable budget and an appropriate cash position, it was identified that GSC would need to improve the financial position of the General Fund.

How did we get here?

The key factors that have led to Council’s financial position:

- impacts of recent high inflation resulting in a higher cost for the delivery of key Council services and a significantly higher level of construction costs associated with the renewal and upgrade of infrastructure
- ongoing cost-shifting and reduced operational financial support from other levels of government, and
- inadequate rate peg values that have slowly added up to large gaps in the availability of renewal funding.

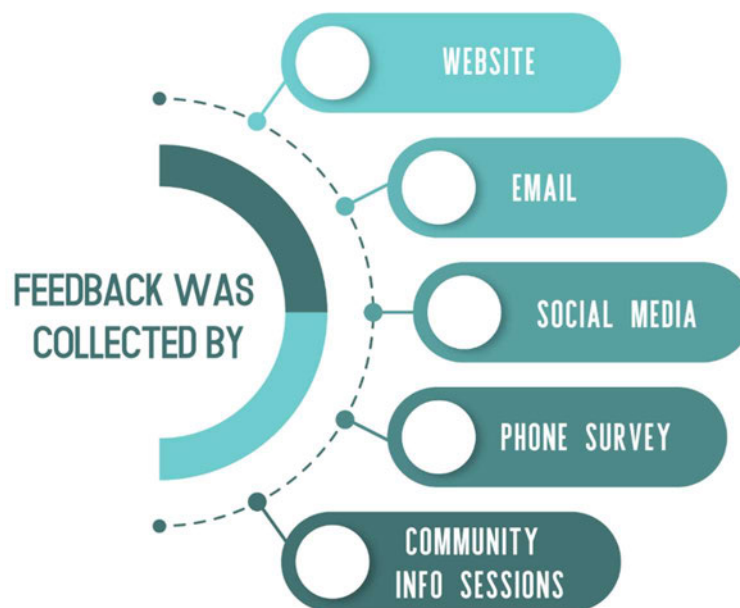
The numbers:

Based on the current long term financial plan, Council estimates there is a funding gap of approximately \$3.1 million per annum in the General Fund. As Council’s asset management data improves, this value may change and is likely to increase.

The proposed SRV discussed was for a permanent SRV of 38.88%, split over two years, comprised of a 24% increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12% increase in year two (2026/27).

	Year 1 2025/26	Year 2 2026/27	Cumulative
Permanent increase above rate peg	19%	7%	
Rate Peg (forecast)	5%	5%	
Total Increase	24%	12%	38.88%

How did we engage:



Council used a variety of methods and tools to engage with the community including:

- Face to face sessions in villages throughout the shire, a Town Hall style meeting and information stands in the main street
- Social media including Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram
- A phone survey independently run by a research house
- Council’s website
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Media releases
- Councils’ operational plans
- A survey accessible from Councils website
- Internal staff briefings



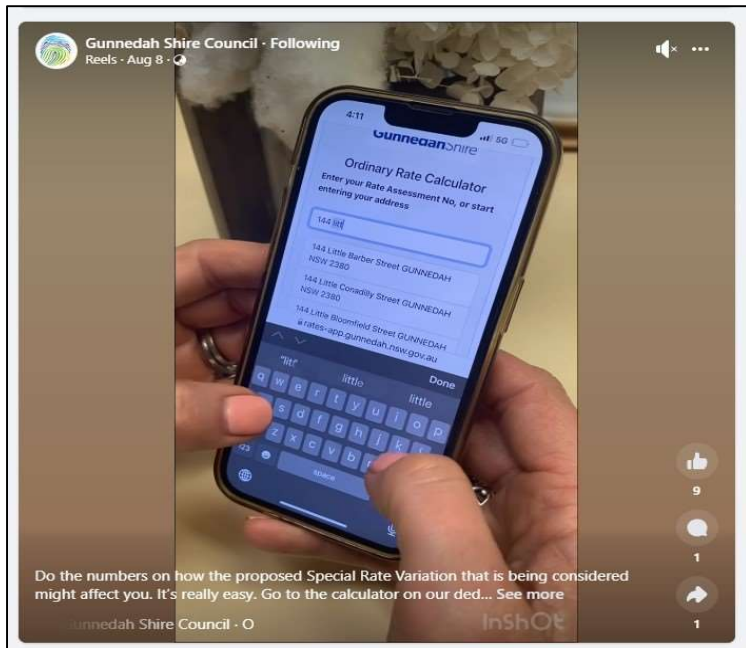
IMAGE FROM CURLEWIS COMMUNITY SESSION

The face-to-face sessions:

Type	Date	Location	# Attendees
Internal Staff briefing	16 July 24	Council Offices	20
	18 July 24	Council Offices	20
	8 August 24	Council Depot	100
		Sub total	140
Community sessions	5 August 24	Curlewis Community Hall	65
	7 August 24	Gunnedah Town Hall	60
	7 August 24	Verdict Café	17
	8 August 24	Tambar Springs Community Hall	24
	13 August 24	Carroll Hall (Progress association shed)	9
	13 August 24	Breeza Progress association	15
	14 August 24	Gunnedah Verdict Café	9
	14 August 24	Gunnedah Town Hall	105
	15 August 24	Gunnedah Library	25
	15 August 24	Club Gunnedah (West Rotary)	1
	17 August 24	Gunnedah Markets, Wolseley Park	55
	20,21,22 August 24	Agquip field days	27
2 September 24	Gunnedah Library	8	
		Sub total	420
		Total	560



IMAGE FROM TAMBAR SPRINGS COMMUNITY SESSION



Council developed an easy-to-use online rates calculator that was actively promoted and used throughout the consultation period.

Who did we Reach?

Throughout the engagement process, we achieved the following reach:

Type of Engagement	Reach
Internal Staff briefings	140
Face to face community sessions	420
Council SRV webpage	1,144 views by 678 visitors
Webpage Rates calculator	821 views by 632 visitors
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37,500 post reach • 75 Direct shares • A reel discussing the SRV and showcasing the Rates Calculator available on Council's website was played 2,400 times with a reach of 1,400.
News articles	>20 articles across radio, TV and print
Media releases and media calls	Significant community reach

Proposed SRV Media Activity Report 2 August - 6 September, 2024



What did the Community tell us

In summary, the key points of feedback from the engagement were:

1. The community does not want to see an increase in rates
2. The community wants/expects to see an improvement in Council services (roads in particular)
3. The community wants to see increased engagement and transparency. It was also noted that there is lots of information available to the community that can be accessed
4. The community wants/expects to see an improvement in Council communications (response to customer requests in particular)
5. Rural ratepayers, particularly farmers, and those living within the outlying villages, expressed concern about paying higher rates with limited visible benefits, especially regarding road maintenance and other critical infrastructure, they suggested the increased rate burden associated with the special rate variation should be more highly attributed to ratepayers closer to or in the Gunnedah township e.g. residential ratepayers
6. The mining sector should be paying a larger portion of Councils rate base.
7. If the SRV is required, it should be implemented over a longer period to lessen the impact on those on fixed incomes
8. They want Council to ensure it has the right balance of indoor/outdoor staff and operating as efficiently as possible
9. Council should tighten its belt and reduce its expense rather than just raising rates
10. Council needs to find other (non-rate) methods to raise revenue rather than just raising rates
11. Address the NSW local government sustainability root cause issues that have led to the SRV requirements and work with the community to address the ineffectiveness of the rate peg process and seek increased funding from the state and federal government
12. Important to note only 26% of the 38.88% is above the rate peg that will occur regardless of the SRV

What questions did the Community ask?

- Why wasn't this brought up sooner? If we were in this situation for some time, why hasn't the community heard about it sooner?
- Can the SRV be spread over a longer period to make it easier on ratepayers?
- Why haven't our rates gradually risen each year of the past ten years to avoid a big rise?
- Are these the only four options (referring to options on presentation)?
- What is the breakdown of what Council rates are currently spent on each year?
- Does the community get a say in what community services get cut if SRV doesn't go ahead?
- If we had to sell assets, what assets would be sold?
- How much money is being spent on staff wages? (relating to GoCo as well as general internal/external Council staff wages)?
- What is the breakdown of funding/spending on the Airport, Saleyards and Koala Sanctuary?
- What do the mines contribute? Are the mines paying a large enough proportion of rates?
- How are you ensuring you capture everyone in your community consultation?
- Can these community sessions continue after the election?

Conclusion of Executive Summary

Council committed to having a conversation with the community about ensuring its financial sustainability and this included a discussion for a potential SRV. Council used many methods and channels to provide many opportunities for the community to provide feedback.

This engagement will inform the newly elected Council on the community's feedback and will be used to guide Council's position on a potential SRV application.

Through the engagement, Council interacted with thousands of residents and ratepayers to ensure a high level of confidence in the feedback.

While questions were raised about Council being as efficient as possible, most people were understanding that Council's costs have gone up significantly due to recent inflation rises. Emotion came into the discussion when it was canvassed that the matter of addressing these higher costs would require a large rate rise (i.e. if the increased costs were addressed through increased state and/or federal government grants, there was less discussion).

The key feedback regarding the potential SRV of 38.88% implemented over two years was;

- the community does not want to pay more rates (noting current difficult times and costs)
- the community does not want to see a reduction in service levels and wants to see an increase in some areas (especially in the condition of Council's roads)
- if an SRV is required, then it should be phased in over a longer period to reduce the single year impact on residents and ratepayers (especially those on fixed incomes)
- the split of how an SRV is applied should be reviewed so the balance is right between farmland and residential rates to be more of a user pays model
- The mining sector should be paying a larger portion of Councils rate base
- Council needs to ensure it is transparent in its decision making, engaging with the community and operating as efficiently as possible, with the right balance of indoor and outdoor staff along with ensuring that current funds and resources are being maximised for the shire
- Only 26% of the 38.88% is above the rate peg that will occur regardless of the SRV
- Council needs to look at non-rate revenue that can help address the asset renewal gap without large rate rises being required and find a solution so large SRVs are not needed in the future

The highest support for the SRV came through the phone survey, which is also the most independent and community wide aspect of the engagement, with 39% of phone survey respondents **"somewhat supportive"** of the proposed SRV option.

While the feedback provided by the community indicated a clear view of not wanting to pay more rates, there was also a clear view that the community does not want to see any service level reduction. Without additional funding, maintaining current service levels will not be possible.

The key is to finding the right and most acceptable balance that will ultimately result in a sustainable Council that provides quality services and infrastructure that the current and future residents of Gunnedah expect and deserve.

Engagement Methodology

Engagement Approach

The Community Consultation and Engagement Plan was designed and delivered following Gunnedah Shire Council’s Engagement Framework to inform and consult the community on the impact of the proposed SRV and the repercussions of not applying for an SRV at this time. Key focus areas of this framework include social justice principles: equity, access, participation and rights. The framework is also guided by key elements of, and in accordance with, the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). These elements are:

- **Inform** – giving information to the local community
- **Consult** – seeking feedback from the local community
- **Involve** – working directly with the local community
- **Collaborate** – create partnerships with the local community to produce recommendations and solutions
- **Empower** – putting final decision-making into the hands of the community

How the IAP2 elements guide Community Consultation:

These key elements are instrumental in shaping effective community consultation processes. Promoting meaningful engagement with stakeholders, as well as emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness. The framework provides a structured approach, helping to ensure community voices are heard and considered in decision-making, fostering trust and collaboration between Council and local constituents.

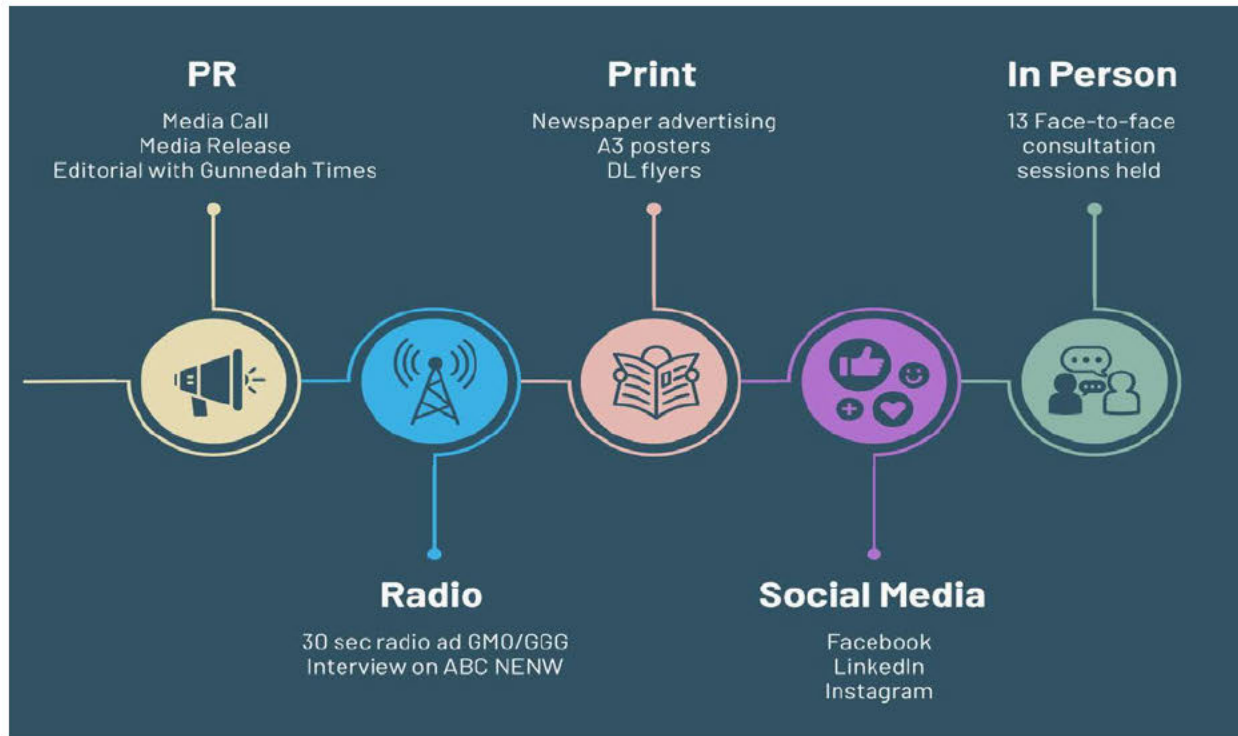
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to Public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide

Key Community Stakeholders

The community consultation and engagement sessions were designed to reach as many parts of the community as possible and to ensure a diverse array of voices from the community could be heard. To achieve this, key stakeholder groupings were identified (below), each encompassing various demographics.

Stakeholder Group	Considerations
Residential ratepayers	Proposed rate increases will be directly incurred by these stakeholders.
Rural ratepayers	Proposed rate increases will be directly incurred by these stakeholders.
Residential renters	Landlords will be responsible for determining if rate increases are passed on to renters.
Landlord ratepayers	Landlords will be responsible for determining if rate increases are passed on to renters.
Business property owners	Proposed rate increases will be directly incurred by these stakeholders. Where commercial leases are in place, it will depend on the contract terms as to whether and when any increase will be passed to tenants.
Community stakeholders	Community groups, sports and recreation groups, environmental groups, cultural groups and local business have a direct interest in their members/residents and therefore need to understand why Council is proposing an SRV.

Communication and Engagement Methods



The community engagement sessions were undertaken over a five-week period from 2nd August – 6th September 2024.

Using an integrated engagement approach, Council provided members of the community with access to information and the opportunity to engage in the conversation.

GSC social media channels provided updates regularly with 25 posts in total related to the SRV consultation session locations, dates and times were promoted extensively across GSC Social media channels during the period.

A landing page on Council's website was developed to house all information regarding the Proposed SRV, including essential elements such as 'Frequently Asked Questions' and a Rates Calculator App where ratepayers could input their details and receive an estimate of their rates if the SRV was to be applied for and approved by IPART at the proposed percentage (see Appendix A).

The Proposed SRV web page received **678** visitors and **1,144** views over the engagement period, with **632** ratepayers utilising the Rates Calculator App. See Appendix B.

A broader phone survey was conducted at the start of the engagement period. This survey identified the types of rates paid by respondents, the importance placed by the individual on various Council services and their satisfaction level of Council's delivery of these services. Although not directly related to the SRV engagement, a portion of the survey enquired if the respondent was aware of the proposed SRV, showing almost three quarters of residents surveyed were aware of the proposed SRV. The phone survey also asked how supportive the interviewee would be of an SRV if it meant improving various services. When speaking to specific services affected, the responses were somewhat supportive of the SRV. Overall, the survey provided valuable insight into the community's value of services provided by Council, and where they would be willing to pay higher rates to maintain or improve. See Appendix C.

Upon completion of the phone survey period, an online survey was launched on Council's website from Wednesday 14th August. The online survey was the same format as the telephone survey and was made available to anyone wishing to complete via Council's SRV website. See Appendix D.

Offline engagements included flyers and posters, radio advertising, newspaper advertising, community information sessions, community group meetings, town and village meetings.

Apart from the engagement methods outlined above, the option of making a written submission via Council's website, email or letter was also made available and promoted. Council received **26 submissions** via these methods.

The overarching goal of having a planned approach to community consultation and engagement was to ensure the community was made aware of the opportunities to engage with Council on the potential SRV, and to provide easy and accessible way to supply Council with informed feedback.

A key focus of the engagement approach was to ensure activities were undertaken in Gunnedah as well as some of the villages, to provide sufficient geographic coverage and affording as many community members as possible an opportunity to participate.

Public Relations

A media call was held at Gunnedah Shire Council Chambers on Friday 2nd August to announce the Proposed SRV, to provide top-level information on what an SRV would mean and why it is needed, to detail the general approach to community consultation and to provide media the opportunity to ask any relevant questions. Covered in advance by NBN TV News, the media call was attended by Prime7 TV News and the Gunnedah Times newspaper and was covered by ABC New England North-West (NENW) Breakfast Radio and ABC NENW Radio News.

A GSC SRV Media Release and Backgrounder were distributed that same day to raise awareness in the community and encourage attendance at the upcoming community information sessions (consultation and engagement sessions). See Appendix E.

The Gunnedah Times newspaper live-streamed the Media Call on their Facebook page, and the also invited their audience on social media to contribute questions for Council. An in-depth interview with Gunnedah Shire Council General Manager, Eric Groth, has been organised for the following week, and was conducted by the Gunnedah Times News Editor Sam Woods on Monday 5th August. This was deliberate approach in helping facilitate a comprehensive and local approach to editorial coverage around the proposed SRV, answering key questions and concerns from the community.

Media coverage resulted in much coverage, both traditional and online options for television, radio and newspaper news, as well as radio and newspaper interviews and editorials respectively.



Media Alert

Proposed Special Rate Variation

31 July 2024

Gunnedah Shire Council wants to have a discussion with the community about a potential Special Rate Variation and invites ALL media to attend.

What: Press Conference

When: Friday, August 2, 2024

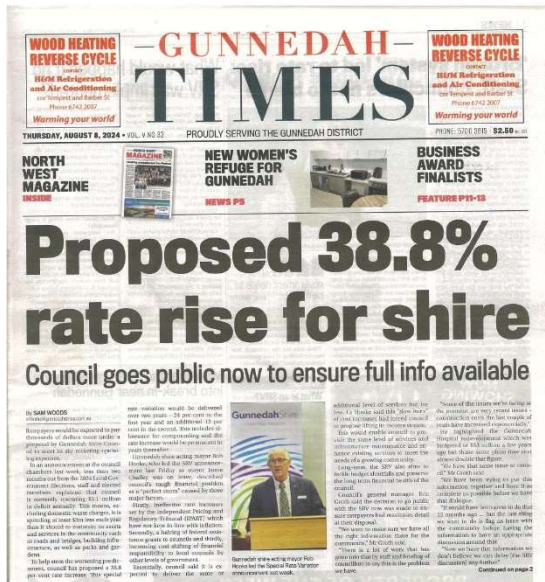
Time: 11:30-12:30PM

Where: Council Chambers, 63 Elgin St, Gunnedah

ENDS

For more information, contact Gunnedah Shire Council's Communications team on (02) 6740 2100 or communications@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au.

Media Coverage



Considering the relevance of the SRV topic due to several neighbouring Councils having recently undertaken SRVs, (Tamworth Regional Council recently announced an SRV – 14th May), and the potential impact on Gunnedah’s residents, local media interest was high.

Proposed SRV Media Activity Report

2 August - 6 September, 2024



Date - 2024	Media Coverage - GSC Potential SRV
16 th May	Gunnedah Shire Council media release: Operational Plan sets clear path for 2024-25 and includes possibility of special rate variation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Plan on website • LinkedIn; Facebook; website • Mirage online news www.miragenews.com
21 st May	Mayor’s Radio Spot 2MO Radio
27 th June	Gunnedah Times: Mayor’s Message “Councils face rising costs for communities”
31 st June	Media Alert: GSC Proposed SRV All local area media given an early heads-up to a media call at Gunnedah Shire Council offices to hear about potential SRV from Deputy Mayor and General Manager (GM).
1 st August	NBN News bulletin preview
2 nd August to 4 th August	Media call: Local regional media invited to a media call at Gunnedah Shire Council Chambers to hear about Proposed SRV. Speakers: Deputy Mayor Rob Hooker and GM

Date - 2024	Media Coverage - GSC Potential SRV
	<p>Eric Groth. Attended by Gunnedah Times and Prime7 News, with quality interest from ABC NENW Radio, commercial radio and Northern Daily Leader.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gunnedah Shire Council website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn • Gunnedah Times livestreamed press conference on Facebook • Gunnedah Times online coverage of media release on Facebook • Gunnedah Times article - Gunnedah Shire Council proposes Special Rate Variation - Gunnedah Times (copy of article Appendix C) • Media release shared on 2MO Facebook page • Northern Daily Leader - Gunnedah Shire considers major 38.88% special rate hike The Northern Daily Leader Tamworth, NSW • 2MO news coverage & Facebook • New England Times - Gunnedah Shire Council proposes Special Rate Variation New England Times (netimes.com.au) • Seven News coverage • Interview with GM Eric Groth broadcast across local ABC New England North West (NENW) Radio News, replayed on ABC NENW Breakfast
5 th August	<p>Inside Local Government - Gunnedah council considers rate variation - Inside Local Government</p>
7 th August	<p>Gunnedah Times article - Question and Answer regarding Gunnedah Shire Council's proposed Special Rate Variation - Gunnedah Times</p>
8 th August	<p>Gunnedah Times article - Proposed 38.88 per cent rate rise for Gunnedah shire - Gunnedah Times</p> <p>Gunnedah Times article - What would happen if no SRV was implemented? - Gunnedah Times</p> <p>Gunnedah Times editorial – ‘Not surprising to see wave of anger at Special Rate Variation’ (copy of editorial Appendix C)</p>
13 th August	<p>2MO + Triple G radio interview broadcasts: Interview with GSC GM re proposed Special Rate Variation, replayed across</p>
15 th August	<p>Gunnedah Times article - Farmers call for rate boycott at Tambar Springs meeting - Gunnedah Times</p> <p>Mention in Gunnedah Times article - Health report recommends council take on more responsibility - Gunnedah Times</p> <p>Gunnedah Times article - Carroll issues on the 'back end' of priorities say residents - Gunnedah Times</p>
22 nd August	<p>Gunnedah Times article - Forget us not say Carroll residents - Gunnedah Times</p>

Radio

To complement the in-person consultation, radio advertising was undertaken throughout the consultation period across the local Gunnedah stations Triple G and 2MO. These channels were chosen as a key communication tool to reach the wider community, farmers and rate payers working across the region. The two stations allowed reach for a wide audience segment, with the demographic profile for Triple G being those aged 18-25 and 2MO listeners aged 40+.

Additionally, GSC GM Eric Groth recorded an interview which was played across both stations, capturing the full demographic spread of the local commercial radio offering. For a map of GGG/2MO radio coverage area, see Appendix F.

An interview with GM Eric Groth by a reporter at ABC NENW was recorded on the day of Media Call (Friday 2nd August) and broadcast the following Monday for local ABC radio news and replayed on ABC NENW Breakfast. An important interview to secure, considering the prior SRV coverage on the broadcaster from across the greater region (**Tamworth, Armidale, Tenterfield, Walcha, and Liverpool Plains** have all successfully applied for SRVs within the same listening area).

ABC New England North-West covers a significant area of northern New South Wales, broadcasting across the New England region, the Northern Tablelands, and the North West Slopes. This includes key towns and cities like Tamworth, Armidale, Moree, Tenterfield, and Glen Innes. The station operates on both AM and FM frequencies, including 648 AM, 819 AM, and FM bands at 99.1 and 101.9 MHz. As part of the broader ABC Local Radio network, its programming focuses on talk radio, providing local news, weather, sports, and community stories. The station's potential listenership is supported by its reach across a wide rural area, connecting regional communities through its mix of both local content, as well as ABC's broader state, national and international coverage.

Print

A full-page advertisement was designed and distributed to the local newspaper, The Gunnedah Times, and the regional publication, the Northern Daily Leader. See Appendix G.

A3 posters and DL leaflet flyers were also developed for display and distribution at community information session locations, village and town meetings as well as local Council-run venues to ensure residents were made aware of the community information sessions. The posters and DL flyer also included a QR code which gave direct access to the GSC SRV information page. This provided a direct opportunity for the community to submit their feedback through online forms. See Appendix H.

Editorially, the proposal was also included in Council's regular items such as Council News in the Gunnedah Times, extensive editorial coverage in The Gunnedah Times, and received coverage in publications including Inside Local Government, Northern Daily Leader and the New England Times. See Appendix I.

Social Media

Gunnedah Shire Council utilised their existing social media platforms to boost online engagement and feedback opportunities to increase awareness reach. A social media content calendar was created with content based on key messages drafted to reach various stakeholder groups. See Appendix J.

Council posted 23 Facebook posts informing the community about aspects of the proposed rate variation, including promotion of the website page, the rates calculator and the community

information sessions. There was also some minor activity on LinkedIn and Instagram. The Facebook posts had a reach of more than 37,500 and more than 75 direct shares.

A Facebook Reel showcasing the Rates Calculator available on Council’s website was played 2,400 times with a reach of 1,400. Up to 120 unique visitors a day accessed the Rates Calculator.

Date - 2024	Social Media Posts - GSC Potential SRV
2 – 4 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 LinkedIn 1 Facebook - Curlewis meeting (4 shares) 1 Facebook - Proposed SRV announcement (18 shares) <i>(see screenshot below)</i> 1 Instagram - Proposed SRV announcement <p>Media social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Gunnedah Times (one livestream of announcement) 1 2MO post 1 New England Times 1 Seven News
5 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook - Phone survey (6 shares) 1 Facebook - Rates calculator 1 Facebook - Curlewis reminder 1 Facebook story - Curlewis
6 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook post - Curlewis meeting 1 Facebook post - Community sessions
7 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook post - First Gunnedah session 1 Facebook post - Tambar Springs session
8 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook post - Rates calculator, reel <i>(see screenshot below)</i> 1 Facebook post - Tambar Springs meeting
9 th August	<p>GSC social post:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook post - Carroll meeting
13 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook post - Community meeting, Gunnedah Town Hall 1 Facebook post - Carroll meeting
14 th August	<p>GSC social posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Facebook post - Phone survey online 2 Facebook posts and story - Community meeting, Gunnedah Town Hall

Date - 2024	Social Media Posts - GSC Potential SRV
20 th August	GSC social post: 1 Facebook post - AgQuip stand
21 st August	GSC social post: 1 Facebook post - AgQuip stand
27 th August	GSC social post: 1 Facebook post - Reminder to have your say via survey <i>and</i> check the rates calculator
2 nd Sept	GSC social post: 1 Facebook post – Seeking your view, have your say via survey <i>and</i> to find out more details on the SRV landing page
5 th Sept	GSC social post: 1 Facebook post – Reminder of submissions closing, survey available online.

Face-to-face: Community Conversations | Sessions



Speaking with community members face to face was key to the consultation process. Allowing community to feel heard and understood, for community to be able to ask questions directly to Council representatives and to be able to portray their individual experiences, was a very important part of the community consultation and engagement process.

Councillors, Executive, and staff from Gunnedah Shire Council facilitated several community information sessions. These

sessions were designed to present comprehensive details about the proposed SRV for the Gunnedah Shire, and to provide residents with opportunities to ask questions and gain clarity on the issue.

In anticipation of the engagement process, Gunnedah Shire Council proactively reached out to core community groups and relevant Progress Associations within the villages of Breeza, Carroll, Curlewis, Emerald Hill, Kelvin, Mullaley, Piallaway, and Tambar Springs.

Consultation was held in correlation with the village community groups who were open and willing to engage with Council around hosting consultation sessions within those villages. Those engagement sessions provided information to community members in attendance and captured vital feedback, ideas, and concerns around the potential SRV, as well as other issues that were pertinent to that particular village and the rural residents who lived in the vicinity. See Appendix K.

As part of the engagement process, key community-led groups were also contacted, such as the local branch of NSW Farmers, the Gunnedah Business Chamber, the Gunnedah Show Society and Country Women's Association (CWA). Whilst uptake was low for these groups to host information sessions, members of these groups were consulted during other engagement opportunities across the period.

Outside of the initially planned village and Gunnedah sessions, some additional sessions were hosted by Gunnedah Shire Council Executive for Gunnedah West Rotary Club, the Breeza Village Progress Association and the Gunnedah Library Brain Trainers Group, displaying Council's

openness and willingness to attend additional events upon invitation, taking any opportunity to further engage with community around the SRV proposal.

A key benefit of the community information sessions was the ability for Council representatives to have the opportunity to educate residents one-on-one on the financial implications of the SRV and to speak intimately around how it relates to local services and infrastructure. In addition to the planned community information sessions, due to the significant interest by a large amount of residents at the first Gunnedah information session, sixty attendees were invited to transition from the Verdict Café location, to partake in a focus stakeholder meeting, which was conducted in the Gunnedah Town Hall, to delve deeper into specific concerns or interests of the community. A formal SRV information presentation was also given to the group.

In total, **13 public face to face engagement sessions were conducted**, with Gunnedah Shire Council hosting additional community information sessions upon request. This included an additional evening town hall meeting in Gunnedah, due to the community’s desire to be informed at large alongside the smaller-scale community information sessions conducted during the consultation period.

These events enabled Council to reach a total of **420** community stakeholders, plus around **140** internal stakeholders, face to face.

The sessions were as follows:

Date - 2024	GSC Potential SRV – Community Consultation Sessions
5 th August	<p>Curlewis Village Session Curlewis Community Hall 5:30pm – 7:30pm Presentation to Curlewis Progress Association + wider village and rural community. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive. Provision of flyers; explanation and encouragement to use rates calculator and to make formal submissions. One on one conversations before and after event. Estimate 65 attendees</p>
7 th August	<p>Gunnedah Community Session Verdict Café (outside) 10am – 2pm One on one conversations with community members around the proposed SRV by GSC. Provision of flyers; support to use rates calculator, personalised support a tailored conversations to the individual, encouraged to make formal submissions. Estimate 17 attendees</p>
7 th August	<p>Gunnedah Community Presentation Gunnedah Town Hall 10am – 2pm Presentation to community members who were interested in hearing more about the proposed SRV by GSC. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive.</p>

Date - 2024	GSC Potential SRV – Community Consultation Sessions
	Provision of flyers; encouragement to use rates calculator and to make formal submissions. One on one conversations before and after event. Estimate 60 attendees
8 th August	Tambar Springs Village Session Tambar Springs Community Hall 9:30am – 12pm Presentation to Tambar Springs village members and rural district residents. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive. Provision of flyers; explanation and encouragement to use rates calculator and to make formal submissions. One on one conversations before and after event. Estimate 24 attendees
13 th August	Carroll Village Session Carroll Community Hall (<i>Progress Association shed</i>) 10am – 12pm Presentation to Carroll Progress Association, village and rural community residents. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive. Provision of flyers; explanation and encouragement to use rates calculator and to make formal submissions. One on one conversations before and after event. 9 attendees
13 th August	Breeza Progress Association Session Breeza Community Hall 10am – 12pm Presentation to Breeza Progress Association, village and rural community residents in attendance. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive. Provision of flyers; explanation and encouragement to use rates calculator and to make formal submissions. One on one conversations before and after meeting. 15 attendees
14 th August	Gunnedah Community Session Verdict Café (<i>outside</i>) 10am – 12pm One on one conversations with community members around the proposed SRV by GSC. Provision of flyers; support to use rates calculator, personalised support a tailored conversations to the individual. 9 attendees
14 th August	Gunnedah Town Meeting Gunnedah Town Hall 6pm – 10:30pm Presentation to community members wanting to understand more about the proposed SRV by GSC. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive. Gunnedah Shire Councillors in attendance, post final meeting of current Council. Provision of flyers; encouragement to use rates calculator, to make submissions. One on one conversations before and after event.

Date - 2024	GSC Potential SRV – Community Consultation Sessions
	Estimate 105 attendees
15 th August	<p>Gunnedah West Rotary Club Presentation Gunnedah Golf Club 7pm – 9pm Presentation to Gunnedah West Rotary Club meeting attendees. Formal presentation, with QnA session with Council Executive. Provision of flyers; explanation and encouragement to use rates calculator and to make formal submissions. One on one conversations before and after meeting. Estimate 25 attendees</p>
15 th August	<p>Gunnedah Community Session Gunnedah Library 10am – 12pm One on one conversation with community member around the proposed SRV by GSC. Provision of flyers; support to use rates calculator, personalised support a tailored conversation to the individual. 1 attendee</p>
17 th August	<p>Gunnedah Community Session Gunnedah Markets, Wolseley Oval 8:30am – 1pm One on one conversations with community members around the proposed SRV by GSC. Provision of flyers; support to use rates calculator, personalised support and tailored conversations to the individual. Estimate 55 attendees</p>
20 th , 21 st , 22 nd August	<p>Gunnedah Community Session Agquip Field Days, GSC Stand. 8:30am – 5pm: Each day, three days. One on one conversations with community members who attended the GSC stand at Agquip, around the proposed SRV by GSC. Provision of flyers; support to use rates calculator, personalised support and tailored conversations to the individual. Estimate 27 attendees</p>
2 nd September	<p>Gunnedah Library Brain Training Session Gunnedah Library 10:30am – 11:30am One on one conversations with community member around the proposed SRV by GSC. Provision of flyers; support to use rates calculator, personalised support and tailored conversation to the individual. 8 attendees</p>

The face-to-face direct consultation allowed for in-depth discussion and feedback collection, allowing stakeholders to have all their questions adequately addressed along with the opportunity to provide detailed feedback and suggestions to Council.

Internal Staff Briefings

Just as discussions around a potential SRV has impacts within the wider community, it has impacts internally on Gunnedah Shire Council (GSC) staff. From the community facing customer-service staff, to those working in parks and gardens and road maintenance crews (as an example), it's likely if you work for Council, you will be questioned around the Proposed SRV. Discussions around the monetary value of Council staff as well as the security of their jobs/positions were expected to be raised by the general public during the consultation phase, so as a way of supporting the wellbeing of GSC Staff, Council Executive undertook three internal presentations to inform and support as many staff as possible, ahead of the conversation going public.

Date - 2024	GSC Potential SRV – Internal Staff Briefings
16 th July 2 - 4pm	Presentation to staff who provide customer facing services. Estimate 20 attendees
18 th July 10 - 11:30am	Presentation to the Leadership Team consisting of managers and supervisors. Estimate 20 attendees
8 th August 7:15 - 8:30am	Presentation to all staff at the depot, to ensure outdoor staff were briefed Estimate 100 attendees



DEPOT STAFF BEING BRIEFED ON THE POTENTIAL SRV

Frequently Asked Questions

Across the many community consultation sessions held during the period, several of the same questions were asked. During every session, the community were invited to ask questions and interact with Council's representatives (Executive, staff and external support), fostering an open and proactive conversation around the potential for an SRV and the related implications.

As a result of these commonly asked questions, and to help answer them in a more visual sense during the community sessions, the GSC SRV Information Presentation was regularly updated to include details regarding items that the community wanted more information about (see Appendix L). For example, details were commonly sought on projects such as the Gunnedah Saleyards upgrade, the Airport, and the Koala Sanctuary.

Here are some examples of questions asked at the consultation sessions that weren't already captured on the FAQ's on the landing page:

Q. Why wasn't this bought up sooner? If we were in this situation for some time, why hasn't the community heard about it sooner?

Response: This has been raised during previous plans, however, the recent significant cost increases and the need to be proactive with managing Councils cash position has required the matter to be addressed in the near future.

Q. Can the SRV be spread over a longer period to make it easier on ratepayers?

Response: Yes, any potential increase could be implemented over a longer period of time. It is important to note that the longer the implementation period, the larger the impact on Councils cash position.

Q. Why weren't our rates gradually raised over each year of the past ten years to avoid this big rate rise?

Response: The current SRV process does not allow for this. This type of approach could be considered for the future and has been suggested as a part addressing the rate peg review.

Q. Are these the only four options (referring to options on presentation)?

Response: No, the four options supplied in the [GSC – Community SRV Information Pack](#) can be changed and adapted to suit the direction the community wants to move forward in.

Q. Do you have a breakdown of what amount from Council rates is currently spent on the community?

Response: Yes, Councils budget detail is provided in the operational plan and more detailed information can be provided on request.

Q. If we had to sell assets, what assets would be sold? How much percentage would that account for?

Response: This is yet to be determined and would require further community consultation before any decisions could be made.

Q. Does the community get a say in what community services get cut if SRV doesn't go ahead?

Response: Yes, if the SRV goes ahead, the community will have a say in what services they would like to be cut/reduced. Further community consultation will take place to gather feedback to inform council which services the community would like to see cut/reduced.

Q. How much money is being spent on staff wages? (relating to GoCo as well as general internal/external Council staff wages)?

Response: Councils budget detail is provided in the operational plan and more detailed information can be provided on request.

Q. What is the breakdown of spending on the airport? How much were the grants? What's the upkeep? Why did Council invest so much money in the Gunnedah airport when there's no commercial airline operating and it's unlikely they ever will?

Response: The information related to the funding of this project is provided in the community presentation pack.

Q. What is the breakdown of spending on the Koala Sanctuary? And how much will it cost the community (Council) to maintain this?

Response: The information related to the funding of the construction of this project is provided in the community presentation pack. The operating costs are being finalised as the agreement with the operator is finalised. This information, once finalised, will be included in Councils future operational plans and budgets.

Q. What do the mines contribute? Do we have costs of mining impacts and can VPAs be publicly released? Should mines pay a greater overall proportion of rates?

Response: The mining rates paid is provided in Councils operational plans. The VPAs were set by the State government approvals (to which Council had made a submission).

Q. How are you ensuring you capture everyone in your community consultation?

Response: We have used several communication methods including an independent phone survey that is designed to achieve a >90% level of confidence in the response representing the community's views. In addition, Councils also used Community Information Sessions both in Gunnedah and the surrounding villages along with radio, TV, print and social media methods.

Q. Why do we say the increase is 38.88% when the increase associated with the SRV is 26%?

Response: The IPART process requires Council to engage based on the full value of the potential rate rise, inclusive of the rate peg component that will occur regardless of an SRV application.

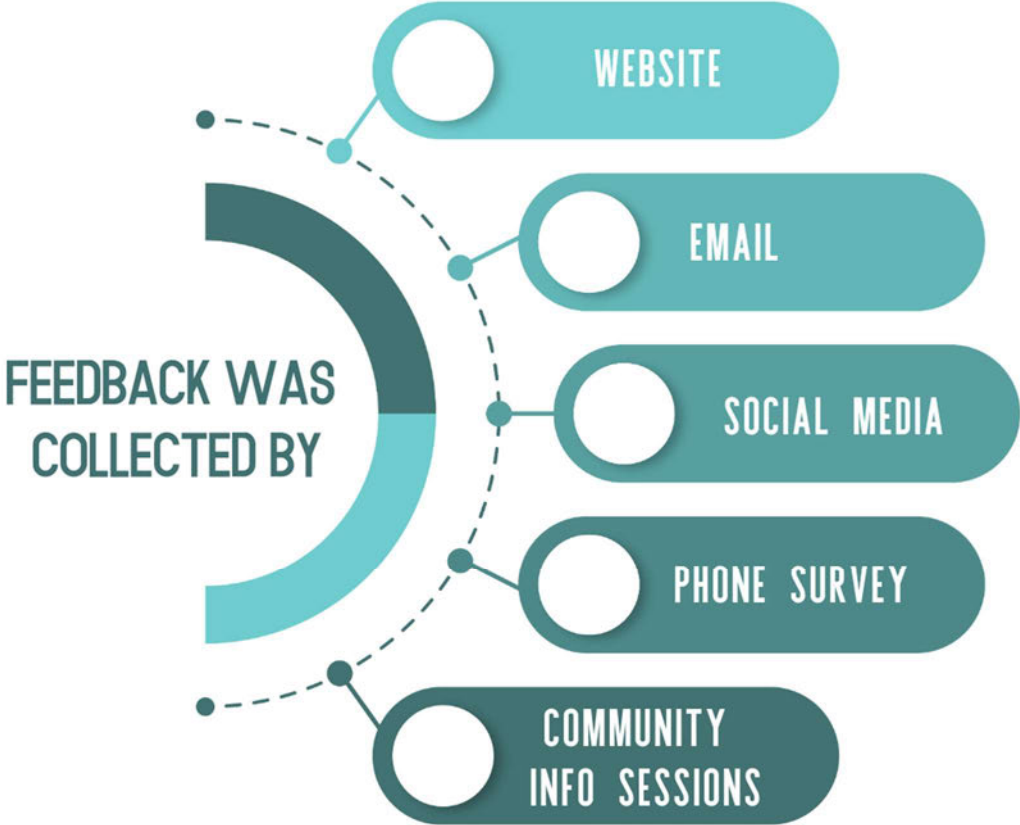
Q. Can these community sessions continue after the election?

Response: Yes. This is the first phase of community consultation. Once the new Council is elected, they will be presented with the initial consultation report, along with the financials from Council Executive. Councillors will then discuss and determine whether or not to apply for an SRV. Once that decision is made, there will be further consultation with the community.

Consultation Process, Key Themes and Feedback

In-person consultation

Throughout the consultation period, feedback was gathered from a range of sources, including public forums, surveys, written submissions, and direct conversations with residents. This process allowed for a comprehensive understanding of current community perspectives, revealing several consistent themes warranting Council's attention. Among the most prominent were concerns about the affordability of higher rates, the potential impact on local businesses and agricultural enterprises, and the need for transparency in how the additional funds would be allocated. These themes reflect a shared desire for a balanced approach that considers both the financial sustainability of the Council going forward, and the economic realities faced by the community.



Key Themes

Lack of Community Engagement and Transparency

The desire for improved transparency around Council decision-making was a key theme observed throughout the various feedback channels. The community emphasised the importance of holding public meetings for important communications and consultation and called for meetings after hours and in rural locations like Mullaley and Emerald Hill, to allow for broader participation in the SRV Consultation process specifically.

It was noted that while there is a general understanding of how Council operates internally, there is significantly less awareness or connection when it comes to the decision-making processes of local Councillors and the workings of Council meetings. It was noted there was appetite for a more proactive connection by community with Council and Council processes, particularly within villages like Curlewis and Carroll.

A perception of overall poor communication from Council created an atmosphere of distrust around the information shared with the community. Most attendees were respectful and open to the information being shared during presentation sessions and conversations but expressed a strong need for more open communication from Council generally. It was made clear by several community members, that if they weren't kept regularly informed by Council, they were likely to fill those knowledge gaps with their own conclusions, recognising this information might not be true nor entirely correct. There were community members who were calling for clearer, more frequent communication about highly visible activities happening within community (e.g. helicopter involvement in saleyards construction) and significant Council decisions, particularly around financial matters and the allocation of resources and funding.

Transparency around how money was being spent by Council was also a concern for the community, particularly around major projects, like the Gunnedah Airport.

Questions were raised about the Council's overall debt level and how the proposed SRV will impact the Council's income. Some residents were unsure how raising rates would generate more income, if by doing an SRV, it would merely cover depreciation costs, rather than providing additional services.

It is also very important to note that the community members were also advised that there is a lot of information available to the community should they want to access it. The key is finding a balance of what information the community want to be aware of noting the resources it takes to provide this information.

Service Delivery and Efficiency Concerns

Many community members felt the services they receive are insufficient compared to the rates they are paying currently. Rural ratepayers, particularly farmers, and those living within the outlying villages, expressed concern about paying higher rates with limited visible benefits, especially regarding road maintenance and other critical infrastructure. It was noted that while they have access to all of Councils services, they do not use most of these services.

A common concern raised by rural ratepayers was around their perception of the unsatisfactory condition of their unsealed rural roads and the lack of frequency of maintenance of these roads, such as road grading. Many of those in attendance at the session felt their local unsealed roads were being maintained less than ever before, and were in very poor condition, in their opinion.

Elderly, pensioners and/or self-declared lower socioeconomic community members and living within Gunnedah township itself, were commonly more open to Council proceeding with an SRV. This demographic was proactive in offering constructive solutions around lessening the impact financially, with many suggesting the proposed percentage might be better spread over three or four years, rather than two-year split. It was noted that those who spoke of being on the pension, or in a less affluent financial position personally, were more likely to be open to the SRV as they were commonly more likely to be using community and town services, services provided, funded and maintained by Gunnedah Shire Council.

Multiple comments shared by those in consultation reflected a frustration with Council operations, expressing their perception around Council staffing and resource allocation. Some locals felt Council workers were not operating as efficiently as possible, with a particular focus on the perceived growth in numbers of indoor staff (ie those based within the Elgin Street office), and expressing a wish to see more investment on outdoor Council workers who were perceived to be the staff who were able to fix infrastructure such as roads.

Internal Council operations and efficiency was often called into question at the start of consultation sessions, with residents calling for internal reviews to reduce costs and improve accountability, before asking rate payers to meet the shortfall, by way of an SRV.

Questions regarding Councils Financial Management

Concerns were raised around the management of finances within Council. The perception by community members that mismanagement of key internal financials had ultimately led to the need for an SRV, which would then supplement the cost of delivering basic services to the district.

The Gunnedah Airport was a common concern raised by community members, due to the significant size of the expenditure, versus the perceived usage and value of the facility by the wider public. It should be noted there is still an opportunity for Council to communicate more fully to community around the current and future usage of the airport, now that it has been upgraded.

It was raised on a number of occasions by attendees of consultation sessions, their dissatisfaction around Council's use of contractors. There were some questions within the consultation process around the use of contractors to deliver the Proposed SRV information sessions. Council Executive and representatives were very open around the use of contractors for this process, explaining the benefit of the skills and independent support those individuals bring, and the ultimate savings brought by not having to pay entire wages to keep those individuals engaged in full time employment.

The general use of contractors, as opposed to in-house management capability was raised, and was commonly placed alongside rhetoric around perceived poor efficiencies within Council overall.

There were many community members at the face-to-face sessions who felt the justification for the rate increases was insufficient. They were particularly concerned about being asked to shoulder higher financial burdens while questioning the Council's efficiency. A small number of community members raised concerns over the high operational costs attributed to Council staff, including questions around staff being based in Tamworth and being supplied a work vehicle to travel back and forth to work each day, wages of Council workers was also raised, as was the wage of the General Manager.

Questions around staff expenses were then aligned with concerns around efficiency and statements around whether the best people were in the right jobs. Commonly there were concerns about the number of Council employees and whether their roles were necessary and/or productive.

There was a response advising that Councils structure and efficiency are reviewed regularly with a view of maximising Councils resources while meeting Councils statutory obligations and meeting as many of the community's expectations as possible.

Perception of Inequity

Dissatisfaction around the perceived imbalance of services between Gunnedah and the surrounding villages contributed to the negative sentiment towards the proposed SRV.

Feedback indicated residents in the villages, particularly the farmland ratepayers, felt they paid a high level of rates for the infrastructure in their local areas (e.g., lack of sewer, stormwater drainage, and public amenities with disability access) compared to the larger townships. These examples were given in comparison to Gunnedah's parks and community infrastructure such as the new dog park, swimming pool complex, library and civic precinct.

There is a clear feeling among rural ratepayers, especially farmers, that they are shouldering what they believe is a disproportionate burden of rate increases while receiving fewer services in return. Rural residents voiced concern that they feel they're being unfairly impacted compared to other sectors of the community, such as mining or village residents, and suggested the percentage mix of rate contributions should be reconsidered. There was also a clear message from the broader rate base that the mining sector should be paying a larger portion of Councils rate base.

The flip side of this discussion is that the ratepayers use a larger portion of the assets per ratepayers (e.g., there are a number of roads that may service as few as 2-3 households).

Pensioners who shared their opinions gave a mix of views. Many spoke of utilising the community services provided by Council. Many spoke of understanding the value of the work Council does, and shared observations around the good services and amenity Council provides to the town of Gunnedah in particular. Many pensioners spoke about how hard they would find increased rate payments but were also understanding in why they were being proposed.

It should be noted that those who disclosed they were in a less fortunate position financially, also displayed a greater awareness of the general challenges faced by community members financially, and yet this sector of the community also indicated a stronger proactiveness in trying to offer problem solving for the situation longer term.

Local Government Funding | Cost shifting

The farming community (in Tambar Springs particularly) expressed dire concerns over the reduction of Local Government funding by both State and Federal Governments. Many were specifically critical of how these reduced funds are now typically allocated as grants for specific facilities, placing the ongoing burden of upkeep and maintenance on the local Council.

Due to this cost shifting, rural ratepayers felt they suffered the consequences, in being required to pay more rates (by way of an SRV) and compensate for a system they perceive to be broken.

In addition, there was general frustration and an overall summation that Local Government is being deprioritised by State and Federal Government processes. This frustration was only heightened by the feeling that this de-prioritisation came, even though local Councils like Gunnedah Shire are required to deliver essential services directly to regional and rural communities.

Phone Survey

Gunnedah Shire Council commissioned Micromex Research to conduct a random telephone survey with residents living in the local government area (LGA) of Gunnedah Shire. This survey was run independently of the SRV Community Consultation and Engagement process; however it did touch on key elements relevant to the proposed SRV consultation and engagement activities, specifically around the services Council provide and the value placed on those services.

Included is a summary of the Phone Survey undertaken by a number of locals, and the full report is provided in Appendix C.

Objectives

- Understand and identify community priorities for the LGA.
- Identify the community's overall level of satisfaction with Council performance and the communication from Council.
- Explore residents' attitudes toward the Special Rate Variation (SRV) and support for paying more for higher service levels.

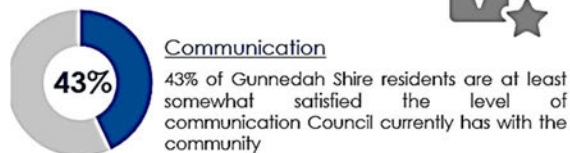
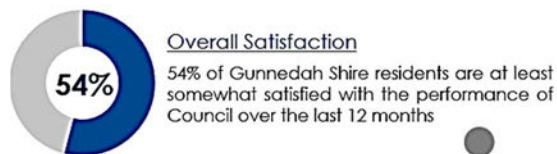
Sample

- Telephone survey (landline N = 5 and mobile N = 295) to N = 300 residents
- We use a 5-point scale (e.g. 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied)

Timing

Implementation 5th – 15th August 2024

Snapshot Summary



Service Satisfaction

Libraries and sewerage management received high satisfaction ratings, while unsealed roads and opportunities for community participation in decision-making were rated with lower levels of satisfaction

Drivers of Satisfaction

Key areas influencing overall satisfaction included opportunities for community participation (10.3% influence) and economic development (8.6% influence). The expanded regression model highlighted the importance of communication, with this measure highlighted as a very strong driver of overall satisfaction with Council's performance.

Community Priorities - Unprompted

The top priorities identified by residents include:

1. Road maintenance/ upgrades (47%)
2. Parks/ playgrounds/ sporting facilities (17%)
3. Council communication/ transparency (15%)
4. Reducing rates/ better value for rates (15%)



Special Rate Variation Awareness and Support

- Almost three quarters of residents were aware of the proposed SRV
- 69% of residents are at least 'somewhat supportive' of the Rate Peg only option
- 39% of residents are at least 'somewhat supportive' of the proposed SRV option

Support for Additional Rate Increases

- 43% of residents were at least 'somewhat supportive' of paying over and above the proposed SRV to support increased service levels for roads
- 41% were also supportive of paying higher rates and charged to support increased service levels in terms of for parks and gardens
- Support for improvements to the Cultural Precinct was lower (31% at least 'somewhat supportive')

SRV Summary:

- **74%** of residents had prior awareness of the SRV, awareness was predominantly through social media
- **69%** are at least somewhat supportive of Option 1: Rate Peg and 39% are at least somewhat supportive of Council proceeding with Option 2: SRV
- **64%** prefer the Rate Peg, with key reasons for this preference centering on a call for better management by Council, a lack of trust and affordability. 36% prefer the SRV as they want to see improvements in the LGA, and understand it needs to be undertaken but have reservations about the high price and management from Council
- **43%** are at least somewhat supportive of paying above the proposed SRV to see service levels improve for local roads
- **41%** are at least somewhat supportive of paying above the proposed SRV to see service levels improve for parks and gardens
- **31%** are at least somewhat supportive of paying above the proposed SRV to see service levels improve for the Cultural Precinct

Some comments provided to Council included:

- *Communication needs to be improved. Council needs to respond to requests.*
- *Council needs to stop contracting work out – buy the equipment and do it themselves, be independent.*
- *Farmers cannot afford to pay more rates living off the land.*
- *As a pensioner, I cannot afford to pay anymore higher rates.*
- *I have complained to Council for five years about disability access, and nothing has been done.*
- *Paying extra will keep everything going, which we want and need.*
- *Potential of better services is a better life for my kids.*
- *Rates do need to go up to above CPI, but 38% is too high*
- *Supportive, but don't know why it needs to be such a big jump from 5% to 38.88%*
- *Reluctantly support the SRV because it needs to be done, but is very frustrating that it hasn't been done sooner at a lower rate*
- *All of us are tightening our purse strings and Council needs to too*

Online Survey

The online survey was the same format as the telephone survey and was made available to anyone wishing to complete via Council's SRV website following the completion of the telephone survey process.

A total of 137 surveys were completed, primarily by ratepayers.

The online survey results showed 76% of respondents advised they were aware of the proposed SRV before completing the survey.

82% of respondents preferred the option of Council increasing rates by the rate peg only. Reasons for not supporting the SRV proposal included concerns regarding:

- Affordability and increased cost of living.
- Council efficiency and lack of trust that Council will allocate the SRV funding to the right services.
- Proposed SRV too high and should be reduced and/or spread over a longer timeframe.

18% of respondents supported the SRV proposal. This support was indicated for reasons such as:

- Concerns about current condition and deterioration of critical infrastructure such as roads.
- Concerns about the reduction of service levels or closure of current services.
- A desire to see an improvement in current service levels.

Full summary of Online Survey, see Appendix D.

Some comments provided to Council included:

- *"We need to take a closer look at the budgets and where they are spent."*
- *"Happy for our rates to go up as long as the money is spent where it should be. Not on projects like a Koala Park that won't be beneficial maybe spend it on youth projects instead."*
- *"With current interest rates, I'd rather have [redacted] roads than throw money away to the Council"*
- *"We already pay ridiculously high rates, and Council would have more money if they consulted more with the community and didn't spend it on irrelevant needs such as the Gunnedah Airport and the Koala Park."*
- *"I'm understanding that cost of living has increased and that has to be expected across all walks of life. I also feel strongly that our services and maintenance are already of a bare minimum (the Main Street is always filthy, the bins around town are ugly and old, there's no care put into the Main Street which is what keeps the CBD alive. The business owners including myself feel like Council don't care about us or the image of our CBD, and I don't want that to worsen far beyond how bad it already is."*
- *"People are struggling enough right now. Maybe revisit rate rise in two-five years."*
- *"I do not want to see roads deteriorate or see people or children go without the current services."*
- *"Allocation of rates between farmland and other groups is distorted. The users of most services except for say roads are located in Gunnedah or villages. A more equitable split is needed"*

Community Submissions

Community members were encouraged to submit questions and feedback to Gunnedah Shire Council in relation to the proposed SRV. The Council's request for feedback further demonstrates Council's intention to hear from the community throughout the consultation and engagement process, providing another method of gathering insights to inform future decision-making.

A total of 26 formal submissions were received by council via email, typed and handwritten letter (redacted submissions in Appendix M). The submissions, some of which included assumptions which were not correct, showed six recurring themes:

Key Themes

Opposition to Rate Increase

Of the 26 submissions received, most expressed strong opposition to the proposed rate rise, citing concerns about the impact on farmers and businesses already facing financial strain. Several correspondents express anger and disbelief at the scale of the proposed rate increases, especially given the limited services received in rural areas.

Dissatisfaction with Infrastructure

A recurring point raised by rate payers who made submissions, was that the primary service utilised by them is road maintenance. Submitters feel the roads are in a poor state for the existing rates they pay and reiterate these roads are critical for their livelihoods. Many emails mention opinions around the inadequate upkeep and ordinary condition of roads and infrastructure.

Calls for Transparency

Several emails highlighted the need for greater transparency in Council budget allocations and spending practices, with comments that further openness would help build community trust.

Demand for Accountability for Councils operations and Management

Submitters questioned the Council's efficiency and spending, including the use of consultants and current Council staffing levels. Submissions made suggestions that cost-cutting measures within Council should be prioritised over raising rates within the Shire.

There was a recurring sentiment from submitters that they, as business operators who run business and farming operations across the district, so too should the Council take a similar approach and run Council operations like a business.

Inequity of Service Delivery

Many submissions were from rural landholders and stated they feel they're subsidising services they don't use in town (like parks and arts facilities) and want a more equitable system that focuses funding on essential services more relevant to their locality, like road maintenance.

Comparison to neighbouring Councils

Some submissions highlight that Gunnedah's rates are already among the highest in the region, raising concerns about competitiveness and sustainability.

Conclusion

During the engagement period regarding a potential SRV for Gunnedah Shire, a variety of engagement methods were utilised to reach as many people in our community as possible. The engagement clearly outlined both the reasons why an SRV is needed and how this will affect the community going forward if it is to proceed.

The engagement methods included advertising on radio and in newspaper, comprehensive digital resources including custom rates calculator; printed flyers and posters; community presentations and information sessions; one-on-one conversations and group discussions; surveys (phone and online); radio interviews and print editorial coverage. The multiple engagement methods ensured the greatest possible number of residents and ratepayers were able to access information on the proposed SRV and were afforded the opportunity to seek further understanding and provide feedback. Submissions for feedback were collected via phone, social media, in-person community information sessions, in person via one-on-one conversations, online website landing page form, email, and through printed feedback forms.

Overall, the general feedback landed on three key points. The first is, as expected and understandable, that ratepayers do want to pay higher rates. The second is that the community want to see improved services from Council and in particular, improved roads and improved responses to customer enquiries. The third was focused on Councils operations and ensuring Council is operating as lean and transparent and efficient as possible. Unfortunately, the first and second points conflict with each other in that to significantly improve service levels, additional and sustainable funding is required.

The highest support for the SRV was from the phone survey, which is also the most independent and community wide aspect of the engagement, with 39% of phone survey respondents “somewhat supportive” of the proposed SRV option.

The in-person community information sessions proved to be a valuable engagement method as it allowed for two-way conversation and an in-depth understanding of attendee’s thoughts, ideas and concerns. A total of 420 attendees were noted as being engaged face-to-face, demonstrating the community’s interest in the Proposed SRV, however it must be noted there was a much larger engagement via the survey and online engagement methods.

It was clear from the submissions and the many conversations had within the region around the impacts of an SRV, that there is diverse socio-economic range, which impacted feedback regarding ability to and willingness to pay additional rates.

The feedback from those on low and fixed incomes, some of whom shared that they are living below the line and community members living in town or in a village who are struggling with the impacts of cost of living, were generally more inclined to be open to the idea of an SRV but wanted to see a smaller value and have it implemented over a longer period to lessen the single year

impact. This sector of the community readily and positively provided constructive solutions around how to make an SRV work, to therefore keep a base level of services provided to community.

Some community members were even willing to shoulder higher rates to facilitate an increase in local services. It should be noted that it is likely this section of the community were more likely to utilise a fuller suite of community services provided by Gunnedah Shire Council, and this sector of community value more highly the services and facilities provided and maintained by Council. This was supported by the phone survey that allowed for unprompted responses around priority services – these being: “Road maintenance / upgrades” and “Parks / Playgrounds / Sporting facilities”. Respondents also indicated that 43% were “somewhat supportive” of paying over and above the proposed SRV to support increased service levels for roads, and that 41% were “somewhat supportive” of paying over and above the proposed SRV to support increased service levels for parks and gardens.

A significant portion of the farmland discussion was the focus on local roads and maintenance of those roads and key infrastructure. Farmers and primary producers were particularly frustrated by the idea of paying more rates, and readily expressed how the state of their local roads is a constant source of frustration for them given they rely upon them every day - to live, to do business, and to safely access their properties, and wanted to see an improved level of service. There was also a common theme that those paying farmland rates do not use most of the services available in town and as such they don't value the contribution their rates make towards those services.

Those in rural communities were also very focused on the cost shifting concern that has come because of changes in funding of local government by State and Federal Government, and the impact this is having on the long-term viability of the Gunnedah Shire Council and its' ability to service ratepayers and facilities. The community members within villages and those living in town did indicate support for working with Council to lobby key politicians and government bodies for better and more sustainable funding of local government without the need to increase rates.

Overall, whilst the feedback provided by the community indicated a clear view of not wanting to pay more rates, there was also a clear view that the community does not want to see any service level reduction and, in most cases, wants to see improved services, improved evidence of Councils operational efficiency and an equitable distribution of Councils rates across all categories.

This provides an opportunity for Council to be better engaged with locals around key financial decision making. There is also an opportunity to further educate the community around the benefits of attending Council meetings, accessing the information available and encouraging community to be more actively engaged with their locally elected Councillors.

Without additional funding, maintaining current service levels will not be possible. The key is to find the right and most acceptable balance that will ultimately result in a sustainable Council that provides quality services and infrastructure that the current and future residents of Gunnedah expect and deserve.



Consultation Report Appenices

Gunnedah Shire Council Proposed SRV

October 2024

Contents

Appendix A – SRV Website.....	2
Appendix B – Online Statistics.....	7
Appendix C – Phone Survey Results.....	10
Appendix D – Online Survey.....	42
Appendix E – Public Relations	46
Appendix F – Radio Coverage	54
Appendix G – Newspaper Coverage.....	55
Appendix H – Print Collateral.....	58
Appendix I – Newspaper Editorial	60
Appendix J – Social Media	65
Appendix K – Community Information Sessions	73
Appendix L – SRV Community Presentation	102
Appendix M – Written Submissions.....	115

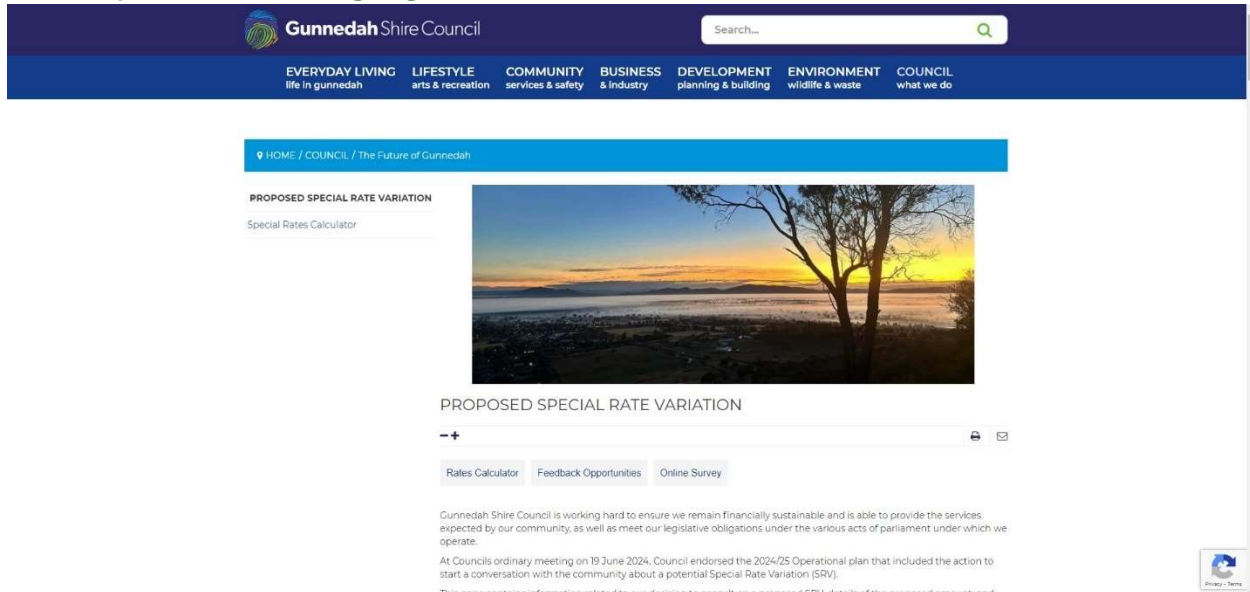
Appendix A – SRV Website

Gunnedah Shire Council (GSC) Homepage:

Featuring Proposed SRV Info Page tile on top right-hand side.



GSC Proposed SRV Landing Page:



This page contains information related to our decision to consult on a proposed SRV, details of the proposed amount, and resources to keep you informed and guide your ability to provide feedback on the proposal, including through a formal submission to Council and/or IPART.

What is an SRV?

An SRV allows a council to increase its general income above the rate peg to provide the services and infrastructure desired by their communities. SRVs can be either for a single year or over multiple years and can be permanent or temporary.

What is the Rate Peg?

Rates increase every year in line with an amount set by the State Government. This amount is calculated every year and is called the 'rate peg'. It is decided by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). The rate peg for Gunnedah Shire Council applied to the 2024/25 financial year will be 5.6%. This figure varies year to year and has been as low as 0.7% in the past five years.

Our financial position

Like many councils across NSW, Gunnedah Shire Council is facing the difficulty of maintaining its infrastructure and services within our existing income levels.

Council's long term financial plan shows that we are currently operating with an approximate \$3.1m operating deficit in the General Fund (excluding domestic waste services). This essentially means that we are spending \$3.1m less than we should be to maintain our assets and services to our current targeted service levels.

Without addressing this gap, the residents and visitors of the Shire will see a deterioration in service levels. Each year we fall behind, the cost of renewing infrastructure will rise and we will eventually have to catch up.

Council also has limitations on how it can spend money that is received for services. For example, income received via Water charges can only be spent on water related services. The same applies to Wastewater and Waste management services. This means that while Council may have significant funds in its bank account, only a portion of these can be used on General Fund activities such as roads, parks, gardens, libraries, and planning services. Current forecasts show that without action, either through additional income or reduced expenditure, Council's unrestricted cash balance will move to a negative value within two financial years. A negative unrestricted cash balance cannot be allowed to occur.

While Council continues to review operational efficiencies, and will continue to do so, because of limited ability to increase revenue in other areas, we are forced to consider an increase in rates via an SRV to secure the level of funding necessary to ensure that we can continue to maintain and renew our asset base.

Further information on Council's financial position, can be found in our 2024/25 Operational Plan, which is available

Further information on Council's financial position can be found in our 2024/25 Operational Plan, which is available here: [2024/25 Operational Plan](#)

What is the proposed SRV?

Council intends to discuss the potential application for a permanent SRV of 39.89% over two years. The 39.89% is comprised of a 24% increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12% increase in year two (2026/27).

	2025/26	2026/27	Cumulative
Permanent Increase above rate peg	19%	7%	
Rate Peg (forecast)	5%	5%	
Total Increase	24%	12%	36.88%

The rationale behind these two values is as follows:

The 24% increase in Year One will allow Council to address the current operating deficit and the current forecast unrestricted cash challenges.

The 12% increase in Year Two will allow Council to commence addressing the backlog of works to bring our assets to the current targeted service levels.

What does the SRV apply to?

The proposed SRV would only apply to the rates portion of the bill (usually listed as the first item on the bill e.g. Residential Gunnedah) and not the separately listed essential charges such as waste and water. These services are all funded through direct fees and charges.



What the SRV funds would be used for

The proposed SRV will be used to fund maintenance and renewal of Council's assets and specifically:

- Council's Transport network (roads, bridges and associated services).
- Council's Building infrastructure, and
- Council's Parks, gardens and Open Space.



How would the increase impact me?

The below tables show the impact of the increase based on averages for rates categories.


Category	2024/25 Average per annum	Year 1 Increase / per annum	Year 1 Increase / per week	Year 2 Increase / per annum	Year 2 Increase / per week	2026/27 Average per annum
Residential	\$1,106	\$264	\$5.08	\$164	\$3.15	\$1,534
Business	\$5,899	\$1,405	\$27.02	\$877	\$16.87	\$6,181
Farmland	\$5,337	\$1,271	\$24.44	\$793	\$15.25	\$7,401

Rating Category	Sub-Category	Base Scenario (5% in 25/26)			Year One Increase (24% in 25/26)			Cumulative Year Two Increase (24% in 25/26 and 12% in 26/27)				
		Average Rate by Category	Increase in Average rate per annum	Additional Cost per week	Average Rate by Category	Increase in Average rate per annum	Additional Cost per week	Average Rate by Category	Increase in Average rate per annum	Year two weekly increase	Cumulative Increase in Average rate per annum	Cumulative Additional Cost per week
Residential	Ordinary	\$993.37	\$48.02	\$0.89	\$1,173.04	\$25.70	\$4.34	\$1,313.04	\$140.80	\$2.71	\$966.50	\$7.05
	Rural	\$1,294.24	\$59.82	\$1.15	\$1,528.89	\$294.18	\$5.66	\$1,712.36	\$183.47	\$3.53	\$477.63	\$8.19
	Gannedah	\$1,251.00	\$57.75	\$1.11	\$1,473.94	\$283.58	\$5.45	\$1,650.61	\$176.87	\$3.40	\$480.45	\$8.85
	Village	\$614.32	\$28.29	\$0.54	\$725.54	\$139.51	\$2.68	\$812.57	\$87.83	\$1.67	\$326.54	\$4.36
Business	Ordinary	\$1,027.07	\$47.23	\$0.91	\$1,213.25	\$233.41	\$4.48	\$1,358.24	\$145.22	\$2.79	\$578.40	\$7.28
	Gannedah	\$7,288.80	\$337.20	\$6.49	\$8,607.60	\$1,656.09	\$31.85	\$9,640.58	\$1,032.98	\$19.87	\$2,889.07	\$51.71
	Business Power Generation	\$12,153.13	\$482.30	\$9.81	\$14,349.49	\$2,760.96	\$53.09	\$16,071.79	\$1,722.09	\$33.12	\$4,482.95	\$86.21
Farmland	Ordinary	\$5,595.43	\$258.89	\$4.98	\$6,607.83	\$1,271.31	\$24.45	\$7,400.80	\$792.95	\$15.25	\$2,004.26	\$39.70
	Additional Yield	\$181,776.99	\$15,959.02	\$295.17	\$192,042.13	\$75,436.21	\$1,450.50	\$435,087.13	\$47,045.00	\$904.71	\$12,471.21	\$2,355.22
		\$777,378.75			\$817,734.71			\$2,381,205.71				

It is important to note these values are averages and the impact of the increase will be different dependent on your property valuation.

Use the below rates calculator to estimate the impact on your property.

NB: This rates calculator is an estimate only of how the special rate variation could affect your property – it does not include any change in property valuations or charges related to water, wastewater/sewage or waste.



CLICK HERE TO USE OUR
RATES CALCULATOR

Feedback Opportunities

Community Information Sessions

Council will be hosting the following community information sessions to provide details on Council's financial position, the proposed SRV and to provide the community with the opportunity to provide feedback.



Location	Date	Time
CURLEWIS Curlewis Community Hall, 21 Goran Street	Monday, 5 August 2024	5.30pm-7.00pm
GUNNEDAH Verdict Coffee Shop, 147 Conadilly Street	Wednesday, 7 August 2024	10am-12pm
TAMBAR SPRINGS Tambar Springs Hall, 1 School Street	Thursday, 8 August 2024	9.30am-12pm
CARROLL Carroll Community Hall, Oxley Hwy, Carroll	Tuesday, 13 August 2024	10am-12pm
GUNNEDAH Verdict Coffee Shop, 147 Conadilly Street	Wednesday, 14 August 2024	10am-12pm
GUNNEDAH Town Hall, 152 Conadilly Street	Wednesday, 14 August 2024	6.30pm-8pm
GUNNEDAH Gunnedah Shire Library, 291-293 Conadilly Street	Thursday, 15 August 2024	10am-12pm
GUNNEDAH Gunnedah Monthly Markets Wolsley Oval, 94 Conadilly Street	Saturday, 17 August 2024	8.30am-1.00pm
GUNNEDAH AgQuip - Gunnedah Shire Council Stand Blackjack Road	Tuesday, 20 August 2024	8.30am - 4.30pm
GUNNEDAH AgQuip - Gunnedah Shire Council Stand Blackjack Road	Wednesday, 21 August 2024	8.30am - 4.30pm
GUNNEDAH AgQuip - Gunnedah Shire Council Stand Blackjack Road	Thursday, 22 August 2024	8.30am - 4pm

A copy of the information being provided at Community Information Sessions can be found here: [GSC - Community SRV Information Pack PDF](#)

How can people have their say?

The consultation period for the proposed SRV closed on **Friday, 6 September 2024**.

What happens now?

At the conclusion of the current period of community engagement, Council will consider whether to proceed with an application for a Special Rate Variation. Council would then need to notify IPART of its intent to lodge a Special Rate Variation application in February 2025.

IPART

Further information on the SRV process, including fact sheets and information papers are available on the IPART website that can be accessed via the following link: www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Industries/Local-Government/For-Councils/Apply-for-a-special-variation-or-minimum-rate-increase

Learn more

If you would like to learn more about the ways in which local government differs from a business, [click here to view a presentation by Professor Joseph Drew](#).

Additional FAQs

Why is an SRV needed?

The cost to deliver services and maintain community assets to current service levels increases above the rate peg amount each year. Combined with reduced financial assistance and ongoing cost shifting to Local Government by other levels of government, councils are under constant financial pressure to deliver the same services for less, which is not a sustainable model.

Council also has an expanding infrastructure base as our community is growing. We view the fact that our population is increasing as very positive but we need to be able to maintain the associated infrastructure need to support this.

Council has very limited opportunity to increase our source revenue and, as a result, an increase in rates is the most viable solution for a financially sustainable council.

Council's long term financial plan shows that we are currently operating with an approximately \$3.1m operating deficit in the General Fund (excluding domestic waste services). This essentially means that we are spending \$3.1m less than we should be to maintain our assets and services to our current targeted service levels.

The SRV is also needed to address Council's current and forecast cash position. Our 2024/25 budget forecast shows that our projected cash reserves will be in decline and the unrestricted cash position will potentially move into a negative balance within the General Fund within two years without intervention. A negative unrestricted cash balance cannot be allowed to occur.

What would happen if the SRV is not implemented?

Council would need to defer necessary capital works and revise the basic range and levels of services provided to the community to avoid a deteriorating cash position, which is not sustainable in the long term. Service levels would need to reduce in the absence of additional funding being available.

What is Council doing to save money?

No matter what Council does, an SRV is required to restore the real cost of maintaining assets and providing services to grow and be sustainable. Council has a focus on continuous improvement and we work hard to keep costs under strict control. Council has introduced a program of service reviews to improve operations and maximise the use and efficiency of resources. These reviews are showing that a number of improvements have already been achieved and that, while further improvements are possible, any drop in funding will translate to a drop in service levels.

Recent improvement and savings include:

- Insurance savings
- Reduced electricity costs (street lighting and Sewer Treatment Plant)
- Service Review program commenced
- Changed unsealed roads techniques (compaction versus dry grading)
- Parks and Gardens (GPS line marking, irrigation systems)
- IT system improvements and Planning portal integration
- Library service improvements

Are other Councils in our area getting SRVs?

Yes, across the North-West and New England the following Councils have applied for and received SRVs.

- Tamworth Regional Council - 36.3% over two years (24/25)
- Armidale Regional Council - 58.8% over three years (23/24)



- Walcha Council – 57.74% across three years (23/24)
- Tenterfield Council – 43% in one year (23/24)
- Liverpool Plains Shire Council – 18.7% in one year (23/24)

What can ratepayers expect in cases of hardship?

Council recognises the community has been doing it tough and has held off as long as possible to request an increase (9 other NSW councils made applications in 24/25 and 17 in 23/24). Unfortunately, additional money is required to keep infrastructure adequately maintained so we can continue to deliver the same level of service the community expects.

For ratepayers experiencing financial hardship, Council has a "Hardship Policy" that has recently been updated to ensure we work with the most vulnerable in our community to support them as best we can during these challenging times.

How will the new land valuation from the Valuer General impact the proposed Special Rate Variation?

Residents across the Gunnedah Shire Council will be receiving new Notice of Valuation from the NSW Valuer General from January 2025. This is provided every 2 to 3 years and reflects the unimproved value of land of a property.

The new valuations will apply from 1 July 2025 for calculating general rates.

It's important to note an increase in land value does not necessarily mean an increase in rates. Council does not receive any more money because land values increase – some people may pay more or less on their rates depending on the change in value of their land relative to changes in land values across the Shire.

Does an increase in land values mean Council can collect more general income?

Council will be receiving new land valuations from the Valuer General effective 1 July 2025.

An increase in land valuations does not result in any additional general income for councils.

The total income that Council can source from land rates is capped at the approved rate pegged amount or any approved special rate variation.

It simply means it changes the way rates are distributed within each rate category/subcategory. Some people will pay more rates, some less, some the same.

Will my rates increase if my land valuation does?

An increase in your land valuation does not necessarily mean your rates will increase. The difference is how the rates revenue is shared across ratepayers, based on the change in their property value. Some people may pay more or less on their rates depending on the change in value of their land relative to changes in land values across the Shire.

Generally, properties whose land valuation increase is lower than the average increase for that rates category (residential, business, farmland or mining) will see a reduction in rates. However, properties whose valuation increase is higher than the average for the rating category may see a rise in rates.








CONTACT US


Opening Hours
Monday - Friday: 9.00am - 4.00pm
(Telephone enquiries: 8.30am - 5.00pm)

Address
63 Elgin Street | PO Box 63
GUNNEDAH NSW 2380

Phone: 02 6740 2100
Fax: 02 6740 2119
Email: council@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au





Gunnedah
Shire Council
Open New Horizons

© 2024 GUNNEDAH SHIRE COUNCIL

Gunnedah Shire Council acknowledges the Kamilaroi Aboriginal Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and in doing so, Council pays its respect to all Elders past and present as well as to the young Indigenous leaders of tomorrow.

[Privacy Statement](#)
[STAFF LOGIN](#)



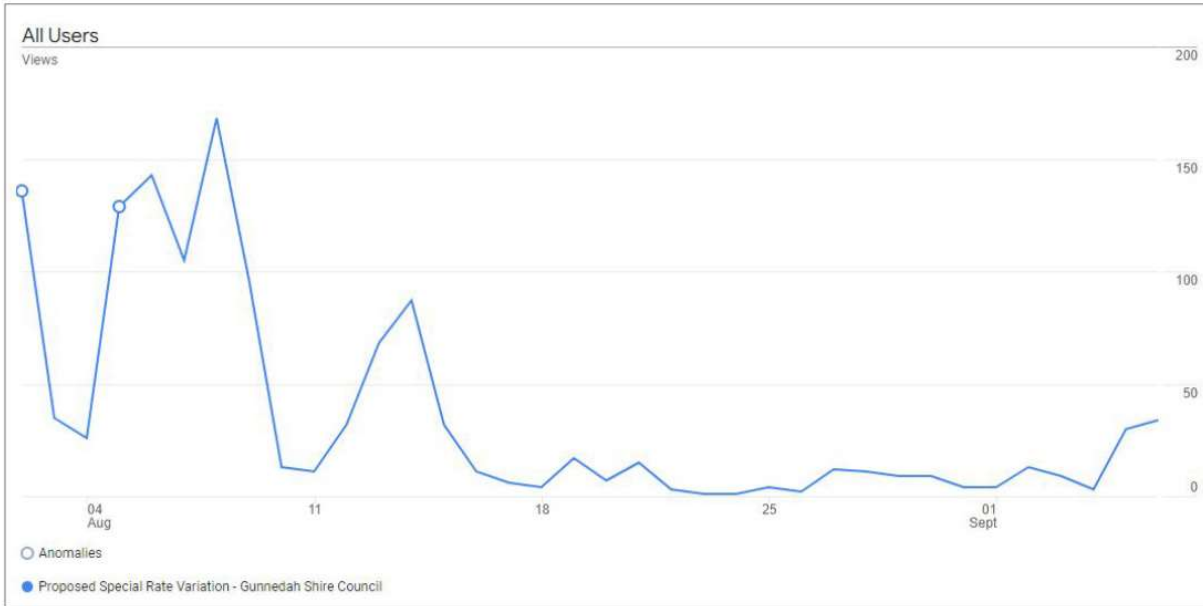
Appendix B – Online Statistics

Engagement Report - Google Analytics

Webpage: Proposed Special Rate Variation - Gunnedah Shire Council

URL: <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/index.php/council/the-future-of-gunnedah/proposed-special-rate-variation>

Date range: 2 August - 6 September 2024



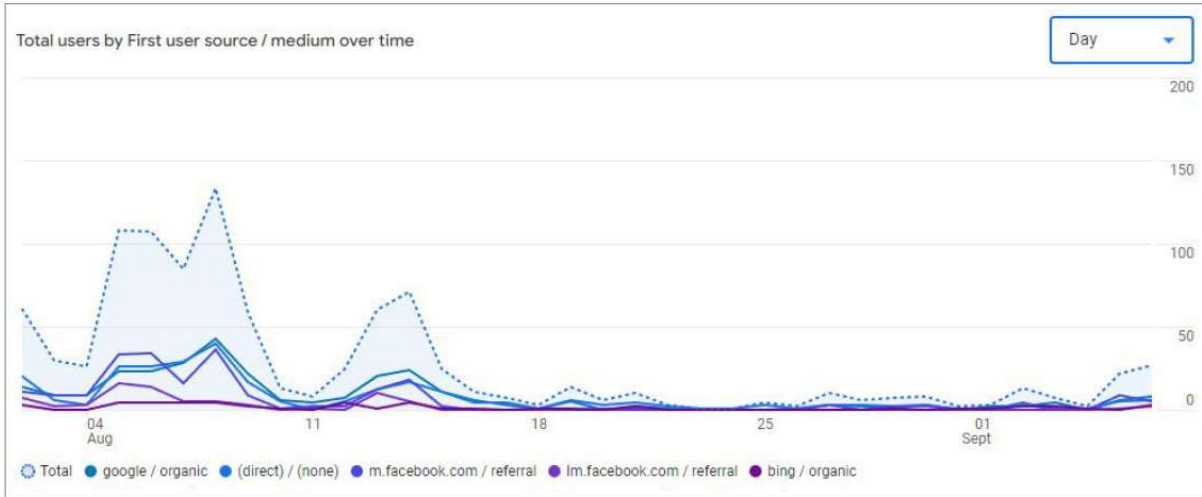
Total users	New users	Returning users	Views	Engagement rate	Sessions	Average session duration
760	352	272	1290	60.9%	1174	2m 31s

Traffic Acquisition Report - Google Analytics

Webpage: Proposed Special Rate Variation - Gunnedah Shire Council

URL: <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/index.php/council/the-future-of-gunnedah/proposed-special-rate-variation>

Date range: 2 August - 6 September 2024



Source/Medium	Total users	New Users	Returning Users	Average engagement time per active user	Average engagement time per active user
Total	760 100% of Total	352 100% of Total	272 100% of Total	1m 06s Avg 0%	1174 Avg 0%
(direct) / (none)	212	130	63	38s	0.84
m.facebook.com / referral	209	152	18	10s	0.42
google / organic	203	23	118	1m 42s	1.31
lm.facebook.com / referral	57	31	23	3m 18s	1.33
bing / organic	28	1	20	2m 14s	1.75
intranet.gscdomain.infogunnedah.com.au / referral	21	0	19	2m 21s	2.33
l.facebook.com / referral	19	10	6	1m 10s	1.00
au.search.yahoo.com / referral	4	1	3	1m 15s	0.50
facebook.com / referral	4	3	0	17s	0.75
duckduckgo / organic	1	0	1	0s	1.00

Rates Calculator Analytics data: This is data is taken from Netlify's Analytics Logging, the program used to create the app:


Site Analytics spanning 30 days ▾

Data from Jul 29 to Aug 28

Total pageviews
821

Total unique visitors
632


The Rates Calculator: <https://rates-app.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/>



GunnedahShire

Ordinary Rate Calculator

Enter your Rate Assessment No, or start entering your address



GunnedahShire


Ordinary Rate Calculator

Enter your Rate Assessment No, or start entering your address

Assessment No
13267262

I confirm this is my address

Calculate



GunnedahShire

Ordinary Rate Calculator

Assessment No
13267262

Property Address
63 Elgin Street GUNNEDAH NSW 2380

2022 Rateable Land Value
\$452,000.00

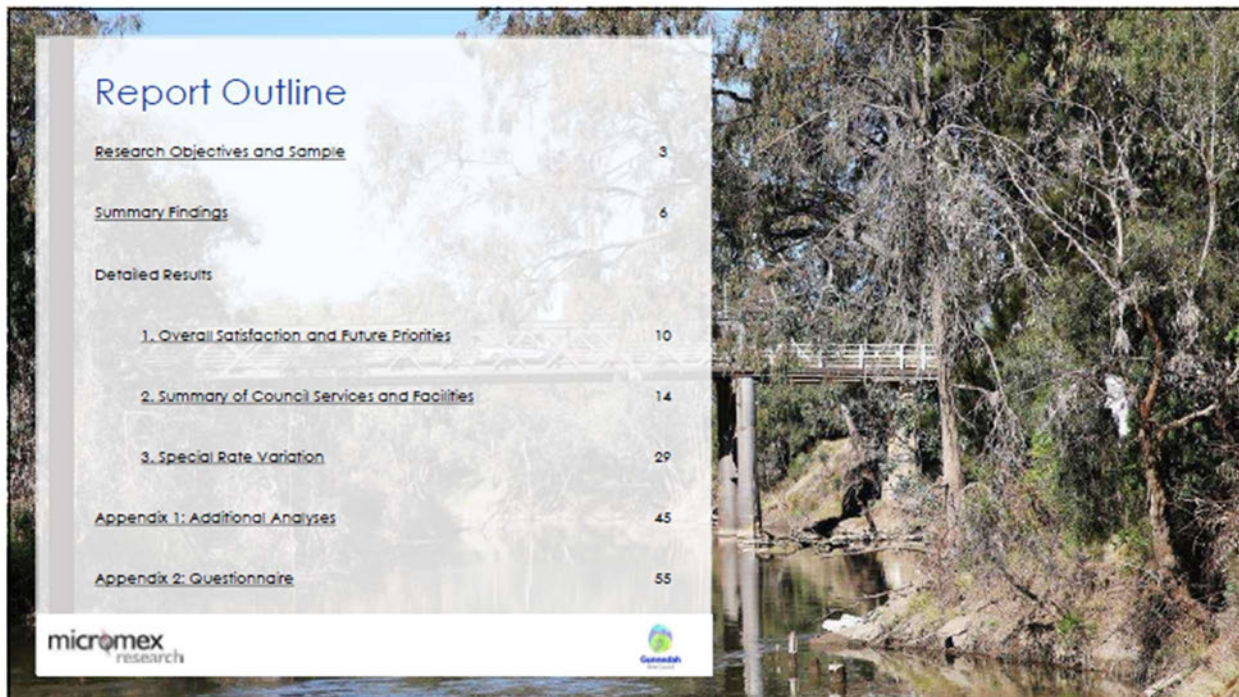
Rate Category/Sub Category
Business Gunnedah

Current (24-25)	
Ordinary Rates Payable	\$12,529.21
Proposed Rate Structure (25-26)	
Ordinary Rates Payable	\$15,514.10
Movement between rating years	\$2,984.89
% movement	23.82%
Weekly Variance	\$57.40
Proposed Rate Structure (26-27)	
Ordinary Rates Payable	\$17,375.94
Movement between rating years	\$1,861.84
% movement	12%
Weekly Variance	\$35.80
Cumulative % increase	38.68%
Disclaimer	
Please note that these are indicative rates based upon current information utilising Land Valuations base dated 1 July 2022. The actual rate amount will be dependent upon future valuation changes, categorisation changes and land value movements and final approval of the rating structure by Council during the finalisation of the Special Rate Variation process. The special rate variation is applicable to the general rate only and does not include annual charges for Council services such as stormwater, water supply, sewer supply, waste services or government levies.	
Reset	

Appendix C – Phone Survey Results



1



2



Research Objectives

Gunnedah Shire Council commissioned Micromex Research to conduct a random telephone survey with residents living in the local government area (LGA).

Objectives (Why?)

- Understand and identify community priorities for the LGA
- Identify the community's overall level of satisfaction with Council performance and the communication from Council
- Explore residents' attitudes toward the Special Rate Variation and support for paying more for higher service levels

Sample (How?)

- Telephone survey (landline N = 5 and mobile N = 295) to N = 300 residents
- We use a 5 point scale (e.g. 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied)
- Greatest margin of error +/- 5.7%

Timing (When?)

- Implementation 5th – 15th August 2024

3

3

Methodology and Sample



Sample selection and error

A total of 300 resident interviews were completed. Respondents were selected by means of a computer based random selection process using Australian marketing lists, Sample Pages, List Broken and Lead Lists.

A sample size of 300 residents provides a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 5.7% at 95% confidence. This means that if the survey was replicated with a new universe of N=300 residents, 19 times out of 20 we would expect to see the same results, i.e. +/- 5.7%. For example, that an answer such as 'yes' (50%) to a question could vary from 44% to 56%.

Interviewing

Interviewing was conducted in accordance with The Research Society Code of Professional Behaviour.

Data analysis

The data within this report was analysed using Q Professional.

Within the report, blue and red font colours are used to identify statistically significant differences between groups, i.e., gender, age, etc.

Significance difference testing is a statistical test performed to evaluate the difference between two measurements. To identify the statistically significant differences between the groups of means, 'One-Way Anova tests' and 'Independent Samples T-tests' were used. 'Z Tests' were also used to determine statistically significant differences between column percentages.

Note: All percentages are calculated to the nearest whole number and therefore the total may not exactly equal 100%.

Ratings questions

The Unipolar Scale of 1 to 5 was used in all rating questions, where 1 was the lowest importance or satisfaction and 5 the highest importance or satisfaction.

This scale allowed us to identify different levels of importance and satisfaction across respondents.

Top 2 (T2) Box: refers to the aggregate percentage (%) score of the top two scores for importance, (i.e. important & very important)

Note: Only respondents who rated services/facilities a 4 or 5 in importance were asked to rate their satisfaction with that service/facility.

Top 3 (T3) Box: refers to the aggregate percentage (%) score of the top three scores for satisfaction or support, (i.e. somewhat satisfied, satisfied & very satisfied)

We refer to T3 Box Satisfaction in order to express moderate to high levels of satisfaction in a non-discretionary category. We only report T2 Box importance in order to provide differentiation and allow us to demonstrate the hierarchy of community priorities.

Micromex LGA Benchmark

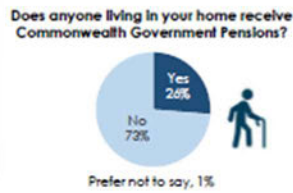
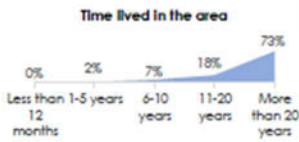
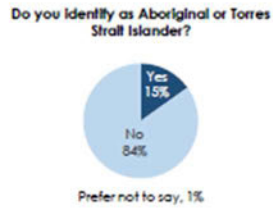
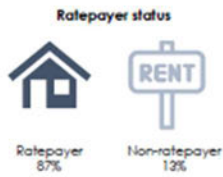
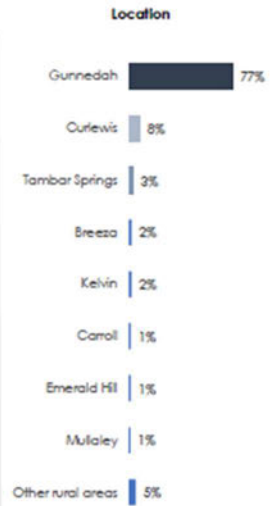
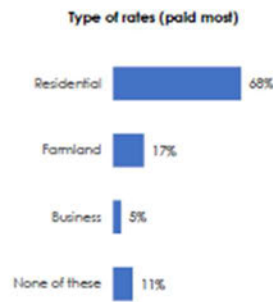
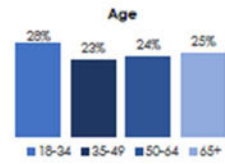
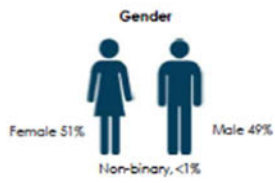
Micromex has developed Community Satisfaction Benchmarks using normative data from over 80 unique councils, more than 200 surveys and over 100,000 interviews since 2012.

4

4

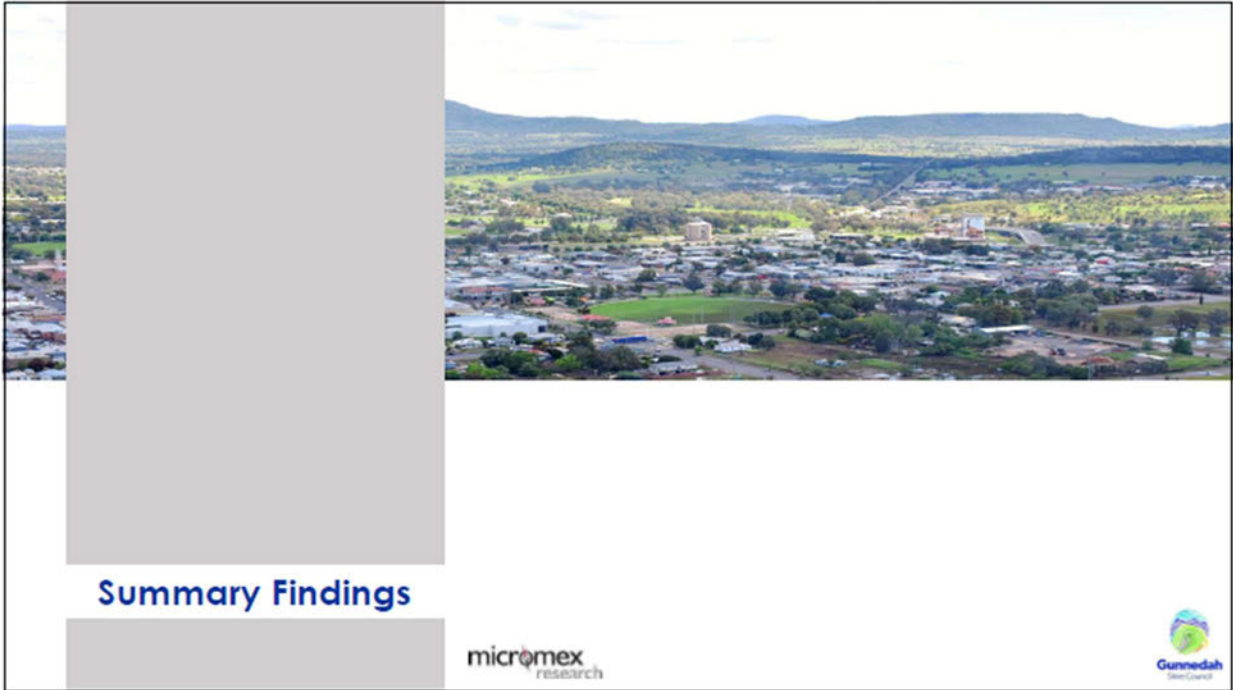
Sample Profile

The sample was weighted by age and gender to reflect the 2021 ABS Census data for the Gunnedah Shire Council LGA.



Base: N = 300

5



Summary Findings

micromex
research



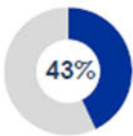
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Snapshot Summary



Overall Satisfaction

54% of Gunnedah Shire residents are at least somewhat satisfied with the performance of Council over the last 12 months



Communication

43% of Gunnedah Shire residents are at least somewhat satisfied the level of communication Council currently has with the community

Service Satisfaction

Libraries and sewerage management received high satisfaction ratings, while unsealed roads and opportunities for community participation in decision-making were rated with lower levels of satisfaction

Drivers of Satisfaction

Key areas influencing overall satisfaction included opportunities for community participation (10.3% influence) and economic development (8.6% influence). The expanded regression model highlighted the importance of communication, with this measure highlighted as a very strong driver of overall satisfaction with Council's performance.

Community Priorities - Unprompted

The top priorities identified by residents include:

1. Road maintenance/ upgrades (47%)
2. Parks/ playgrounds/ sporting facilities (17%)
3. Council communication/ transparency (15%)
4. Reducing rates/ better value for rates (15%)



Special Rate Variation Awareness and Support

- Almost three quarters of residents were aware of the proposed SRV
- 69% of residents are at least 'somewhat supportive' of the Rate Peg only option
- 39% of residents are at least 'somewhat supportive' of the proposed SRV option

Support for Additional Rate Increases

- 43% of residents were at least 'somewhat supportive' of paying over and above the proposed SRV to support increased service levels for roads
- 41% were also supportive of paying higher rates and charged to support increased service levels in terms of for parks and gardens
- Support for improvements to the Cultural Precinct was lower (31% at least 'somewhat supportive')

7

7

Moving Forward

Council's current consideration of the proposed SRV is no doubt influencing the community's views and opinions of Council and current service delivery (74% of residents aware of the proposed SRV).

The research has shown Council's level of communication with the community to be a very strong driver of overall satisfaction with Council's performance. In an unaided question regarding priority areas for Council, almost one quarter of residents believe focus areas should include improvements to communication, consultation, transparency and management.

With over one third of residents at least somewhat supportive of the SRV, there is a segment of the community that are aware that in order to fund existing services and maintain local infrastructure there is the need for a rate increase above the rate peg. The challenge for Council will be to continue to improve communication channels in an effort to improve transparency regarding any future changes to rates and service delivery.



8

Satisfaction Scorecard

14/32 services and facilities received a good performance score (at least somewhat satisfied of 80% or more).

There were 9 areas identified as areas for improvement with a satisfaction score of less than 60% (see red shaded cells).

Good performance
(T38 sat score ≥80%)

Monitor
(T38 sat score 60%-79%)

Needs Improvement
(T38 sat score <60%)

Community Facilities	Infrastructure
Public parks	Unsealed roads
Swimming pools	Rural sealed roads
Sporting grounds	Urban streets
Libraries	Footpaths and cycleways
Public buildings and village halls	Street cleaning
The Civic Precinct (i.e. Town Hall/Movie Theatre/Art Gallery)	Gunnedah airport
Gunnedah showground	Drainage/food management
Quality of town centres and public spaces	Water supply
Human Services	Sewerage management
Youth services	General garbage collection
Aged care services (i.e. Go Co)	Landfills and waste transfer stations
Relationship with Indigenous residents	Recycling
Support for volunteers	Corporate Services and Management
Disability access	Opportunities to participate in Council decision making
Emergency services (i.e. SES, RFS)	Management of development
	Tourism, importance
	Economic development
	Environmental and sustainability initiatives
	Heritage conservation/promotion

9



Section One

Overall Satisfaction and Future Priorities

This section examines residents' overall satisfaction with the performance of Council and Council's communication with the community. It also explores community priorities for the planning of the area.



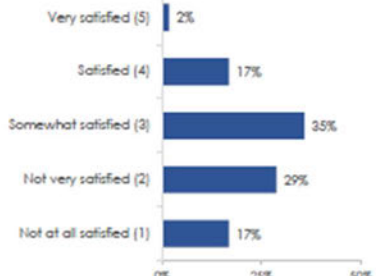

10

Overall Satisfaction with the Performance of Council

54% of residents are at least somewhat satisfied with the performance of Council in the last 12 months.

At the overall level, residents' satisfaction with the performance of Council is lower than the Regional Benchmark.

Further analysis has shown ratepayers and those aware of the Special Rate Variation to be significantly less satisfied with the performance of Council, indicating the impact of the rate increase on this key measure.



	Overall	Aware of Special Rate Variation	
		Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	54%	49%	69%
Mean rating	2.58	2.45	2.93
Base	300	221	79

	Gunnedah Shire Council	Micromex LGA Benchmark - Regional
Top 3 Box %	54% ¹	82%
Mean rating	2.58 ¹	3.31
Base	300	53,020

¹ = A significantly higher/lower level of satisfaction (compared to the Benchmark)

	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
	Male	Female	18-24	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 3 Box %	50%	59%	53%	52%	56%	56%	52%	71%
Mean rating	2.54	2.61	2.50	2.39	2.72	2.72	2.52	2.97
Base	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
	Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	58%	53%	44%	57%	48%	56%	56%	54%
Mean rating	2.58	2.58	2.29	2.64	2.44	2.62	2.71	2.52
Base	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Base: N = 300

Q4. Overall, for the last 12 months, how satisfied are you with the performance of Council, not just on one or two issues, but across all responsibility areas?

Scale: 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied
A significantly higher/lower level of satisfaction (by group) ¹

11

Satisfaction with the Level of Communication

43% of residents are at least somewhat satisfied with the level of communication Council has with the community.

At the overall level, residents' satisfaction with the level of communication Council has with the community is lower than the Regional Benchmark.

Similar to overall satisfaction, ratepayers and those aware of the Special Rate Variation are significantly less likely to be satisfied.



Base: N = 300

Q3. How satisfied are you currently with the level of communication Council has with the community?

	Overall	Aware of Special Rate Variation	
		Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	43%	37%	61%
Mean rating	2.36	2.23	2.72
Base	300	221	79

	Gunnedah Shire Council	Micromex LGA Benchmark - Regional
Top 3 Box %	43%	79%
Mean rating	2.36	3.21
Base	300	17,943

[1] = A significantly higher/lower level of satisfaction (compared to the Benchmark)

	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 3 Box %	41%	45%	37%	35%	52%	49%	41%	57%
Mean rating	2.32	2.41	2.26	2.16	2.58	2.45	2.30	2.81
Base	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
	Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	43%	43%	34%	45%	34%	46%	52%	39%
Mean rating	2.41	2.35	2.12	2.41	2.15	2.43	2.48	2.30
Base	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Scale: 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied
A significantly higher/lower level of satisfaction (by group)

12

Key Priorities

Nearly half of residents (47%) stated that road maintenance/upgrades is a key priority for Council to focus on.

Other suggested priorities include parks/ playground/ sporting facilities, Council's management and communication, and rate reduction.

Example Verbatims

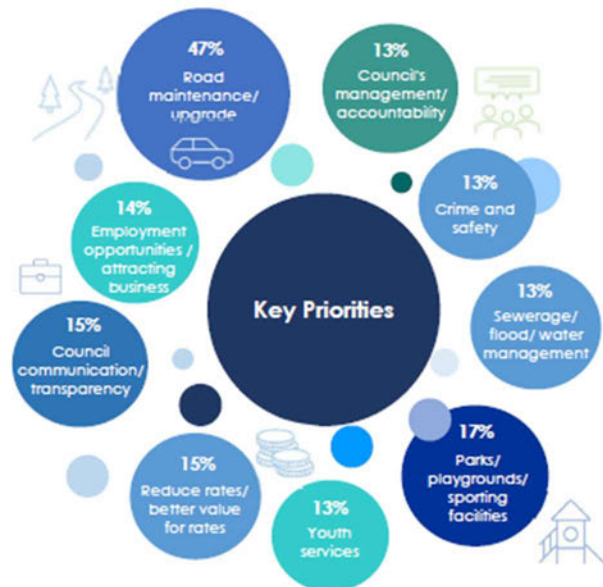
"Road maintenance and fixing the potholes"

"Need to be better with the sporting areas as the basketball hoop is broken and the tennis courts need fixing"

"More communication/ transparency with the community about decision-making"

"Finding ways to save and gain funds without increasing rates"

"Management of Council"



Base: N = 300

Q2. What do you think are the key priorities for Council in the local area?

Note: Please see Appendix 1 for complete list

13




Section Two

Summary of Council Services/Facilities

This section summarises the importance and satisfaction ratings for the 32 services and facilities. In this section we explore trends to past research and comparative norms.





14



Summary: Services / Facilities

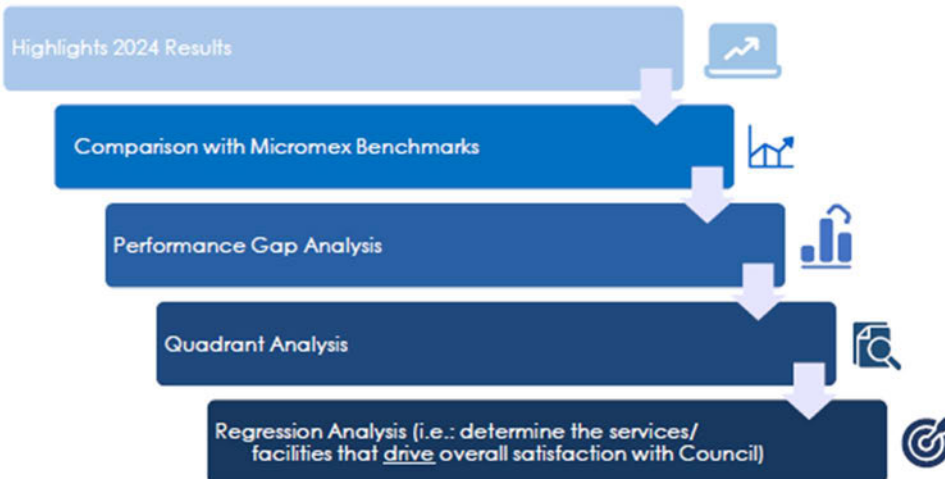
- Emergency services, water supply and general garbage collection were rated most important. Residents were most satisfied with libraries and sewerage management
- Performance gaps were greatest for roads (unsealed and rural), opportunities to participate in Council decision making and development (management of development and economic development)
- Opportunities to participate in Council decision making has the greatest influence on overall satisfaction (standard model), followed by economic development, swimming pools and urban streets
- A re-run of the regression analysis (expanded model) highlighted the influence of the level of communication the Council currently has with the community, contributing to 32% of overall satisfaction

15

Council Services and Facilities

A major component of the 2024 Community Survey was to assess perceived Importance of, and Satisfaction with 32 Council-provided services and facilities – the equivalent of 64 separate questions!

We have utilised the following techniques to summarise and analyse these 64 questions:



16

16

Importance & Satisfaction – Highest/Lowest Rated Services/Facilities

The analysis below identifies the highest and lowest rated services/facilities in terms of importance and satisfaction.

Importance

The following services/facilities received the highest T2 box importance ratings:

Higher importance	T2 Box	Mean
Emergency services	94%	4.71
Water supply	91%	4.61
General garbage collection	90%	4.59
Economic development	88%	4.52
Drainage/food management	87%	4.47
Urban streets	87%	4.27

The following services/facilities received the lowest T2 box importance ratings:

Lower importance	T2 Box	Mean
Gunnedah airport	31%	2.52
Libraries	42%	3.09
Public buildings and village halls	52%	3.49
Swimming pools	57%	3.63
Relationship with Indigenous residents	59%	3.69

T2B = Important/very important
Scale: 1 = not at all important, 5 = very important

Satisfaction

The following services/facilities received the highest T3 box satisfaction ratings:

Higher satisfaction	T3 Box	Mean
Libraries	95%	4.17
Sewerage management	93%	4.07
The Civic Precinct	89%	3.76
Emergency services	86%	3.82
Water supply	86%	3.74
Public buildings and village halls	86%	3.50

The following services/facilities received the lowest T3 box satisfaction ratings:

Lower satisfaction	T3 Box	Mean
Unsealed roads	19%	1.73
Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	33%	2.05
Rural sealed roads	34%	2.12
Management of development	44%	2.33
Youth services	53%	2.54

T3B = somewhat satisfied/satisfied/very satisfied
Scale: 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied

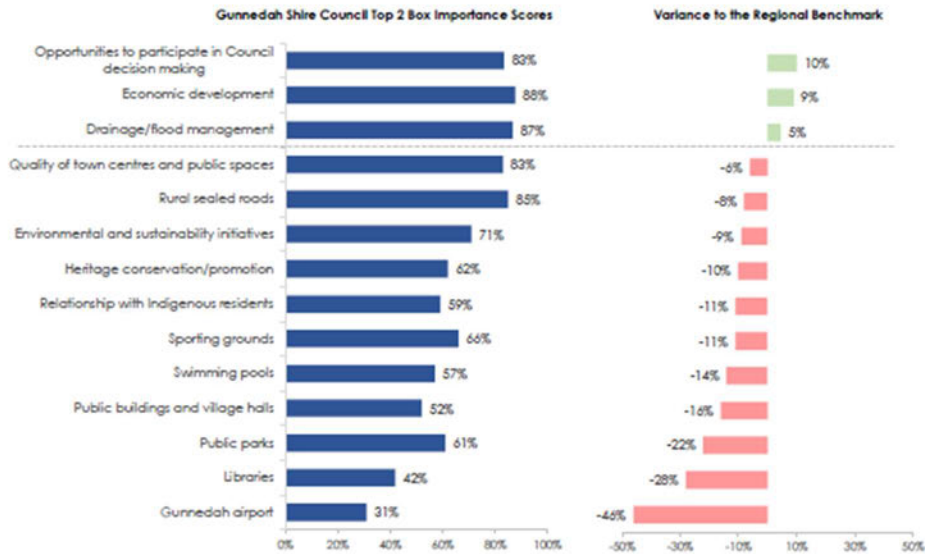
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17

Summary Importance Comparison to the Micromex Benchmark

The chart to the right shows the variance between Gunnedah Shire Council top 2 box importance scores and the Micromex Regional Benchmark.

Services/facilities shown in the chart highlight larger positive and negative gaps.



Note: Only services/facilities with a variance of +/- 5% to the Benchmark have been shown above. Please see Appendix 1 for detailed list
Top 2 box = Important/Very important

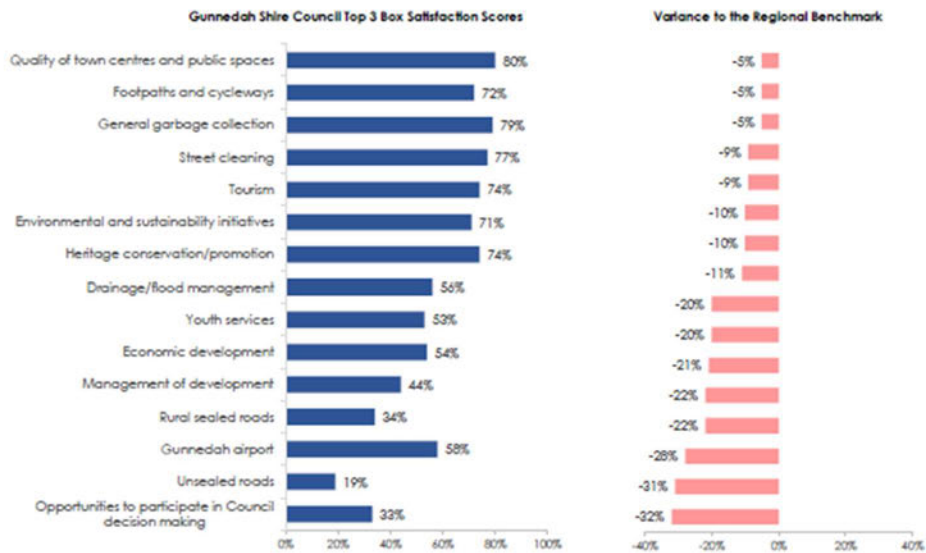
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18

Summary Satisfaction Comparison to the Micromex Benchmark

The chart to the right shows the variance between Gunnedah Shire Council top 3 box satisfaction scores and the Micromex Regional Benchmark.

Services/facilities shown in the chart to the right highlight larger negative gaps.



Note: Only services/facilities with a variance of +/- 5% to the Benchmark have been shown above. Please see Appendix 1 for detailed list
Top 3 box = at least somewhat satisfied

19

19

Performance Gap Analysis

PGA establishes the gap between importance and satisfaction. This is calculated by subtracting the top 3 satisfaction score from the top 2 importance score. In order to measure performance gaps, respondents are asked to rate the importance of, and their satisfaction with, each of a range of different services or facilities on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = low importance or satisfaction and 5 = high importance or satisfaction. These scores are aggregated at a total community level.

The higher the differential between importance and satisfaction, the greater the difference is between the provision of that service by Gunnedah Shire Council and the expectation of the community for that service/facility.

In the table on the following page, we can see the services and facilities with the largest performance gaps.

When analysing the performance gaps, it is expected that there will be some gaps in terms of resident satisfaction. Those services/facilities that have achieved a performance gap of greater than 20% may be indicative of areas requiring future optimisation.



20

20

Performance Gap Analysis

When we examine the largest performance gaps, we can identify that all of the services or facilities have been rated as high in importance, whilst residents' satisfaction for all of these areas is between 19% and 58%. Roads (unsealed and sealed) and opportunities to participate in Council decision making received the largest performance gaps.

Service Area	Service/Facility	Importance T2 Box	Satisfaction T3 Box	Performance Gap (Importance - Satisfaction)
Infrastructure	Unsealed roads	76%	19%	57%
Infrastructure	Rural sealed roads	65%	34%	31%
Corporate services and management	Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	83%	33%	50%
Corporate services and management	Management of development	78%	44%	34%
Corporate services and management	Economic development	88%	54%	34%
Infrastructure	Drainage/flood management	67%	36%	31%
Infrastructure	Urban streets	67%	42%	25%
Human services	Youth services	72%	53%	19%

Note: Performance gap is the first step in the process, we now need to identify comparative ratings across all services and facilities to get an understanding of relative importance and satisfaction at an LGA level. This is when we undertake step 2 of the analysis.

Please see Appendix 1 for full Performance Gap Ranking

21

21

Quadrant Analysis

Quadrant analysis is often helpful in planning future directions based on stated outcomes. It combines the stated importance of the community and assesses satisfaction with delivery in relation to these needs.

This analysis is completed by plotting the variables on x and y axes, defined by stated importance and rated satisfaction. We aggregate the top 2 box importance scores and top 3 satisfaction scores for stated importance and rated satisfaction to identify where the facility or service should be plotted.

On average, Gunnedah Shire Council residents rated services/facilities less important than our Benchmark, and their satisfaction was also lower.

	Gunnedah Shire Council	Micromex Comparable Regional Benchmark
Average Importance	73%	80%
Average Satisfaction	71%	80%

Note: Micromex comparable benchmark only refers to like for like measures

Explaining the 4 quadrants (overleaf)

Attributes in the top right quadrant, **CELEBRATE**, such as 'emergency services', are Council's core strengths, and should be treated as such. Maintain, or even attempt to improve your position in these areas, as they are influential and address clear community needs.

Attributes in the top left quadrant, **IMPROVE**, such as 'rural sealed roads' are key concerns in the eyes of your residents. In the vast majority of cases you should aim to improve your performance in these areas to better meet the community's expectations.

Attributes in the bottom left quadrant, **NICHE**, such as 'Gunnedah airport', are of a relatively lower priority (and the word 'relatively' should be stressed – they are still important). These areas tend to be important to a particular segment of the community.

Finally, attributes in the bottom right quadrant, **SOCIAL CAPITAL**, such as 'libraries', are core strengths, but in relative terms they are considered less overtly important than other directly obvious areas. However, the occupants of this quadrant tend to be the sort of services and facilities that deliver to community liveability, i.e. make it a good place to live.

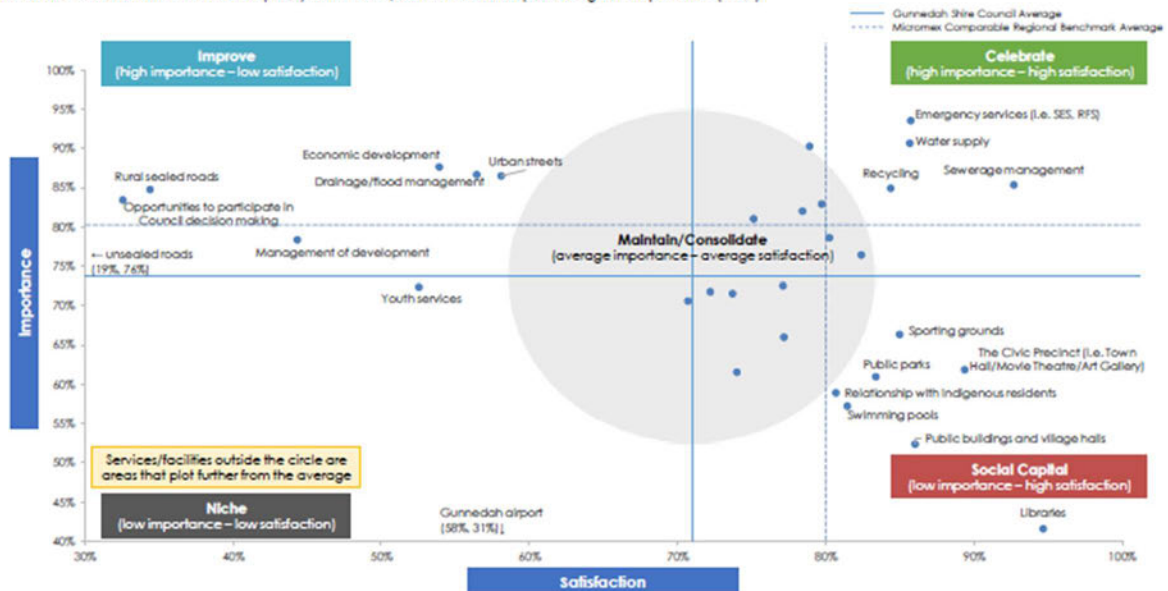
Recommendations based only on stated importance and satisfaction have major limitations, as the actual questionnaire process essentially 'slots' facilities and services as if they are independent variables, when they are in fact all part of the broader community perception of council performance.

22

22

Quadrant Analysis – Mapping Priority Against Delivery

The chart below shows the satisfaction (T38%) with service/facilities measures plotted against importance (T28%).

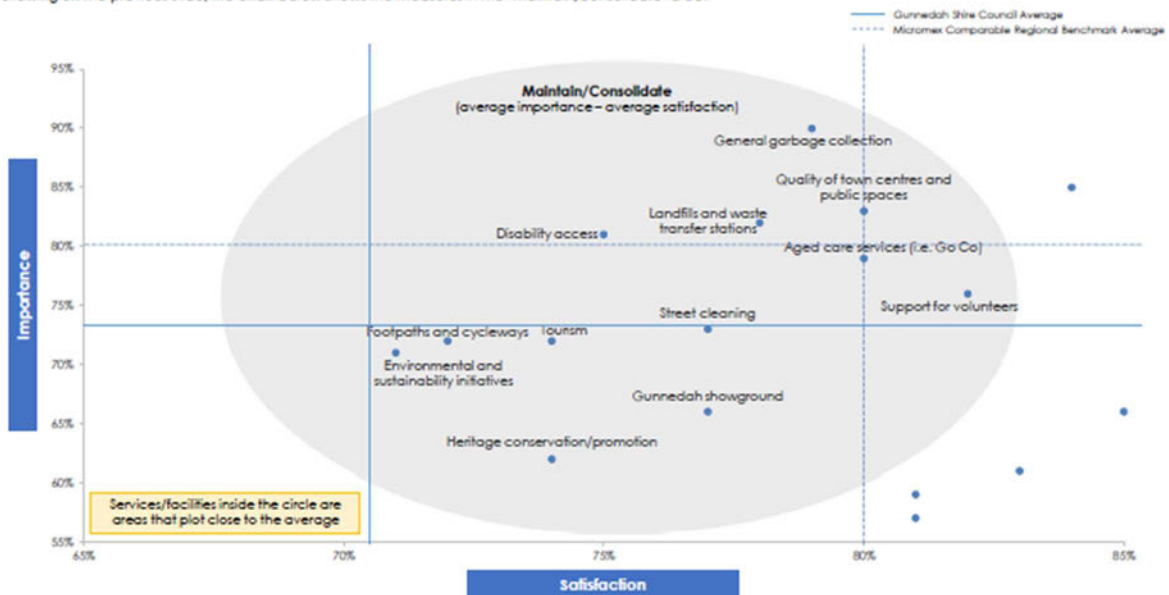


23

23

Quadrant Analysis – Mapping Priority Against Delivery

Following on the previous slide, the chart below shows the measures in the 'maintain/consolidate' area.



24

Regression Analysis

The outcomes identified in stated importance/satisfaction analysis often tend to be obvious and challenging. No matter how much focus a council dedicates to 'rural sealed roads', it will often be found in the IMPROVE quadrant. This is because, perceptually, the condition of local roads can always be better.

Furthermore, the outputs of stated importance and satisfaction analysis address the current dynamics of the community, they do not predict which focus areas are the most likely agents to change the community's perception of Council's overall performance. Therefore, in order to identify how Gunnedah Shire Council can actively drive overall community satisfaction, we conducted further analysis.

Explanation of Analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical tool for investigating relationships between dependent variables and explanatory variables. Using a regression, a category model was developed. The outcomes demonstrated that increasing resident satisfaction by actioning the priorities they stated as being important would not necessarily positively impact on overall satisfaction.

What Does This Mean?

The learning is that if we only rely on the stated community priorities, we will not be allocating the appropriate resources to the actual service attributes that will improve overall community satisfaction. Using regression analysis, we can identify the attributes that essentially build overall satisfaction. We call the outcomes 'derived importance'.

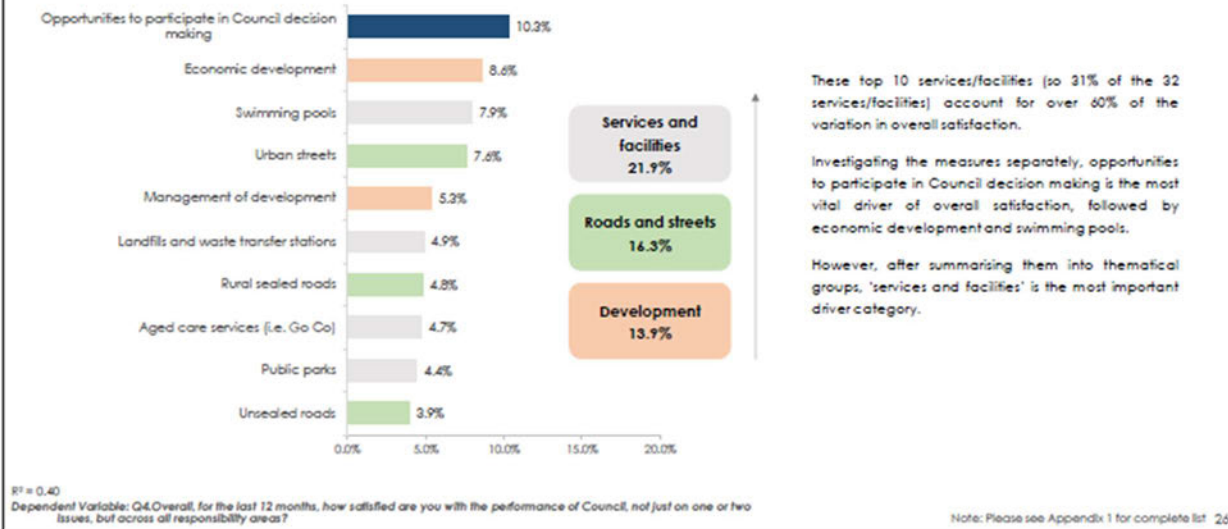
Identify top services/facilities that will drive overall satisfaction with Council

Map stated satisfaction and derived importance to identify community priority areas

25

Key Drivers of Overall Satisfaction with Council

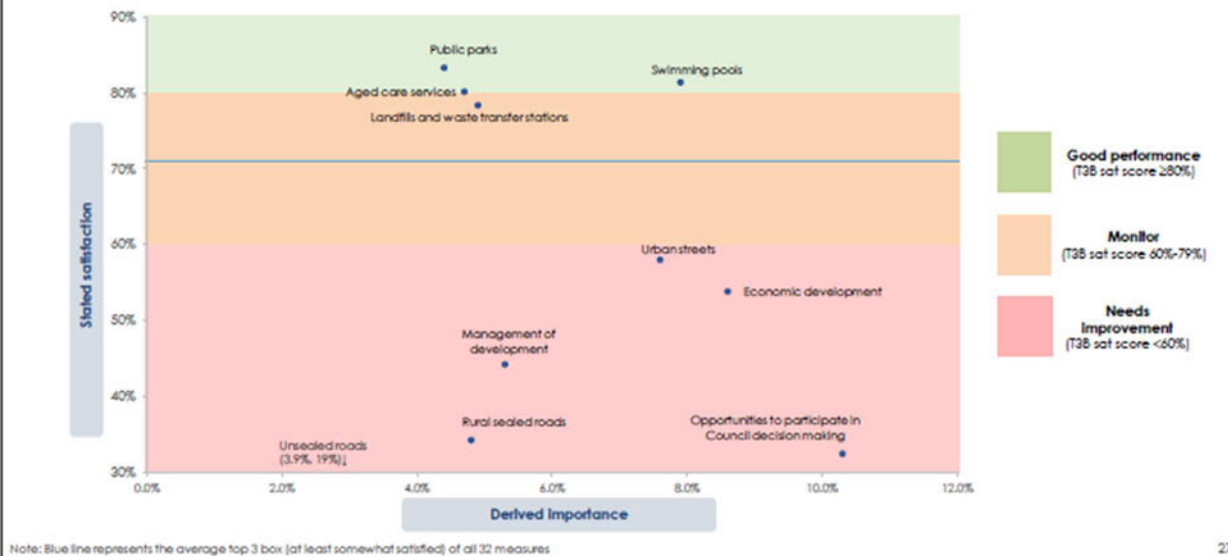
The score assigned to each area is not a measure of performance, rather, it indicates the percentage of influence each measure contributes to overall satisfaction with Council. All services/facilities are important – but if Council can increase satisfaction in these key driver areas, they will likely see an improvement in overall community satisfaction.



26

Mapping Stated Satisfaction and Derived Importance Identifies the Community Priority Areas

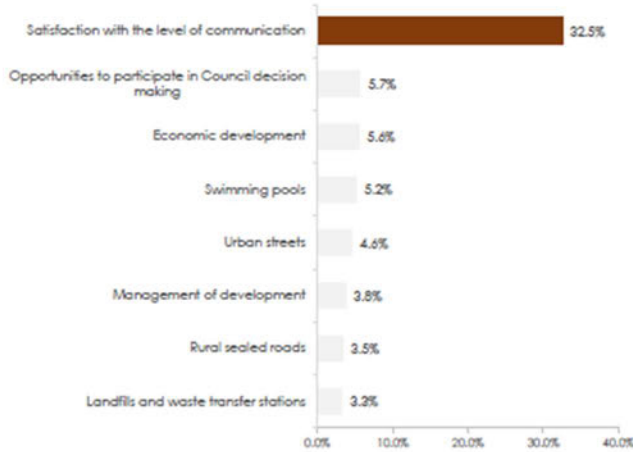
The below chart looks at the relationship between stated satisfaction (top 3 box) and derived importance (Regression result) to identify the level of contribution of each measure. Any services/facilities below the blue line could potentially be benchmarked to target in future research to elevate satisfaction levels in these areas.



27

Key Drivers of Overall Satisfaction with Council – Expanded Model

The below chart shows the outcomes of additional analysis conducted within an expanded regression model, including the measure (Q3): satisfaction with the level of communication



We can see from the chart to the left, satisfaction with the level of communication from Council accounts for almost a third of the variation in overall satisfaction.

This indicates that communication is a very important driver of overall satisfaction with Council's performance.

R² = 0.53

Dependent Variable: Q4.Overall, for the last 12 months, how satisfied are you with the performance of Council, not just on one or two issues, but across all responsibility areas?

28

28



Special Rate Variation

This section explores awareness of, and level of support and preference for a SRV.

Section Three

micromex
research



29

29



Summary: Special Rate Variation

- 74% of residents had prior awareness of the SRV, awareness was predominantly through social media
- 69% are at least somewhat supportive of Option 1: Rate Peg and 39% are at least somewhat supportive of Council proceeding with Option 2: SRV
- 64% prefer the Rate Peg, with key reasons for this preference centring on a call for better management by Council, a lack of trust and affordability. 36% prefer the SRV as they want to see improvements in the LGA, understand it needs to be undertaken but have reservations about the high price and management from Council
- 43% are at least somewhat supportive of paying above the proposed SRV to see service levels improve for local roads
- 41% are at least somewhat supportive of paying above the proposed SRV to see service levels improve for parks and gardens
- 31% are at least somewhat supportive to pay above the proposed SRV to see service levels improve for the Cultural Precinct

30



Context

At present, Council's revenue is regulated by the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). IPART limits the amount by which councils can increase rates from one year to the next. This is called the rate peg. Council's Long Term Financial Plan provides for a 5.0% rate peg increase for the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 financial years and 2.50% for the remaining years of the Plan. However, the rate peg will not provide enough revenue to maintain service levels.

Over recent years, Council has implemented a range of productivity savings and reduced costs across our operations, but there are no easy solutions to addressing an increasing funding gap. If Council does not address this gap now, our community assets (such as our roads, drainage, swimming pools and public buildings) will deteriorate. To address this situation, councils are able to apply for rate increases above rate peg. This is called a Special Rate Variation or SRV.

Gunnedah Shire Council is considering applying for a permanent SRV. There are two options which I would like you to consider.

Let's look at the options in more detail:

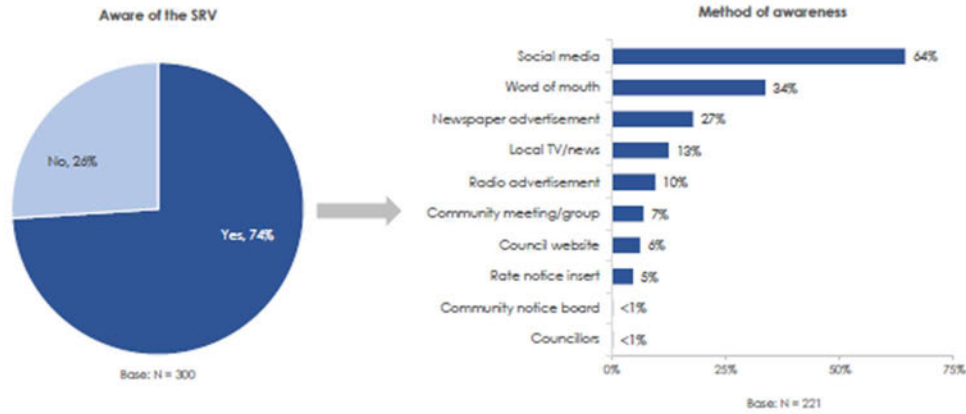
- **Option 1 – Rate Peg Only.** Council will need to defer necessary capital works, as well as revise their range and levels of services to avoid a deteriorating cash position – which is not sustainable in the long term
- **Option 2 – Maintain.** The proposed SRV is anticipated to generate additional revenue of \$6.2 million over a two-year period from 2025-2026 to 2026-2027 and will be used to fund existing services and maintenance of local infrastructure

Council acknowledges that any rate increase may adversely impact some community members. Council has a Hardship Policy and alternative payment options to assist ratepayers should they have difficulty keeping up with their rate payments.

31

Awareness of the SRV

74% were aware of the SRV prior to the call, with social media and word of mouth being the most common methods of being informed.



Q6a. Prior to this call, were you aware that Council was exploring community sentiment towards a Special Rate Variation?
Q6b. How were you informed of the Special Rate Variation?

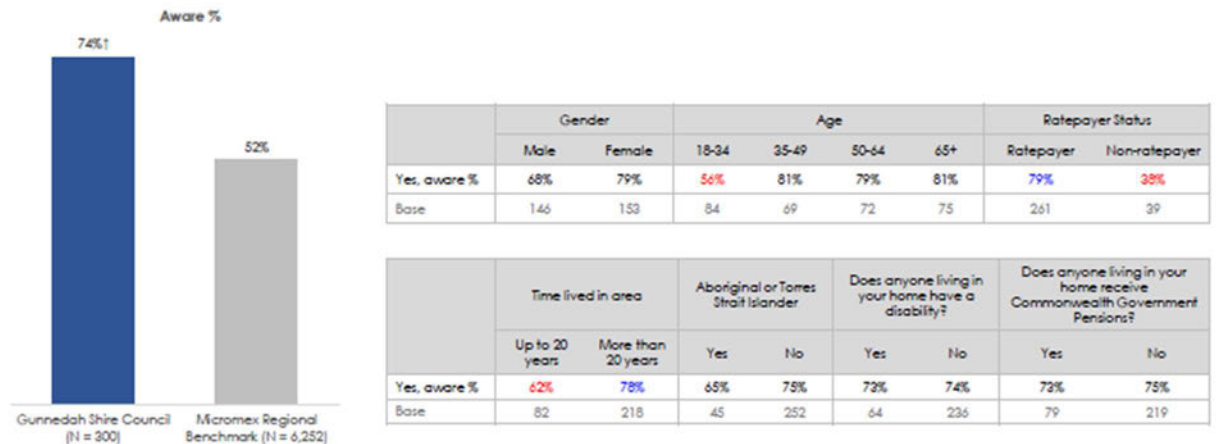
32

32

Awareness of the SRV

Awareness is significantly higher than the Micromex Regional normative data (74% compared to 52%), suggesting a highly engaged community.

Awareness was higher for older residents, ratepayers and long-term residents of the LGA.



†† = A significantly higher/lower awareness (compared to the Benchmark)

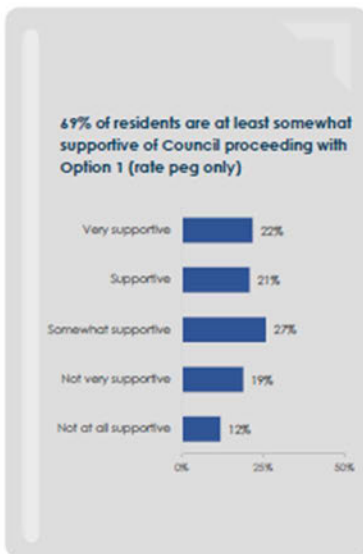
Q6a. Prior to this call, were you aware that Council was exploring community sentiment towards a Special Rate Variation?

A significantly higher/lower awareness (by group)

33

33

Option 1: Rate Peg Only



No special rate variation. This option would continue the status quo with rates only increasing by an estimated rate peg amount (assumed to be 5.0% this year).

Under this option over the next two financial years:

- 1. Residential** – The average residential rates, which are currently \$1,106 per annum, will increase by approximately \$54 in Year 1 and \$58 in Year 2 – meaning the average residential rate will be \$1,218 in 2026/2027.
- 2. Business** – The average Business rates, which are currently \$5,899 per annum, will increase by approximately \$286 in Year 1 and \$309 in Year 2 – meaning the average business rate will be \$6,494 in 2026/2027.
- 3. Farmland** – The average Farmland rates, which are currently \$5,337 per annum, will increase by approximately \$258 in Year 1 and \$280 in Year 2 – meaning the average farmland rate will be \$5,875 in 2026/2027.

Under this option the impact would be:

- Our sealed and gravel road networks would deteriorate.
- Council would not be able to maintain the range of facilities and services currently provided.
- Council would rely heavily on grant funding to renew existing assets.
- Community and recreational facilities such as pools and buildings will continue to deteriorate if grant funding is not successful, and potentially closed when the risk of operating becomes unacceptable.
- Council's backlog of roadworks would continue to increase and gravel roads would not be improved.

34

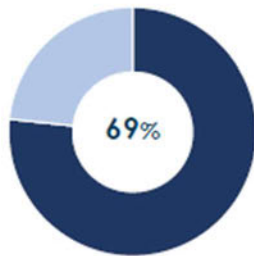
34

Option 1: Rate Peg Only

69% of residents are at least somewhat supportive of Council proceeding with Option 1 (rate peg only). Further analysis shows no significant differences by demographics. There was slightly higher preference amongst those not previously aware of the SRV and those aged 18-34.

	Overall	Aware of Special Rate Variation	
		Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	69%	67%	75%
Mean rating	3.21	3.22	3.16
Base	300	221	79

% at least somewhat supportive (T38)



	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 3 Box %	72%	66%	77%	69%	63%	66%	69%	67%
Mean rating	3.22	3.21	3.23	3.32	3.02	3.26	3.26	2.86
Base	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
	Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	74%	67%	69%	68%	75%	67%	64%	70%
Mean rating	3.28	3.18	3.13	3.22	3.40	3.15	3.09	3.25
Base	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

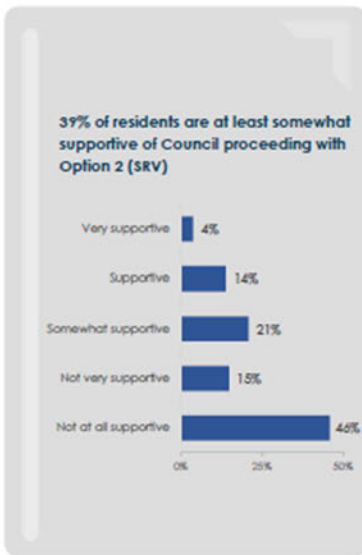
Q5a. How supportive are you of Council proceeding with Option 1?

Scale: 1 = not at all supportive, 5 = very supportive

35

35

Option 2: Special Rate Variation



Under Option 2, Council would apply for an SRV of 38.88% including each year's rate peg, phased in over two years to maintain infrastructure and service and commence addressing the infrastructure backlog of works (i.e., works that have not been done). At the end of the period the Special Rate Variation increase would be built into the rate base.

If implemented, the SRV will apply to your general rates only and will not apply to the waste management, water and sewerage charges on your rates notices. SRV funds would not be used on waste management, water and sewerage services, which are all funded through direct fees and charges.

Under this option over the next two financial years:

- 1. Residential** – The average residential rates, which are currently \$1,106 per annum, will increase by approximately \$264 in Year 1 and \$164 in Year 2 – meaning the average residential rate will be \$1,534 in 2026/2027.
- 2. Business** – The average Business rates, which are currently \$5,899 per annum, will increase by approximately \$1,405 in Year 1 and \$877 in Year 2 – meaning the average business rate will be \$8,181 in 2026/2027.
- 3. Farmland** – The average Farmland rates, which are currently \$5,337 per annum, will increase by approximately \$1,271 in Year 1 and \$793 in Year 2 – meaning the average farmland rate will be \$7,401 in 2026/2027.

The proposed SRV is anticipated to generate an additional revenue of \$6.2 million over a two-year period from 2025-2026 to 2026-2027 and will be used to fund maintenance of local infrastructure, including:

- Grading unsealed local roads to meet existing service levels;
- Additional maintenance of rural roads;
- Roadwork and renewal of urban streets;
- Increased funding to maintain existing services across Council operations
- Additional bitumen resealing and gravel re-sheeting to keep our roads at a good standard and prevent them from deteriorating;
- Culverts, causeways, drainage and footpath renewal; and
- Community assets renewal.

36

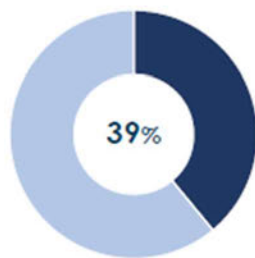
36

Option 2: Special Rate Variation

Lower support was recorded for Option 2, with 39% of residents at least somewhat supportive. Ratepayers and those with prior awareness of the SRV were significantly less supportive of this option.

	Overall	Aware of Special Rate Variation	
		Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	39%	32%	59%
Mean rating	2.16	1.95	2.73
Base	300	221	79

% at least somewhat supportive (T3B)



	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 3 Box %	38%	42%	47%	37%	37%	34%	34%	74%
Mean rating	2.14	2.18	2.24	2.12	2.11	2.14	2.01	3.16
Base	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
	Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 3 Box %	39%	39%	37%	40%	34%	40%	45%	36%
Mean rating	2.12	2.17	2.05	2.18	2.05	2.19	2.30	2.08
Base	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Q5b. How supportive are you of Council proceeding with Option 2?

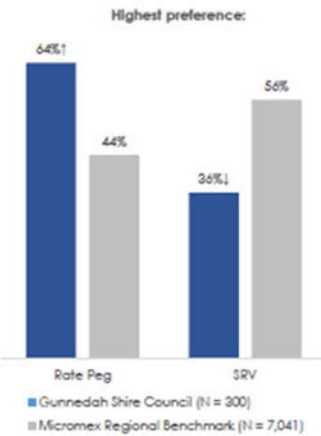
Scale: 1 = not at all supportive, 5 = very supportive
A significantly higher/lower level of support (by group)

37

37

Highest Preference: Rate Peg vs SRV

36% of residents are in preference of Council proceeding with the SRV and 64% in preference of the standard rate peg option. Those without prior awareness of the SRV, non-ratepayers and those with someone in their household receiving a Government pension are significantly more likely to prefer the SRV option.



	Overall	Aware of Special Rate Variation	
		Yes	No
Rate Peg	64%	70%	47%
SRV	36%	30%	52%
Base	300	221	79

	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Rate Peg	68%	61%	60%	69%	65%	64%	68%	41%
SRV	32%	39%	40%	31%	35%	36%	32%	59%
Base	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
	Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Rate Peg	68%	63%	62%	64%	70%	62%	54%	69%
SRV	32%	37%	38%	36%	30%	37%	46%	31%
Base	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Q5c. Which of the following 2 options do you most prefer?

A significantly higher/lower percentage (by group) 28

Reason for Preference

Main reasons for those in preference of Option 1 (Rate Peg) included a call for improved Council performance/financial management/communication, a lack of trust in Council and an inability to afford the SRV.

For those in preference of the SRV, key reasons centred on the need for improvements/maintenance within the area. Other comments also cited the need for the increase, but raised concerns regarding the increased costs associated and Council's performance/financial management/communication.

Option 1 – Rate Peg (64%)	N = 300
Need better Council performance/financial management/communication	41%
Don't trust Council/this is Council's fault	17%
Can't afford it/rates already too high	16%
Don't get quality services and facilities as it is/more needs to be done	15%
Cost of living/financial pressures	14%
The better option/need another option	7%
Airport was a waste of money	6%
Questioning the facts/numbers given in the survey	3%
Get money from elsewhere	2%
Other	4%
Option 2 – SRV (36%)	
To improve/maintain the town	24%
Can see it needs to be done but increase is too high/alternative payment options to assist	9%
Need better Council performance/financial management/communication	7%
All costs are going up	3%
Questioning the facts/numbers given in the survey	3%
Don't support either option/need another option	2%
Get money from elsewhere e.g. State Government, mining companies, etc.	1%
Not sure	1%
Other	2%

Q5c. Which of the following 2 options do you most prefer?
Q5d. What is your reason for choosing that option as your highest preference?

39

39

Reason for Preference: Example Verbatims (Top Codes)

Option 1: Rate Peg

Need better Council performance/financial management/communication (41%)	Don't trust Council/this is Council's fault (17%)	Can't afford it/rates already too high (16%)	Don't get quality services and facilities as it is/more needs to be done (15%)
"Communication has been missing, most people found out about this through Facebook"	"Promises haven't been kept in the past as it is so we can't trust it will done"	"Farmers cannot afford to pay more rates living off the land"	"Those that live in outlying areas that don't receive services, anyway, paying more rates for more of the same doesn't make sense"
"Be more transparent with what they are doing with the money"	"I don't believe Council will use the funds correctly, they wouldn't focus on what the community wants/needs"	"As a pensioner, I cannot afford to pay anymore higher rates"	"No infrastructure or gravel road repairs have been done in the last 5-6 years anyway"
"I don't see what Council is spending our rates on, they seem to do nothing even for our current rates"	"I do not believe that council is being genuine with the options that are given"	"The rate increase is substantially less in Option 1, most people would not be able to afford the larger increase"	"We are not getting the service we deserve"
"Council waste money e.g. spent millions on the pool but it still leaks"	"Council are corrupt"	"People can't afford rates already"	"Farmers only get the odd grading of rural roads"
"Council needs to budget and spend wisely"	"I believe there is a 3rd option that Council has not made public to community"	"People living on a fixed income are the most at risk of losing their homes"	"I have complained to Council for 5 years about disability access, and nothing has been done"
"Assets are already deteriorating but the council keeps spending money on things we don't need"	"SRV funds will all go to council management"	"Council have increased the rates already last year"	"Need to look after local residents"
"Council needs to stop contracting work out - buy the equipment and do it themselves, be independent"	"This increase will not stop further increases"	"A 35% rate increase is too much because people are struggling as it is"	"I don't feel we're getting the services we are paying for as it is"

Q5c. Which of the following 2 options do you most prefer?
Q5d. What is your reason for choosing that option as your highest preference?

40

40

Reason for Preference: Example Verbatims (Top Codes)

Option 2: SRV

To improve/maintain the town (24%)	Can see it needs to be done but increase is too high/alternative payment options to assist (9%)	Need better Council performance/financial management/communication (7%)
"Roads are shocking and footpaths are dangerous, so they need to be maintained, there is no other option"	"Rates do need to go up to above CPI, but 38% is too high"	"Transparency of where the money is being spent is required"
"Potential of better services is a better life for my kids"	"Rate increase too high for this option needs to be over 3 years and smaller %"	"Council should be more responsible to live within their means and use the money they already have more wisely"
"Paying extra will keep everything going, which we want and need"	"Between Option 1 and 2, I prefer Option 2, but would prefer a staged increase e.g. 10% or 15% for next 3 years"	"Expect rate rises provided the funds are spent on the community"
"Would like to see the town continue to improve"	"Supportive, but don't know why it needs to be such a big jump from 5% to 38.88%"	"Lots more chiefs and not enough workers in Council"
"Don't really have a choice. To keep everything maintained and upgraded it, has to be Option 2"	"Reluctantly support the SRV because it needs to be done, but is very frustrating that it hasn't been done sooner at a lower rate"	"All been done quickly, not thinking through and it's all happened so fast. It's a surprise"
"We live on a rural dirt road that is in disrepair and is dangerous"	"Will support Option 2 only if Council are actually going to stick to what they say they will do with the money"	"All of us are tightening our purse strings and Council needs to too"
"As someone who works in emergency services, most of our services should be maintained and improved at the very least"		"Inefficiency of Council has been a problem, especially when people are struggling financially"

Q5c. Which of the following 2 options do you most prefer?
Q5d. What is your reason for choosing that option as your highest preference?

41

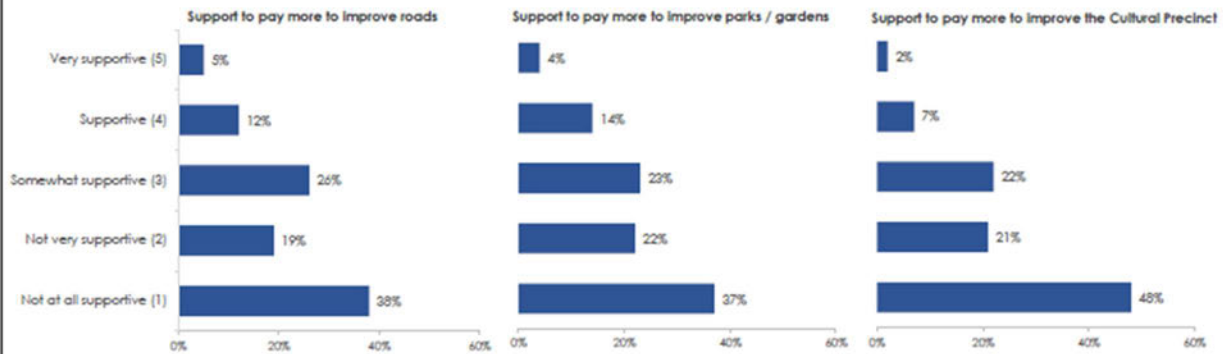
41

Support for Paying More for Higher Service Levels

Residents recorded very low levels of support to pay more, over and above the proposed SRV, to improve service levels for roads, parks and gardens and the Cultural Precinct. Lowest support was for the Cultural Precinct (9% supportive/very supportive) and near identical support for roads and parks / gardens.

Ratepayers were significantly less supportive of paying more for all three areas.

	Improve roads	Improve Parks / Gardens	Improve the Cultural Precinct
T28 %	17%	18%	9%
T38 %	43%	41%	31%
Mean rating	2.27	2.26	1.94



Q7a. How supportive would you be of paying more, over and above the proposed SRV, in rates and charges to improve service levels for our roads (e.g., improved drainage works, increased gravel re-sheeting, review ability to seal high priority unsealed roads).
Q7b. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to improve service levels for our parks and gardens (e.g., expanded irrigation, improve Parc pine lookout, move skate park to tier one park, water saving measures, increased cleaning of public toilets, more proactive tree management)?
Q7c. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to make improvements to the Cultural Precinct (e.g., new library, community meeting spaces, enhanced and uplifting performing arts venue and amenities).

Base: N = 300
Scale: 1 = not at all supportive, 5 = very supportive
T28% = Supportive/Very supportive, T38% = at least somewhat supportive

42

Support for Paying More for Higher Service Levels

Support to pay more to improve roads

Q7a.	overall	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
		Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 2 Box %	17%	21%	12%	21%	14%	13%	18%	15%	25%
Top 3 Box %	43%	47%	39%	47%	44%	40%	41%	39%	69%
Mean rating	2.27	2.44	2.11	2.35	2.21	2.25	2.25	2.19	2.79
Base	300	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

Support to pay more to improve the Cultural Precinct

Q7b.	overall	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
		Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 2 Box %	18%	17%	19%	27%	18%	13%	14%	13%	54%
Top 3 Box %	41%	44%	37%	50%	42%	35%	34%	37%	67%
Mean rating	2.26	2.39	2.13	2.48	2.25	2.15	2.12	2.11	3.27
Base	300	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

Support to pay more to improve parks / gardens

Q7c.	overall	Gender		Age				Ratepayer Status	
		Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Top 2 Box %	9%	10%	9%	10%	13%	10%	4%	9%	14%
Top 3 Box %	31%	30%	32%	32%	31%	30%	30%	27%	59%
Mean rating	1.94	2.00	1.89	1.98	2.03	1.92	1.85	1.85	2.58
Base	300	146	153	84	69	72	75	261	39

Q7a. How supportive would you be of paying more, over and above the proposed SRV, in rates and charges to improve service levels for our roads?

Q7b. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to improve service levels for our parks and gardens?

Q7c. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to make improvements to the Cultural Precinct?

Scale: 1 = not at all supportive, 5 = very supportive
T28% = Supportive/Very supportive, T38% = at least somewhat supportive
A significantly higher/lower level of support (by group) 43

43

Support for Paying More for Higher Service Levels

Support to pay more to improve roads

Q7a.	Overall	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
		Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 2 Box %	17%	15%	17%	15%	17%	15%	17%	21%	15%
Top 3 Box %	43%	44%	43%	32%	45%	35%	46%	42%	43%
Mean rating	2.27	2.32	2.25	2.10	2.30	2.15	2.31	2.36	2.23
Base	300	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Support to pay more to improve the Cultural Precinct

Q7b.	Overall	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
		Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 2 Box %	18%	15%	19%	16%	18%	11%	20%	17%	19%
Top 3 Box %	41%	40%	41%	39%	41%	32%	43%	41%	40%
Mean rating	2.26	2.21	2.28	2.25	2.26	2.02	2.33	2.33	2.23
Base	300	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Support to pay more to improve parks / gardens

Q7c.	Overall	Time lived in area		Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander		Does anyone living in your home have a disability?		Does anyone living in your home receive Commonwealth Government Pensions?	
		Up to 20 years	More than 20 years	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Top 2 Box %	9%	8%	10%	12%	9%	12%	8%	11%	9%
Top 3 Box %	31%	29%	32%	34%	31%	28%	32%	36%	29%
Mean rating	1.94	1.99	1.93	1.99	1.94	1.88	1.96	2.03	1.90
Base	300	82	218	45	252	64	236	79	219

Q7a. How supportive would you be of paying more, over and above the proposed SRV, in rates and charges to improve service levels for our roads?

Q7b. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to improve service levels for our parks and gardens?

Q7c. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to make improvements to the Cultural Precinct?

Scale: 1 = not at all supportive, 5 = very supportive
T28% = Supportive/Very supportive, T38% = at least somewhat supportive 44

44



Additional Analyses

Appendix 1

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45

45

Key Priorities

Key Priorities	N = 300	Key Priorities	N = 300
Road maintenance/upgrade	47%	Airport	3%
Parks/playgrounds/sporting facilities	17%	Building the community/support	3%
Council communication/transparency/consultation	15%	Disability services	3%
Reduce rates/better value for rates	15%	Housing availability and affordability	3%
Employment opportunities/attracting business	14%	More/upgrading infrastructure e.g. lighting, footpaths, etc.	3%
Council's management/accountability	12%	Tourism	3%
Crime and safety	12%	Education	2%
Sewerage/flood/water management	12%	Environment/sustainability	2%
Youth services	12%	More events/activities	2%
Waste management	10%	Public transport	2%
Better financial management	9%	Town planning/development	1%
Maintaining the local area	9%	Keeping heritage	1%
More/better/accessibility to services/facilities	9%	Cost of living	1%
Health services	7%	Extractive industries	<1%
Improve the DA process	6%	Other	2%
Aged care services	3%	No response	4%

Q2. What do you think are the key priorities for Council in the local area?

45

46

Importance Compared to the Micromex Regional Benchmark

Service/Facility	Gunnedah Shire Council T2 box importance score	Micromex LGA Benchmark – Regional T2 box importance score	Variance
Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	83%▲	73%	10%
Economic development	88%	79%	9%
Drainage/flood management	87%	82%	5%
Sewerage management	85%	81%	4%
Water supply	91%	88%	3%
Emergency services (i.e. SES, RFS)	94%	91%	3%
Landfills and waste transfer stations	82%	80%	2%
Disability access	81%	82%	-1%
General garbage collection	90%	91%	-1%
Unsealed roads	76%	77%	-1%
Management of development	78%	80%	-2%
Support for volunteers	76%	79%	-3%
Tourism	72%	75%	-3%
Youth services	72%	75%	-3%

Note: Benchmark differences are based on assumed variants of +/- 10%, with variants beyond +/- 10% more likely to be significant
▲ / ▼ = positive/negative difference equal to/greater than 10% from Benchmark.

Note: T2 = Important/very important 47

47

Importance Compared to the Micromex Regional Benchmark

Service/Facility	Gunnedah Shire Council T2 box importance score	Micromex LGA Benchmark – Regional T2 box importance score	Variance
Aged care services (i.e. Go Co)	79%	83%	-4%
Recycling	85%	89%	-4%
Footpaths and cycleways	72%	76%	-4%
Street cleaning	73%	77%	-4%
Quality of town centres and public spaces	83%	89%	-6%
Rural sealed roads	85%	93%	-8%
Environmental and sustainability initiatives	71%	80%	-9%
Heritage conservation/promotion	62%▼	72%	-10%
Relationship with Indigenous residents	59%▼	70%	-11%
Sporting grounds	66%▼	77%	-11%
Swimming pools	57%▼	71%	-14%
Public buildings and village halls	52%▼	68%	-16%
Public parks	61%▼	83%	-22%
Libraries	42%▼	70%	-28%
Gunnedah airport	31%▼	77%	-46%

Note: Benchmark differences are based on assumed variants of +/- 10%, with variants beyond +/- 10% more likely to be significant
▲ / ▼ = positive/negative difference equal to/greater than 10% from Benchmark.

Note: T2 = Important/very important 48

48

Satisfaction Compared to the Micromex Regional Benchmark

Service/Facility	Gunnedah Shire Council T3 box satisfaction score	Micromex LGA Benchmark – Regional T3 box satisfaction score	Variance
Sewerage management	93%	90%	3%
Relationship with Indigenous residents	81%	80%	1%
Water supply	86%	85%	1%
Libraries	95%	94%	1%
Emergency services (i.e. SES, RFS)	86%	86%	0%
Landfills and waste transfer stations	78%	80%	-2%
Public buildings and village halls	86%	88%	-2%
Recycling	84%	86%	-2%
Public parks	83%	86%	-3%
Swimming pools	81%	85%	-4%
Support for volunteers	82%	86%	-4%
Aged care services (i.e. Go Co)	80%	85%	-5%
Disability access	75%	79%	-4%
Sporting grounds	85%	89%	-4%
Quality of town centres and public spaces	80%	85%	-5%

Note: Benchmark differences are based on assumed variants of +/- 10%, with variants beyond +/- 10% more likely to be significant
 ▲ / ▼ = positive/negative difference equal to/greater than 10% from Benchmark.

Note: T3 = at least somewhat satisfied 49

49

Satisfaction Compared to the Micromex Regional Benchmark

Service/Facility	Gunnedah Shire Council T3 box satisfaction score	Micromex LGA Benchmark – Regional T3 box satisfaction score	Variance
Footpaths and cycleways	72%	77%	-5%
Street cleaning	77%	86%	-9%
General garbage collection	79%	88%	-9%
Environmental and sustainability initiatives	71%▼	81%	-10%
Tourism	74%▼	84%	-10%
Heritage conservation/promotion	74%▼	85%	-11%
Drainage/flood management	56%▼	76%	-20%
Youth services	53%▼	73%	-20%
Economic development	54%▼	75%	-21%
Management of development	44%▼	66%	-22%
Rural sealed roads	34%▼	56%	-22%
Gunnedah airport	58%▼	86%	-28%
Unsealed roads	19%▼	50%	-31%
Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	33%▼	65%	-32%

Note: Benchmark differences are based on assumed variants of +/- 10%, with variants beyond +/- 10% more likely to be significant
 ▲ / ▼ = positive/negative difference equal to/greater than 10% from Benchmark.

Note: T3 = at least somewhat satisfied 50

50

Performance Gap Analysis

When analysing performance gap data, it is important to consider both stated satisfaction and the absolute size of the performance gap.

Performance Gap Ranking

Service/facility		Importance T2 Box	Satisfaction T3 Box	Performance Gap (Importance - Satisfaction)
Infrastructure	Unsealed roads	76%	19%	57%
Infrastructure	Rural sealed roads	85%	34%	51%
Corporate services and management	Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	83%	32%	50%
Corporate services and management	Management of development	78%	44%	34%
Corporate services and management	Economic development	88%	54%	34%
Infrastructure	Drainage/flood management	87%	56%	31%
Infrastructure	Urban streets	87%	58%	29%
Human services	Youth services	72%	53%	19%
Infrastructure	General garbage collection	90%	79%	11%
Human services	Emergency services (i.e. SES, RFS)	94%	86%	8%
Human services	Disability access	81%	75%	6%
Infrastructure	Water supply	91%	86%	5%
Infrastructure	Landfills and waste transfer stations	82%	78%	4%
Community facilities	Quality of town centres and public spaces	83%	80%	3%
Infrastructure	Recycling	85%	84%	1%
Corporate services and management	Environmental and sustainability initiatives	71%	71%	0%

Note: T2 = Important/very important
T3 = at least somewhat satisfied

51

51

Performance Gap Analysis

Performance Gap Ranking continue

Service/facility		Importance T2 Box	Satisfaction T3 Box	Performance Gap (Importance - Satisfaction)
Infrastructure	Footpaths and cycleways	72%	72%	0%
Human services	Aged care services (i.e. Go Co)	79%	80%	-1%
Corporate services and management	Tourism, importance	72%	74%	-2%
Infrastructure	Street cleaning	73%	77%	-4%
Human services	Support for volunteers	76%	82%	-6%
Infrastructure	Sewerage management	85%	93%	-8%
Community facilities	Gunnedah showground	66%	77%	-11%
Corporate services and management	Heritage conservation/promotion	62%	74%	-12%
Community facilities	Sporting grounds	66%	85%	-19%
Human services	Relationship with Indigenous residents	59%	81%	-22%
Community facilities	Public parks	61%	83%	-22%
Community facilities	Swimming pools	57%	81%	-24%
Community facilities	The Civic Precinct (i.e. Town Hall/Movie Theatre/Art Gallery)	62%	89%	-27%
Infrastructure	Gunnedah airport	31%	58%	-27%
Community facilities	Public buildings and village halls	52%	86%	-34%
Community facilities	Libraries	42%	95%	-53%

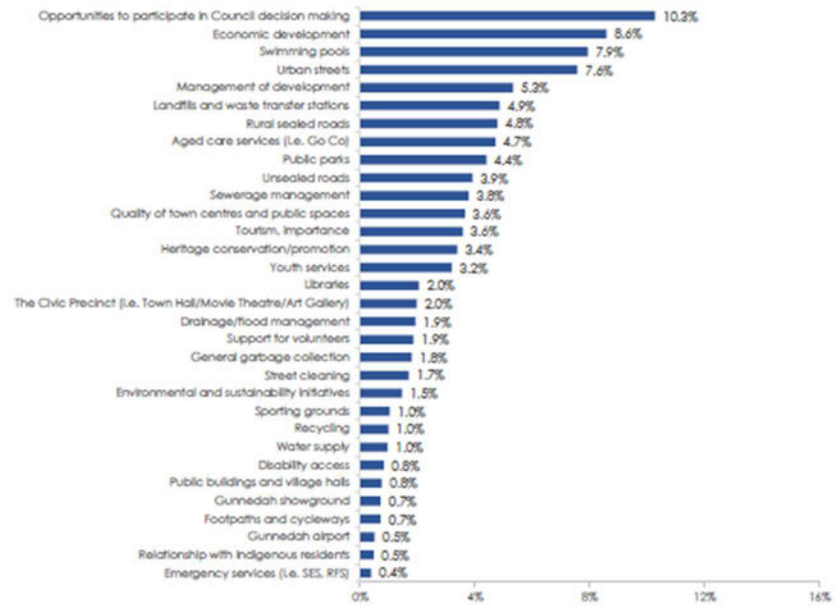
Note: T2 = Important/very important
T3 = at least somewhat satisfied

52

52

Regression Analysis – Influence on Overall Satisfaction

The chart to the right summarises the influence of the 32 facilities/ services on overall satisfaction with Council's performance, based on the Regression analysis.



53


Council's Used to Create the Micromex Regional Benchmark

The Regional Benchmark was composed from the Council areas listed below:

Albury City Council	Hawkesbury City Council	Narrandera Shire Council
Ballina Shire Council	Kempsey Shire Council	Parkes Shire Council
Bathurst Regional Council	Lachlan Shire Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
Bland Shire Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Richmond Valley Council
Blue Mountains City Council	Leeton Shire Council	Singleton Shire Council
Byron Shire Council	Lismore City Council	Tamworth Regional Council
Cabonne Shire Council	Lithgow City Council	Tenterfield Shire Council
Central Coast Council	Liverpool Plains Shire Council	Tweed Shire Council
Cessnock City Council	Maitland City Council	Upper Hunter Shire Council
City of Newcastle	MidCoast Council	Wagga Wagga City Council
Coffs Harbour City Council	Mid-Western Regional Council	Walgett Shire Council
Devonport City Council	Moree Plains Shire Council	Weddin Shire Council
Dungog Shire Council	Murray River Council	Wingecambee Shire Council
Eurobodalla Shire Council	Murumbidgee Council	Wollondilly Shire Council
Forbes Shire Council	Muswellbrook Shire Council	Yass Valley Council
Glen Innes Severn Shire Council	Narrabri Shire Council	

54

54




[Redacted]

Appendix 2

Questionnaire

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

55

Gunnedah Shire Council
Community Survey
July 2024

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is _____ from Micromas Research and we are conducting a survey on behalf of Gunnedah Shire Council. The survey will take about 15 minutes.

It is a random sample survey and accordingly I would like to speak to the person who has the next birthday in your household and is over the age of 18 years, would you be able to assist us please?

Thank you for agreeing to assist us with this survey.

QA. Before we start, I would like to check whether you work for Gunnedah Shire Council? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Yes	Terminate
2	No	

QB. Please stop me when I read out your age bracket. Prompt (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	18-34	
2	35-49	
3	50-64	
4	65+	

QC. In which area of the shire do you live? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Gunnedah	
2	Curtewig	
3	Corral	
4	Tombor Springs	
5	Breeza	
6	Emerald Hill	
7	Kelvin	
8	Mulberry	
9	Other rural areas	

QDa. Does your household pay Council rates to Gunnedah Shire Council, if so, which type(s) do you pay? Prompt (MR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Residential (1)	
2	Business (2)	
3	Farmland (3)	
4	None of these	Default to residential script <exclusive/>

QDb. Which type of rates do you pay the most for? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Residential (1)	Show if selected in QDa
2	Business (2)	Show if selected in QDa
3	Farmland (3)	Show if selected in QDa

Part A

Q1. In the first part could you please indicate which best describes your opinion of the importance of the following services/facilities to you, and in the second part, the level of satisfaction with the performance of that service. The scale is from 1 to 5 where 1 is low importance and low satisfaction, and 5 is high importance and high satisfaction. Prompt ONLY ASK SAT IF IMP 4 OR 5 SCALE

Community facilities

Position	Answers	Importance					Satisfaction							
		Low	1	2	3	4	5	Low	1	2	3	4	5	NA
1	Public parks													
2	Swimming pools													
3	Sporting grounds													
4	Libraries													
5	Public buildings and village halls													
6	The Civic Precinct (i.e. Town Hall/Movie Theatre/Art Gallery)													
7	Gunnedah showground													
8	Quality of town centres and public spaces													

Infrastructure

Position	Answers	Importance					Satisfaction							
		Low	1	2	3	4	5	Low	1	2	3	4	5	NA
1	Unsealed roads													
2	Rural sealed roads													
3	Urban streets													
4	Footpaths and cycleways													
5	Street cleaning													
6	Gunnedah airport													
7	Drainage/flood management													
8	Water supply													
9	Sewerage management													
10	General garbage collection													
11	Livestock and waste transfer stations													
12	Recycling													

Human services

Position	Answers	Importance					Satisfaction							
		Low	1	2	3	4	5	Low	1	2	3	4	5	NA
1	Youth services													
2	Ageed care services (i.e. Go C&C)													
3	Relationship with Indigenous residents													
4	Support for volunteers													
5	Disability access													
6	Emergency services (i.e. SES, RFS)													

Corporate services and management

Position	Answers	Importance					Satisfaction							
		Low	1	2	3	4	5	Low	1	2	3	4	5	NA
1	Opportunities to participate in Council decision making													
2	Management of development													
3	Tourism													
4	Economic development													
5	Environmental and sustainability initiatives													
6	Heritage conservation/promotion													

Definitions to be read out for Part A - 'Corporate services and management'

- Economic development is attracting and assisting new businesses and creating jobs
- Management of development is pacing building construction and what types of development can be located in which areas.

Q2. What do you think are the key priorities for Council in the local area? (TEXT)

Position	Answers	Notes
1		5 Lines

Part B

Q3. How satisfied are you currently with the level of communication Council has with the community? Prompt (SR)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very satisfied	
4	Satisfied	
3	Somewhat satisfied	
2	Not very satisfied	
1	Not at all satisfied	

Q4. Overall, for the last 12 months, how satisfied are you with the performance of Council, not just on one or two issues, but across all responsibility areas? Prompt (SR)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very satisfied	
4	Satisfied	
3	Somewhat satisfied	
2	Not very satisfied	
1	Not at all satisfied	

As we have just discussed Gunnedah Shire Council delivers a broad range of services and has the responsibility to maintain the facilities and infrastructure across the shire.

At present, Council's revenue is regulated by the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). IPART sets the amount by which councils can increase rates from one year to the next. This is called the rate peg. Council's Long Term Financial Plan provides for a 1.0% rate peg increase for the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 financial years and 2.50% for the remaining years of the Plan. However, the rate peg will not provide enough revenue to maintain service levels.

Over recent years, Council has implemented a range of productivity savings and reduced cash across our operations, but there are no easy solutions to addressing an increasing funding gap. If Council does not address this gap now, our community assets (such as our roads, drainage, swimming pools and public buildings) will deteriorate. To address this situation, councils are able to apply for rate increases above rate peg. This is called a Special Rate Variation or SRV.

Gunnedah Shire Council is considering applying for a permanent SRV, there are two options which I would like you to consider.

Let's look at the options in more detail:

- Option 1 - Rate Peg Only:** Council will need to defer necessary capital works, as well as review their range and levels of services to avoid a deteriorating cash position - which is not sustainable in the long term.
- Option 2 - Maintain:** The proposed SRV is anticipated to generate additional revenue of \$1.2 million over a two-year period from 2025-2026 to 2026-2027 and will be used to fund existing services and maintenance of local infrastructure.

Council acknowledges that any rate increase may adversely impact some community members. Council has a Hardship Policy and alternative payment options to assist ratepayers should they have difficulty keeping up with their rate payments.

Programmer note: Kolate Order

Option 1: Rate peg only

No special rate variation, this option would continue the status quo with rates only increasing by an estimated rate peg amount (assumed to be 5.9% this year).

Under this option over the next two financial years: (READ OUT/SHOW APPROPRIATE SCRIPT BASED ON ANSWERS AT Q1, but only 1)

1. Residential – The average residential rates, which are currently \$1,106 per annum, will increase by approximately \$54 in Year 1 and \$58 in Year 2 – meaning the average residential rate will be \$1,218 in 2024/2027.
2. Business – The average Business rates, which are currently \$5,899 per annum, will increase by approximately \$284 in Year 1 and \$309 in Year 2 – meaning the average business rate will be \$6,414 in 2024/2027.
3. Farmland – The average Farmland rates, which are currently \$5,337 per annum, will increase by approximately \$258 in Year 1 and \$280 in Year 2 – meaning the average farmland rate will be \$5,875 in 2024/2027.

Under this option the impact would be:

- Our sealed and gravel road networks would deteriorate.
- Council would not be able to maintain the range of facilities and services currently provided.
- Council would rely heavily on grant funding to service existing assets.
- Community and recreational facilities such as pools and buildings will continue to deteriorate if grant funding is not successful, and potentially closed when the risk of operating becomes unacceptable.
- Council's backlog of roadworks would continue to increase and gravel roads would not be improved.

Q1a. How supportive are you of Council proceeding with Option 1? Prompt (18)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very supportive	
4	Supportive	
3	Somewhat supportive	
2	Not very supportive	
1	Not at all supportive	

Option 2: Special Rate Variation

Under Option 2, Council would apply for an SRV of 38.88% including each year's rate peg, phased in over two years to maintain infrastructure and service and commence addressing the infrastructure backlog of works (i.e., works that have not been done). At the end of the period the Special Rate Variation increase would be built into the rate base.

If implemented, the SRV will apply to your general rates only and will not apply to the waste management, water and sewerage charges on your rates notices. SRV funds would not be used on waste management, water and sewerage services, which are all funded through direct fees and charges.

Under this option over the next two financial years: (READ OUT/SHOW APPROPRIATE SCRIPT BASED ON ANSWERS AT Q2, but only 1)

1. Residential – The average residential rates, which are currently \$1,106 per annum, will increase by approximately \$284 in Year 1 and \$164 in Year 2 – meaning the average residential rate will be \$1,534 in 2024/2027.
2. Business – The average Business rates, which are currently \$5,819 per annum, will increase by approximately \$1,405 in Year 1 and \$877 in Year 2 – meaning the average business rate will be \$8,181 in 2024/2027.
3. Farmland – The average Farmland rates, which are currently \$5,337 per annum, will increase by approximately \$1,271 in Year 1 and \$793 in Year 2 – meaning the average farmland rate will be \$7,401 in 2024/2027.

The proposed SRV is anticipated to generate an additional revenue of \$6.2 million over a four-year period from 2024/2024 to 2024/2027 and will be used to fund maintenance of local infrastructure, including:

- Grading unsealed local roads to meet existing service levels;
- Additional maintenance of rural roads;
- Roadwork and renewal of urban streets;
- Increased funding to maintain existing services across Council operations
- Additional libraries, resealing and gravel re-sheeting to keep our roads at a good standard and prevent them from deteriorating;
- Culverts, causeways, drainage and footpath renewal; and
- Community assets renewal.

Q2a. How supportive are you of Council proceeding with Option 2? Prompt (18)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very supportive	
4	Supportive	
3	Somewhat supportive	
2	Not very supportive	
1	Not at all supportive	

58

Q3c. Which of the following 2 options do you most prefer? Programming note: totate Order

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Option 1 – Rate Peg Only (No SRV, noting this will lead to a further deterioration of our assets and reduction in services)	
2	Option 2 – Special Rate Variation (SRV to maintain our current targeted service levels)	

Q3a. What is your reason for choosing that option as your highest preference? (TEXT)

Position	Answers	Notes
1		5 Lines

Q3b. Prior to this call, were you aware that Council was exploring community sentiment towards a Special Rate Variation? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Yes	
2	No	Go to D1
3	Not sure	Go to D1

Q3b. How were you informed of the Special Rate Variation? Please answer yes or no as I read each one. Prompt (18)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Rate notice insert	
2	Council website	
3	Newspaper advertisement	
4	Radio advertisement	
5	Social media	
6	Other (Please specify)	Go to Q3b1

Q3b1. Other (Please specify). (TEXT)

Position	Answers	Notes
1		1 line

Having discussed the impact of the special rate variation, we are now interested in your thoughts regarding higher service levels than would be possible within the SRV.

Q7a. How supportive would you be of paying more, over and above the proposed SRV, in rates and charges to improve service levels for our roads (e.g., improved drainage works, increased gravel re-sheeting, review ability to seal high priority unsealed roads)? (SR)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very supportive	
4	Supportive	
3	Somewhat supportive	
2	Not very supportive	
1	Not at all supportive	

Q7b. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to improve service levels for our parks and gardens (e.g., expanded irrigation, improve Foculpine lookout, move skate park to first on park, water saving measures, increased cleaning of public toilets, more proactive tree management)? (SR)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very supportive	
4	Supportive	
3	Somewhat supportive	
2	Not very supportive	
1	Not at all supportive	

Q7c. How supportive would you be of paying more in rates and charges to make improvements to the Cultural Precinct (e.g., new library, community meeting spaces, enhanced and splitting performing arts venue and amenities)? (SR)

Value	Answers	Notes
5	Very supportive	
4	Supportive	
3	Somewhat supportive	
2	Not very supportive	
1	Not at all supportive	

Demographics

D1. Which of the following best describes the house you are currently living? Prompt (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	I/We own/are currently buying this property	
2	I/We currently rent this property	

D2. How long have you lived in Gunnedah Shire? (SR) Prompt

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Less than 12 months	
2	1-3 years	
3	4-10 years	
4	11-20 years	
5	More than 20 years	

D3. What is your gender? DO NOT PROMPT! (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Male	
2	Female	
3	Non-binary	

59

D4. Do you identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Yes	
2	No	
3	Prefer not to say	

D5. Does anyone living in your home have a disability? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Yes	
2	No	
3	Prefer not to say	

D6. Does anyone living in your home receive a Commonwealth Government Pensions? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Yes	
2	No	
3	Prefer not to say	

As a participant in this research, you may be invited to participate in further community consultation, such as focus groups, about specific issues.

At this stage we are developing a register of interest for future consultations.

R1. Would you be interested in registering your interest? (SR)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	Yes	
2	No	Go to end

R2. May I please confirm your contact details? (TEXT)

Position	Answers	Notes
1	First name	1 line
2	Surname	1 line
3	Email address	1 line
4	Phone number	1 line

Thank you for your time and assistance. This market research is carried out in compliance with the Privacy Act, and the information you provided will be used only for research purposes. The research has been conducted by Micromex Research on behalf of Gunnedah Shire Council.

If you have any further questions regarding this special rate valuation, please contact Customer Service on 4740 2100 or visit the Gunnedah Shire Council website.

Thank you very much for your time. Enjoy the rest of your evening.

The information contained herein is believed to be reliable and accurate, however, no guarantee is given as to its accuracy and reliability, and no responsibility or liability for any information, opinions or commentary contained herein, or for any consequences of its use, will be accepted by Micromex Research, or by any person involved in the preparation of this report.

60

Appendix D – Online Survey

Online Survey

Total Respondents: 137

Sample Profile

Gender		#	%
Male	Male	48	35%
Female	Female	88	64%
Non-binary	Other	1	1%
Total		137	100%

Ratepayer Status		#	%
Ratepayer	I/We own/are currently buying this property	135	99%
Non-ratepayer	I/We currently rent this property	2	1%
Total		137	100%

Time Lived in Area		#	%
< 12 Months	Less than 12 months	1	1%
1-5 Years	1-5 years	10	7%
6-10 Years	6-10 years	15	11%
11-20 Years	11-20 years	28	20%
>20 Years	More than 20 years	83	61%
Total		137	100%

Age		#	%
18-34	18-34	26	19%
35-49	35-49	50	36%
50-64	50-64	43	31%
65+	65+	18	13%
Total		137	100%

Disability in Home?		#	%
Yes	Yes	11	8%
No	No	116	85%
Prefer not to say	Prefer not to say	10	7%
Total		137	100%

Commonwealth Gov't Pension?		#	%
Yes	Yes	8	6%
No	No	123	90%
Prefer not to say	Prefer not to say	6	4%
Total		137	100%

Type of Rates Paid (Most)		#	%
Residential	Residential	90	66%
Farmland	Farmland	40	29%
Business	Business	7	5%
Total		137	100%

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?		#	%
Yes	Yes	9	7%
No	No	113	82%
Prefer not to say	Prefer not to say	15	11%
Total		137	100%

Location		#	%
Gunnedah	Gunnedah	99	72%
Curlewis	Curlewis	6	4%
Tambar Springs	Tambar Springs	3	2%
Breeza	Breeza	2	1%
Kelvin	Kelvin	4	3%
Carroll	Carroll	5	4%
Emerald Hill	Emerald Hill	8	6%
Mullaley	Mullaley	2	1%
Other	Other rural areas	8	6%
Total		137	100%

Snapshot Summary

Overall Satisfaction with Council		#	%
Not at all satisfied	1 - Not at all satisfied	31	23%
Not very satisfied	2 - Not very satisfied	63	46%
Somewhat satisfied	3 - Somewhat satisfied	34	25%
Satisfied	4 - Satisfied	9	7%
Very Satisfied	5 - Very satisfied	0	0%
Total		137	100%

At least somewhat satisfied **43** **31%**

Satisfaction with Council's Communication		#	%
Not at all satisfied	1 - Not at all satisfied	35	26%
Not very satisfied	2 - Not very satisfied	52	38%
Somewhat satisfied	3 - Somewhat satisfied	34	25%
Satisfied	4 - Satisfied	12	9%
Very Satisfied	5 - Very satisfied	4	3%
Total		137	100%

At least somewhat satisfied **50** **36%**

Special Rate Variation

Awareness of SRV?		#	%
Yes	Yes	104	76%
No	No	29	21%
Not sure	Not sure	4	3%
Total		137	100%

Preferred Option		#	%
Option 1 – Rate Peg Only	Option 1 – Rate Peg Only (No	112	82%
Option 2 – SRV	Option 2 – Special Rate Varia	25	18%
Total		137	100%

Option 1 - Rate Peg Only		#	%
Not at all supportive	1 - Not at all supportive	15	11%
Not very supportive	2 - Not very supportive	17	12%
Somewhat supportive	3 - Somewhat supportive	33	24%
Supportive	4 - Supportive	18	13%
Very supportive	5 - Very supportive	54	39%
Total		137	100%

At least somewhat supportive 105 77%

Option 2 - Special Rate Variation		#	%
Not at all supportive	1 - Not at all supportive	86	63%
Not very supportive	2 - Not very supportive	32	23%
Somewhat supportive	3 - Somewhat supportive	12	9%
Supportive	4 - Supportive	3	2%
Very supportive	5 - Very supportive	4	3%
Total		137	100%

At least somewhat supportive 19 14%

Pay More for Roads		#	%
Not at all supportive	1 - Not at all supportive	62	45%
Not very supportive	2 - Not very supportive	21	15%
Somewhat supportive	3 - Somewhat supportive	14	10%
Supportive	4 - Supportive	5	4%
Very supportive	5 - Very supportive	2	1%
Total		104	76%

At least somewhat supportive 21 15%

Pay More for Parks & Gardens		#	%
Not at all supportive	1 - Not at all supportive	55	40%

Not very supportive	2 - Not very supportive	27	20%
Somewhat supportive	3 - Somewhat supportive	15	11%
Supportive	4 - Supportive	3	2%
Very supportive	5 - Very supportive	4	3%
Total		104	76%

At least somewhat supportive **22** **16%**

Pay More for Cultural Precinct		#	%
Not at all supportive	1 - Not at all supportive	64	47%
Not very supportive	2 - Not very supportive	23	17%
Somewhat supportive	3 - Somewhat supportive	11	8%
Supportive	4 - Supportive	1	1%
Very supportive	5 - Very supportive	5	4%
Total		104	76%

At least somewhat supportive **17** **12%**

Appendix E – Public Relations

Advice of a Media Call was distributed in advance by GSC on Wednesday 31st of July, to give regional Media ample time to prepare to travel to Gunnedah/cover the press conference.



Media Alert

Proposed Special Rate Variation

31 July 2024

Gunnedah Shire Council wants to have a discussion with the community about a potential Special Rate Variation and invites ALL media to attend.

What: Press Conference

When: Friday, August 2, 2024

Time: 11:30-12:30PM

Where: Council Chambers, 63 Elgin St, Gunnedah

ENDS

For more information, contact Gunnedah Shire Council's Communications team on (02) 6740 2100 or communications@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au.

Media Release:

A media release was given to media in attendance at the Press Call on Friday 2nd of August, and then widely distributed to local and regional media at lunchtime that same day.

Photo: Acting Mayor Rob Hooke at today's announcement in the Gunnedah Shire Council Chambers





MEDIA RELEASE

Council proposes Special Rate Variation

2 August 2024

Gunnedah Shire Council is planning for the future of the region, by considering the proposal of a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to maintain, and potentially enhance the services the community currently receives.

With initial community consultation on the SRV to be undertaken over the coming weeks, an SRV will allow Council to increase its general income above the rate peg, to provide the services and infrastructure desired by the community. SRVs can be either for a single year or over multiple years and can be permanent or temporary.

At Council's ordinary meeting on 19 June 2024, Council endorsed the 2024/25 Operational Plan that included the action to begin consultation with the community about a potential SRV.

Gunnedah Shire Deputy Mayor Cr Rob Hooke believes the Special Rate Variation will allow Council to deliver a bright future for the region.

"The difficulty Council faces around financially sustaining existing services and maintaining infrastructure within the existing income levels is not unique to our region and is one that many Councils across NSW are facing at this time," Cr Hooke said.

"Like other Councils, we have been negatively impacted over time by the rate peg not keeping up with actual cost increases, reduced levels of financial assistance, cost shifting from other levels of government and an expanding infrastructure base, which is needed to support our growing community.

"The proposed SRV will ensure the timely maintenance of essential infrastructure like roads, bridges, sporting fields, playgrounds, and community facilities which we use every day, and would allow Council to work towards the communities' future aspirations."

The primary reasons Gunnedah Shire Council is investigating an SRV include:



1. **To maintain current services:** Ensuring council can continue to provide the same level of services and infrastructure maintenance.
2. **Improving services:** Enhancing or expanding existing services or adding new services to meet the needs of our growing community.
3. **Financial sustainability:** Addressing budget shortfalls and ensuring the long-term financial health of the council.

The potential application will be for a permanent SRV of 38.88% over two years. This will be comprised of a 24% increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12% increase in the second year (2026/27). Both years include an assumed rate peg of 5%.

The proposed SRV would only apply to the rates portion of the bill (usually listed as the first item on the bill e.g., "Residential Gunnedah") and not the separately listed essential charges such as waste and water.

Council will be engaging with the community over the coming weeks to gather feedback, share information and answer any questions around the proposed SRV. A series of drop-in sessions will be available for residents and ratepayers to attend, along with an online form for community members to provide feedback on Council's website.

Council will hold the first of its planned community engagement sessions to discuss the proposed SRV at the ~~Curlewis~~ Curlewis Community Hall next Monday, August 5, 2024 at 5:30PM.

Advise about other sessions will be made available on Council's dedicated SRV website page at www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au.

The SRV application process involves submitting a detailed proposal to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), outlining the reasons for the requested increase and how the additional revenue would be used. Community feedback is extremely valuable to the decision-making around the SRV, and it is important an application includes information direct from our community.

It is important that everyone understands that this a process to have the conversation regarding a potential SRV. Council will not make a final decision on an SRV application until later in the year, once the initial community consultation has been undertaken.

For FAQs, a handy rate calculator, or if you're unable to attend one of the drop-in sessions and would like more information on the Special Rate Variation, visit Council's website at:

www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/index.php/council/the-future-of-gunnedah/proposed-special-rate-variation

Caption: Acting Mayor Rob Hoake at today's announcement in the Gunnedah Shire Council Chambers



ENDS

Media Contact: Jo McKinnon - Communications Officer

Gunnedah Shire Council

(02) 6740 2100.

Media Call – Media Backgrounder:

Media who attended were supplied with the following backgrounder, by way of informing and supporting the details spoken about at the press conference.



Special Rate Variation Background information

August 2024

Overview:

Gunnedah Shire Council is working hard to ensure Council remains financially sustainable and is able to provide the services expected by the community, as well as fulfilling its legislative obligations under the various acts of parliament under which it must operate.

At Council's Ordinary Meeting on 19 June 2024, Council endorsed the 2024/25 Operational Plan that included the action to start a conversation with the community about a potential Special Rate Variation (SRV).

What is an SRV?

An SRV allows a council to increase its general rates income above the rate peg to provide the services and infrastructure desired by their communities. SRVs can be either for a single year or over multiple years and can be permanent or temporary.

What is the Rate Peg?

Rates increase every year in line with an amount set by the NSW State Government. This amount is calculated every year and is called the 'rate peg'. It is decided by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). The rate peg for Gunnedah Shire Council in the 2024/25 financial year will be 5.6%. This figure varies year to year and has been as low as 0.7% in the past five years.

Why is an SRV needed?

The cost to deliver services and maintain community assets to current service levels increases above the rate peg amount each year. Combined with reduced financial assistance and ongoing cost shifting to Local Government by other levels of government, councils are under constant financial pressure to deliver the same services for less, which is not a sustainable model.

Council also has an expanding infrastructure base as our community is growing. We view the fact that our population is increasing as very positive but we need to be able to maintain the associated infrastructure to support this.

Council has very limited opportunity to increase our source revenue and, as a result, an increase in rates is the most viable solution for a financially sustainable council.

Council's long-term financial plan shows that we are currently operating with an approximately \$3.1m operating deficit in the General Fund (excluding domestic waste services). This essentially means that we are spending \$3.1m less than we should be to maintain our assets and services to our current targeted service levels.

The SRV is also needed to address Council's current and forecast cash position. Our 2024/25 budget forecast shows that our projected cash reserves will be in decline and the unrestricted



cash position will potentially move into a negative balance within the General Fund within two years without intervention. A negative unrestricted cash balance cannot be allowed to occur.

Further information on Council's financial position can be found in our 2024/25 Operational Plan, which is available on our website under "Council" then "Integrated Planning and Reporting".

What would happen if the SRV is not implemented?

Council would need to defer necessary capital works and revise the basic range and levels of services provided to the community to avoid a deteriorating cash position, which is not sustainable in the long term. Service levels would need to reduce in the absence of additional funding being available.

What is the proposed SRV?

Council intends to discuss the potential application for a permanent SRV of 38.88% over two years. The 38.88% is comprised of a 24% increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12% increase in year two (2026/27). This includes an assumed rate peg of 5% in both years.

	2025/26	2026/27	Cumulative
Permanent increase above rate peg	19%	7%	
Rate Peg (forecast)	5%	5%	
Total Increase	24%	12%	38.88%

The rationale behind these two values is as follows:

1. The 24% increase in Year One would allow Council to address the current operating deficit and the current forecast unrestricted cash challenges,
2. The 12% increase in Year Two would allow Council to start addressing the backlog of works to bring assets to the current targeted service levels.

What does the SRV apply to?

The proposed SRV would only apply to the rates portion of the bill (usually listed as the first item on the bill e.g. "Residential Gunnedah") and not the separately listed essential charges such as waste and water.

What would the SRV funds be used for?

The proposed SRV would be used to fund maintenance and renewal of Council assets, specifically:

- Council's Transport Network (roads, bridges and associated services),
- Council's Building Infrastructure, and
- Council's Parks, Gardens and Open Space.



We are encouraging residents and ratepayers to provide their feedback by **Friday, 6 September 2024**.

At the conclusion of the current period of community engagement, Council will consider whether to proceed with an application for a Special Rate Variation. Council would then need to notify IPART of its intent to lodge a Special Rate Variation application in February 2025.

How can people have their say?

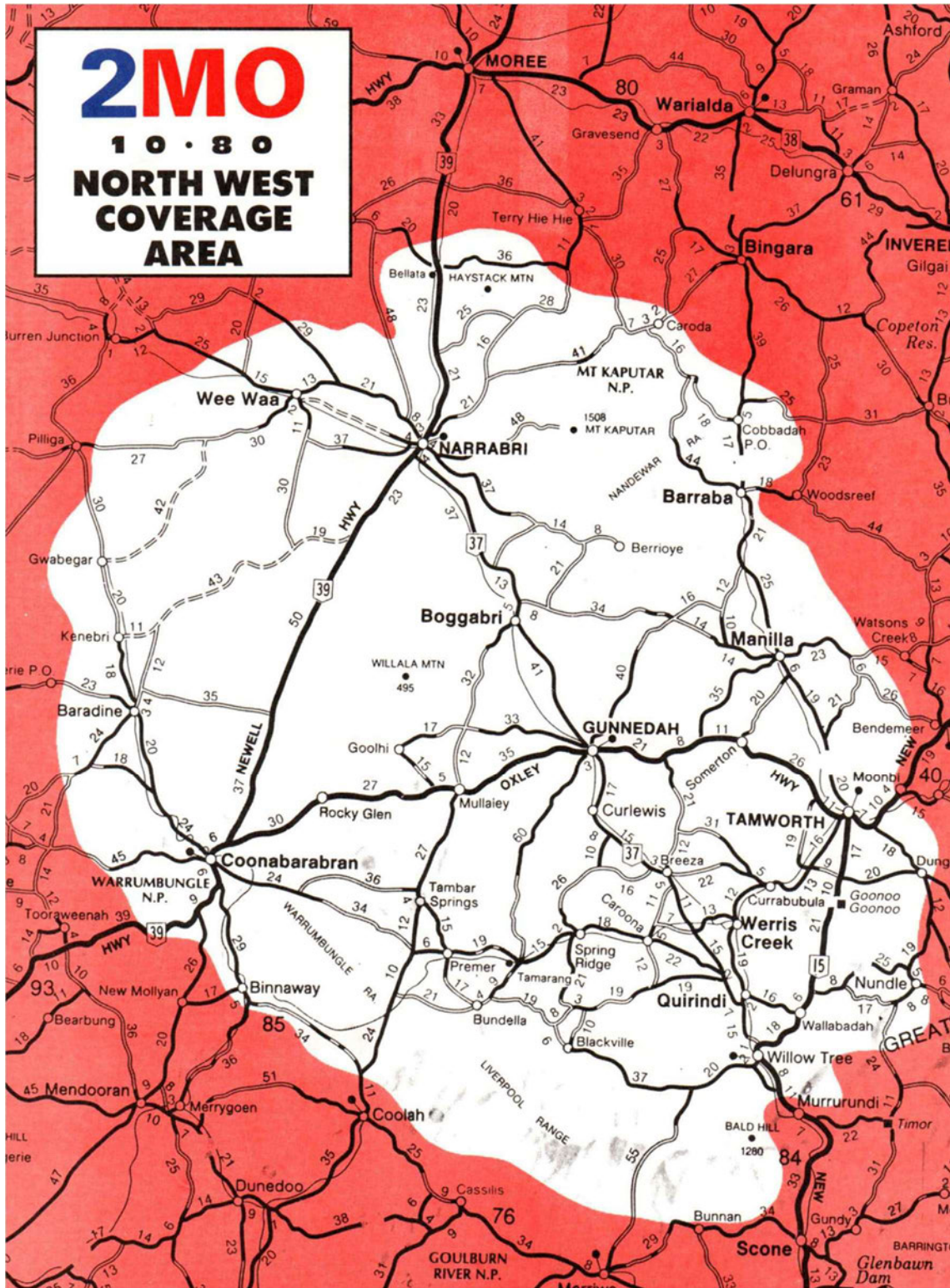
Residents and ratepayers are invited to read about the proposed SRV and have their say in a number of ways. Community feedback will be captured as part of our engagement opportunities that will be detailed on Facebook and our website, or you can provide a submission in writing by Friday, 6 September 2024 to the General Manager, Gunnedah Shire Council, PO Box 63, Gunnedah NSW 2380 or send by email to council@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Media Contact:

Gunnedah Shire Council Communications Team - (02) 6740 2100 or communications@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Appendix F – Radio Coverage

GGG/2MO radio coverage area



Appendix G – Newspaper Coverage

Northern Daily Leader (NDL) Thursday 8/8/24 - Tearsheet:

The advertisement is a full-page spread in the Northern Daily Leader, dated Thursday August 08, 2024. It features a dark blue background with a vibrant green and yellow logo for Gunnedah Shire Council at the top left. The main headline reads 'Planning for our Future' in large white font, with 'Special Rate Variation' in a smaller, light blue font below it. A section titled 'Have your say' provides details about the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) and encourages community input. A QR code is prominently displayed within a magnifying glass graphic, with the text 'FIND OUT MORE' next to it. The bottom half of the advertisement shows a scenic landscape of rolling hills and fields under a clear sky.

NORTHERN DAILY LEADER Thursday August 08, 2024 northerndailyleader.com.au

Gunnedah
Shire Council

Planning for our Future

Special Rate Variation

Have your say

Gunnedah Shire Council is proposing a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to build a brighter future for our community. Your input on the value of services currently provided is vital in the decision-making process. We're open to feedback and welcome you to visit us at one of our community consultation pop-ups or learn more at www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

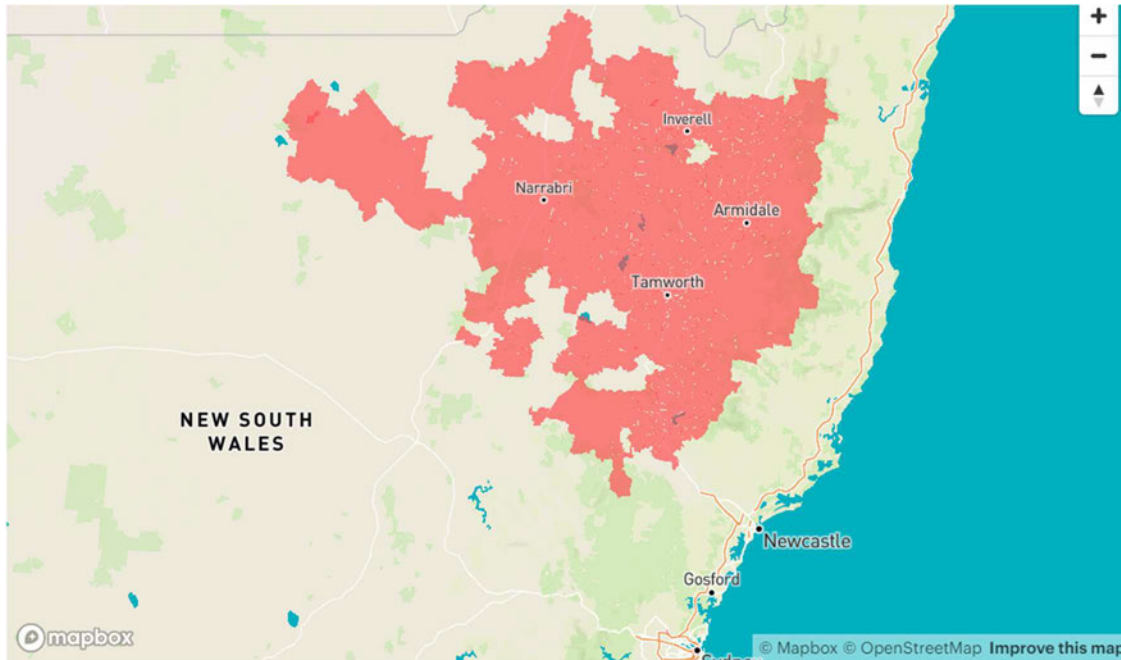
FIND OUT MORE

NDL Stats:

Mon – Fri: Average Issue Readership: 11,676

Audience Type: Small Business Owners (incl Agriculture) 12%; Baby Boomers (1946-1965) 21% ; Gen X (1966-1980) 23% ; Gen Y (1981-1995) 29% ; Gen Z (1996-2010) 21% ; Families with Children at Home 36% ; Property Buyers 17%.

NDL Distribution area map:



The Gunnedah Times is an integral part of the Gunnedah Shire community, serving a local population of about 13,000 people. Although exact readership data is not always publicly detailed, the Gunnedah Times is a widely-read publication, both in print and online. Its influence is evident through its role in covering local news, events, and issues relevant to the community.

Considering its focus on local affairs and the population size, the Gunnedah Times is likely to reach a substantial portion of the regional population, bolstered by both print subscriptions and the introduction of a paywall for online content to sustain its operations.

WOOD HEATING REVERSE CYCLE
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H&M Refrigeration and Air Conditioning
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GUNNEDAH TIMES

WOOD HEATING REVERSE CYCLE
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THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 2024 • VOL. V NO 32

PROUDLY SERVING THE GUNNEDAH DISTRICT

PHONE: 5700 3815 • \$2.50 inc GST

NORTH WEST MAGAZINE
INSIDE



NEW WOMEN'S REFUGE FOR GUNNEDAH
NEWS P5



BUSINESS AWARD FINALISTS
FEATURE P11-13

Proposed 38.8% rate rise for shire

Council goes public now to ensure full info available

By **SAM WOODS**
editor@gunnedahtimes.com.au

Ratepayers would be expected to pay thousands of dollars more under a proposal by Gunnedah Shire Council to meet its sky-rocketing operating expenses.

In an announcement at the council chambers last week, less than two months out from the 2024 Local Government Elections, staff and elected members explained that council is currently operating \$3.1 million in deficit annually. This means, excluding domestic waste charges, it is spending at least \$3m less each year than it should to maintain its assets and services in the community such as roads and bridges, building infrastructure, as well as parks and gardens.

To help stem the worsening predicament, council has proposed a 38.8 per cent rate increase. This special

rate variation would be delivered over two years - 24 per cent in the first year and an additional 12 per cent in the second. This includes allowance for compounding and the rate increase would be permanent in years thereafter.

Gunnedah shire acting mayor Rob Hooke, who led the SRV announcement last Friday as mayor Jamie Chaffey was on leave, described council's tough financial position as a "perfect storm" caused by three major factors.

Firstly, ineffective rate increases set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) which have not kept in line with inflation. Secondly, a halving of federal assistance grants to councils and thirdly, increasing cost shifting of financial responsibility to local councils by other levels of government.

Essentially, council said it is expected to deliver the same or



Gunnedah shire acting mayor Rob Hooke led the Special Rate Variation announcement last week.

additional level of services but for less. Cr Hooke said this "slow burn" of cost increases had forced council to propose lifting its income stream.

This would enable council to provide the same level of services and infrastructure maintenance and enhance existing services to meet the needs of a growing community.

Long-term, the SRV also aims to tackle budget shortfalls and preserve the long-term financial health of the council.

Council's general manager Eric Groth said the decision to go public with the SRV now was made to ensure ratepayers had maximum detail at their disposal.

"We want to make sure we have all the right information there for the community," Mr Groth said.

"There is a lot of work that has gone into that by staff and briefing of councillors to say this is the problem we have.

"Some of the issues we're facing at the moment are very recent issues - construction costs the last couple of years have increased exponentially."

He highlighted the Gunnedah Hospital redevelopment which was budgeted at \$53 million a few years ago but those same plans now cost almost double that figure.

"We have that same issue at council," Mr Groth said.

"We have been trying to put this information together and have it as complete as possible before we have that dialogue."

"It would have been great to do that 12 months ago ... but the last thing we want to do is flag an issue with the community before having the information to have an appropriate discussion around that."

"Now we have that information we don't believe we can delay [the SRV discussion] any further."

Continued on page 2

WEATHER Fri. Min 7° Max 19° Partly cloudy. Slight chance of a shower. Light winds becoming northeasterly 15 to 20 km/h during the morning.

Sat 20°	Sun 20°	Mon 21°	Tue 21°	Wed 20°	Thurs 21°
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Combat Winter Dryness:

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Taking Care of Your Skin:

MooGoo \$15.98 SAVE 19%

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Gunnedah

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Monday - Friday: 8:30AM - 6PM
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Sunday: 9AM - 12PM

www.carterspharmacy.com.au
/CartersPharmacyGunnedah

easy clinic LifeClub

Appendix H – Print Collateral

Artwork for DL Flyer:

Planning for our Future Special Rate Variation

Have your say

Gunnedah Shire Council is proposing a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to build a brighter future for our community. Your input on the value of services currently provided is vital in the decision-making process. We're open to feedback and welcome you to visit us at one of our community consultation pop-ups or learn more at www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au



FIND OUT MORE



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Special Rate Variation (SRV)?

A Special Rate Variation (SRV) is a process that allows local councils to apply for an increase in the rates they charge beyond the standard rate peg limit set by the State Government.

Why does Council need one?

The primary reasons Gunnedah Shire Council is investigating an SRV include:

- **To maintain current services:** Ensuring Council can continue providing the same level of services and infrastructure maintenance.
- **Improving services:** Enhancing or expanding existing services or adding new services to meet the needs of our growing community.
- **Financial sustainability:** Addressing budget shortfalls and ensuring the long-term financial health of the Council.

It is important for Council to engage in community consultation before applying for an SRV, to better understand the evolving needs and wants of the community.

The SRV application process involves submitting a detailed proposal to the State Government, outlining the reasons for the requested increase and how the additional revenue will be used. Your input on the value of services currently provided is vital in the decision-making process.

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.

Contact
T: (02) 6740 2100
E: council@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au
www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au



Gunnedah
Shire Council

Artwork for A3 and A4 Posters:



Appendix I – Newspaper Editorial

gunnedahtimes.com.au/2024/08/02/gunnedah-shire-council-proposes-special-rate-variation

October 2, 2024 Subscribe

19°C **GUNNEDAH TIMES**

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P: 6742 5020
69-71 Oakey Highway, Gunnedah and 80-82 L. Volpert
aquaWEST

GUNNEDAH SHIRE COUNCIL
Gunnedah Shire Council proposes Special Rate Variation



© Aug 2, 2024

Video Unavailable
This video may no longer exist, or you don't have permission to view it.
[Learn more](#)

Gunnedah Shire Council is planning for the future of the region, by considering the proposal of a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to maintain, and potentially enhance the services the community currently receives.

With initial community consultation on the SRV to be undertaken over the coming weeks, an SRV will allow council to increase

its general income above the rate peg, to provide the services and infrastructure desired by the community. SRVs can be either for a single year or over multiple years and can be permanent or temporary.



At council's ordinary meeting on 19 June 2024, Council endorsed the 2024/25 Operational Plan that included the action to begin consultation with the community about a potential SRV.

Gunnedah Shire deputy mayor Cr Rob Hooke believes the Special Rate Variation will allow council to deliver a bright future for the region.

"The difficulty council faces around financially sustaining existing services and maintaining infrastructure within the existing income levels is not unique to our region and is one that many councils across NSW are facing at this time," Cr Hooke said.

"Like other councils, we have been negatively impacted over time by the rate peg not keeping up with actual cost increases, reduced levels of financial assistance, cost shifting from other levels of government and an expanding infrastructure base, which is needed to support our growing community.

"The proposed SRV will ensure the timely maintenance of essential infrastructure like roads, bridges, sporting fields, playgrounds, and community facilities which we use every day, and would allow Council to work towards the communities' future aspirations."

The primary reasons Gunnedah Shire Council is investigating an SRV include:

1. **To maintain current services:** Ensuring council can continue to provide the same level of services and infrastructure maintenance.
2. **Improving services:** Enhancing or expanding existing services or adding new services to meet the needs of our growing community.
3. **Financial sustainability:** Addressing budget shortfalls and ensuring the long-term financial health of the council.

The potential application will be for a permanent SRV of 38.88 per cent over two years. This will be comprised of a 24 per cent increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12 per cent increase in the second year (2026/27). Both years include an assumed rate peg of 5 per cent.

The proposed SRV would only apply to the rates portion of the bill (usually listed as the first item on the bill e.g., "Residential Gunnedah") and not the separately listed essential charges such as waste and water.

Council will be engaging with the community over the coming weeks to gather feedback, share information and answer any questions around the proposed SRV. A series of drop-in sessions will be available for residents and ratepayers to attend, along with an online form for community members to provide feedback on council's website.

Council will hold the first of its planned community engagement sessions to discuss the proposed SRV at the Curlewis Community Hall next Monday, August 5, 2024 at 5:30PM.

Advice about other sessions will be made available on council's dedicated SRV website page at www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au.

The SRV application process involves submitting a detailed proposal to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), outlining the reasons for the requested increase and how the additional revenue would be used. Community feedback is extremely valuable to the decision-making around the SRV, and it is important an application includes information direct from our community.

It is important that everyone understands that this a process to have the conversation regarding a potential SRV. Council will not make a final decision on an SRV application until later in the year, once the initial community consultation has been undertaken.

For FAQs, a handy rate calculator, or if you're unable to attend one of the drop-in sessions and would like more information on the Special Rate Variation, visit Council's website at:

www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/index.php/council/the-future-of-gunnedah/proposed-special-rate-variation



Home > Finance

FINANCE NEWS NSW NEWS

Gunnedah council considers rate variation

06/08/2024



Gunnedah Shire Council says it is considering a Special Rate Variation (SRV) proposal in a bid to maintain, and potentially enhance the services the community currently receives.

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LATEST ARTICLES

NEWS
Green light for new Byron Shire Mayor



Gunnedah Shire Council says it is considering a Special Rate Variation (SRV) proposal in a bid to maintain, and potentially enhance the services the community currently receives.

The potential application will be for a permanent SRV of 38.88% over two years. This will be comprised of a 24% increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12% increase in the second year (2026/27). Both years include an assumed rate peg of 5%.

It will begin initial community consultation on the SRV over the next few weeks.

Deputy Mayor, Rob Hooke *(pictured)* says he believes the rate variation will allow Council to deliver a bright future for the region.

"The difficulty Council faces around financially sustaining existing services and maintaining infrastructure within the existing income levels is not unique to our region and is one that many Councils across NSW are facing at this time," Cr Hooke said.

"Like other Councils, we have been negatively impacted over time by the rate peg not keeping up with actual cost increases, reduced levels of financial assistance, cost shifting from other levels of government and an expanding infrastructure base, which is needed to support our growing community.

"The proposed SRV will ensure the timely maintenance of essential infrastructure like roads, bridges, sporting fields, playgrounds, and community facilities which we use every day, and would allow Council to work towards the communities' future aspirations."

He says the primary reasons the Council is investigating an SRV include:

- **To maintain current services:** Ensuring council can continue to provide the same level of services and infrastructure maintenance;
- **Improving services:** Enhancing or expanding existing services or adding new services to meet the needs of our growing community;
- **Financial sustainability:** Addressing budget shortfalls and ensuring the long-term financial health of the council.

The proposed SRV would only apply to the rates portion of the bill (usually listed as the first item on the bill e.g., 'Residential Gunnedah') and not the separately listed essential charges such as waste and water, the Council said in a statement.

The SRV application process involves submitting a detailed proposal to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), outlining the reasons for the requested increase and how the additional revenue would be used.

"It is important that everyone understands that this a process to have the conversation regarding a potential SRV. Council will not make a final decision on an SRV application until later in the year, once the initial community consultation has been undertaken," the Council said.

www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/index.php/council/the-future-of-gunnedah/proposed-special-rate-variation.



Shire Mayor



NEWS

Russell Fitzpatrick returned as Bega Valley mayor



HERITAGE

City of Bayswater pushes for brickworks preservation



AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Greater Shepparton scores platinum pool safety award



NEWS

Wollondilly Mayor welcome new faces

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An Editorial from Editor of Gunnedah Times Sam Woods gave a fair and balanced perspective of the Proposed SRV for Gunnedah Shire:

Not surprising to see the wave of anger at Special Rate Variation

OPINION: There is nothing more contentious than targeting the bank balances of ordinary citizens - just look at the disastrous impact even the suggestion of a GST had for the Liberal-Nationals in the 'unloseable' election of the early 1990s.

Rate increases can have a similar knock on effect - driving anger and resentment in local communities, largely because of the wide and far reaching impact on residents.

It is not surprising to see the criticism that has already started on Gunnedah's special rate variation but is it all warranted?

Much of the anger and frustration, at least early in the process when Gunnedah first proposed the SRV, seemed to be generated by people unaware of the full details of the rate rise. It's symptomatic of the ease of social media to post your thought bubbles to the world immediately before getting the full picture about what's going on. Council said it turned comments off its posts as the page could not be monitored 24-7 for potentially defamatory statements (visit gunnedah-times.com.au for a full explanation).

Other people are just looking for a fight and no matter what information is put forward, their views would remain the same.

People need to vent and ultimately, the council, its staff and elected members - who are also part of this community - wear the brunt of the attack. But of those casting blame at positions of authority, how many are willing to give the process a go themselves? There is a sign on the sidelines at local sports games that says before you criticise, ask yourself, have you volunteered to help? The same rule should apply to every other walk of life.

There is a local government election in September, after which the newly elected Gunnedah shire councillors will decide whether to proceed or not with the SRV. That is the perfect opportunity for anyone willing to stick their hand up and make a stand for their community, to do so.

Some commentary has been made already about the timing of the SRV announcement immediately before the election. But in one sense, the timing couldn't be better. Those motivated for change can make an immediate difference on the outcome of this proposal - either for or against.

Council says it didn't want to go earlier on the SRV without all the information for the community at its disposal. But one would think there's a tipping point at which council says enough is enough before the rate increase reaches almost half what we're already paying. Perhaps the comfort comes from knowing many other councils are faced with equally high special rate variations - so we're not alone.

Still on timing, others have questioned why council would roll this out amid the "cost of living crisis". Undeniably, some people in our community and indeed across the country are doing it tough financially. It's also true everyday expenses are skyrocketing but so too are expenses for everyone else, local council included. If council costs are going up, it's only a matter of time before its charges are increased.

It seems many people have the misconception that governments and councils are expected to shoulder the burden of life's problems and Joe Bloggs is entitled to live consequence-free because of it. But this couldn't be further from the truth. People need to take responsibility for their own financial situation and if they need help, ask for it. Just don't expect to be bailed out on every occasion because eventually the kind hearts will wear thin and your luck will run out.

People also forget how lucky we are to have this democratic process of consultation in the first place - many other locations the world over are not so fortunate. If we don't agree with the ideas put forward, we can tell those in positions of power what we think. If we still don't agree, we can vote accordingly on the elected members. Try doing the same in less developed countries of the world and see how far you get. Australia has fought for these freedoms, some have died for them, don't take it for granted.

I urge everyone with an opinion about Gunnedah's proposed special rate variation - either good or bad - to make their views known, either through the in-person community consultation sessions, in writing, or over the phone. The *Gunnedah Times* will be doing its best to cover consultation process, putting forward views from across the shire about the rate proposal and any alternatives.

- Sam Wood

Appendix J – Social Media

GSC Facebook

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 2 · 🌐

COUNCIL CONSIDERS PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

Gunnedah Shire Council is planning for the future of the region, by considering the proposal of a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to maintain, and potentially enhance the services the community currently receives.

With initial community consultation on the SRV to be undertaken over the coming weeks, an SRV will allow Council to increase its general income above the rate peg, to provide the services and infrastructure desired b... [See more](#)




Gunnedah Shire Council
August 2 · 🌐

The **Gunnedah Shire Council** is considering a proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV). Council will hold the first of its planned community engagement sessions to discuss the proposed SRV at the Curlewis Community Hall next Monday, August 5, 2024 at 5:30PM.

Advice about other sessions over the coming weeks is available on Council's dedicated SRV website page at www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au [See more](#)



Gunnedah Shire Council
August 5 · 🌐




PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

PHONE SURVEY

Residents and ratepayers are being surveyed about the proposed SRV and encouraged to have their say. This survey commences **Monday, 5 August 2024.**

Find out more at
www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.



👍 🗨️ 🌟 8 6 shares

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 5 · 🌐

Reminder to come along tonight to the Curlewis Community Hall. It's warm inside and there's tea and coffee.



Gunnedah Shire Council
August 2 · 🌐

The **Gunnedah Shire Council** is considering a proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV). Council will hold the first of its planned community engagement sessions to ... [See more](#)

Want to learn more about how you could be affected by the potential Special Rate Variation (SRV) that is being considered at the moment?

You can calculate the impact of a potential rates increase by using our special rates calculator which can be accessed here <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...>

WHAT DOES THE SRV APPLY TO?

The SRV applies to your general rates only and will not apply to the waste management, water and sewerage charges on your rates notices.

RATES AND CHARGES NOTICE 01/07/2024 to 30/06/2025			
Gunnedah Shire Council PO Box 63 GUNNEDAH NSW 2380		13279251	
ABN 80 183 655 793 Administration Building 63 Edgar St Gunnedah PO Box 63, Gunnedah, NSW 2380 Enquiries: 102 4740 2300 Email: council@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au Web: www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au		17/07/2024	
Gunnedah Shire Council PO Box 63 GUNNEDAH NSW 2380		31/08/2024	
1/07/2022		Residential Gunnedah	
UNIVERSITY OF WAGGA WAGGA Municipality Street GUNNEDAH NSW 2380 0429		1/07/2022	
UNIVERSITY OF WAGGA WAGGA Municipality Street GUNNEDAH NSW 2380 0429		Residential Gunnedah	
UNIVERSITY OF WAGGA WAGGA Municipality Street GUNNEDAH NSW 2380 0429		Residential Gunnedah	
REBATE OF RATES AND CHARGES		COUNTY RATE	AMOUNT
Residential Gunnedah		0.01172553	49,900
GWS Availability Charge		242.50	1
Sewer Availability Charge		686.40	1
DWWS 1-140L waste/240L rec/240L green		440.00	1
Waste Management Facility Fee		86.90	1
			\$585.15
			\$242.50
			\$686.40
			\$440.00
			\$86.90

Use the online rates calculator to estimate how the special rate variation could affect you.
www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

14

Thank you to residents of the village of Curlewis who, despite the cold weather, showed up to our first community session last night to understand more about the proposed Special Rate Variation.

More than 70 people filled the community hall which served as a fantastic facility to host this important conversation.

Special thanks to the passionate Curlewis Progress NSW for their assistance in gathering such a strong attendance.

The next session will be held tomorrow outside The Verdict Cafe in Gunnedah between 10AM-12 Noon.

For more information and a full list of upcoming community sessions please go to our dedicated web page <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...>



Want to learn more or have your say about the Proposed Special Rate Variation currently being considered by Council?

We have a range of community sessions coming up around our shire. The next one is tomorrow outside The Verdict Cafe in the main street of Gunnedah between 10am-midday.

For details go to the dedicated page on our website www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au See more

COMMUNITY SESSIONS PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

GUNNEDAH
Verdict Coffee Shop
(outside)
Wednesday, 7 August 2024
10am-12pm

- Learn more about the proposed SRV
- Engage directly with Council
- Have your questions answered
- Provide your SRV feedback

TAMBAR SPRINGS
Tambar Springs Hall
Thursday, 8 August 2024
9.30am-12pm

CARROLL
Carroll Hall
Tuesday, 13 August 2024
10am-12pm

Find out more at
www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Let's plan for the future of
our region, together.



Jo McKinnon and 10 others

10 shares

This morning, the first of a series of Gunnedah-based community information sessions, regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation being considered by Council, was held.

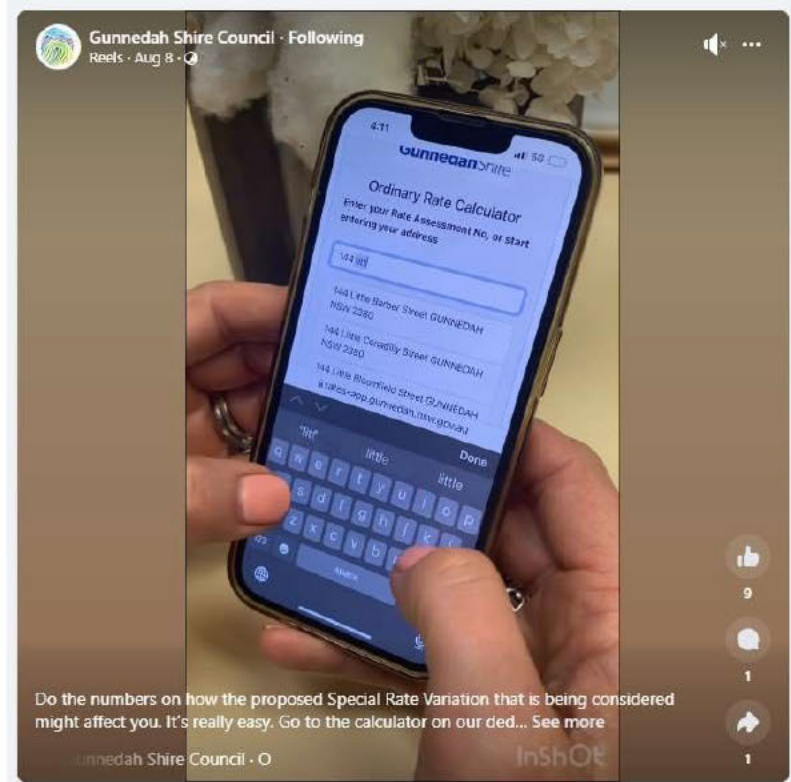
Initially designed for one-on-one conversations outside The Verdict cafe, to answer questions from our community on an individual basis, this was extended to a more formal group presentation inside the Town Hall that went for 2 hours and was facilitated by our General Manager Eric Groth, assisted by Govern...



Gunnedah Shire Council
August 7 · 🌐

The **Gunnedah Shire Council** will hold a community engagement session regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation currently currently being considered tomorrow at the **Tambar Springs Community Hall** between 9:30am-midday.

[Tambar Springs Progress Association CWA - Tambar Springs Branch](#)





Gunnedah Shire Council is in Tambar Springs.

August 8 · 🌐



Thank you to everyone from the Tambar Springs community who showed up for our information session this morning regarding the Special Rate Variation currently being considered by Council.

CWA - Tambar Springs Branch Tambar Springs Community

Our next scheduled information session will be held at the Carroll Community Hall next Tuesday, 13 August, between 10am-12pm,



Gunnedah Shire Council
August 9 · 🌐

The **Gunnedah Shire Council** will hold a community information session regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation currently being considered next Tuesday, 13 August, at the Carroll Community Hall.

For a full list of locations we will hold sessions at please go to our dedicated web page www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au .



COMMUNITY SESSION

PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

Carroll Community Hall
Tuesday, 13 August 2024
10:00am-midday

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.



Gunnedah
Shire Council

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 13 · 🌐

Thanks to everyone who came to our information session this morning to learn more about the Special Rate Variation that is currently being considered by Council.

Special thanks also to the hard working Robyn Hattam and the **Carroll progress association** team who readied the hall for us and made us feel so welcome. It is much appreciated.

For the full schedule of upcoming community information sessions please go to the dedicated page on our website <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...> .



Gunnedah Shire Council
August 13 · 🌐

The **Gunnedah Shire Council** will hold a community information session regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation currently being considered tomorrow evening at the Gunnedah Town Hall.

For a full list of locations we will hold sessions at please go to our dedicated web page <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...> .



COMMUNITY SESSION

PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

Gunnedah Town Hall
Wednesday, 14 August
6.30pm-8pm

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.



Gunnedah
Shire Council

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 14 · 🌐

The phone survey that has been taking place about the proposed Special Rate Variation is now available online. 🗳️

You can jump on to <https://app.keysurvey.com/f/41742584/741f/> to have your say.

To find out more about the proposed Special Rate Variation, you can visit <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...> .

T... See more



PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION SURVEY

You can have your say about the proposed SRV on an online survey.

Find out more at
www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.



Gunnedah
Shire Council

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 14 · 🌐

A reminder that Gunnedah Shire Council will hold a community information session regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation currently being considered tonight at Gunnedah Town Hall. For a full list of locations of sessions, please go to our dedicated web page <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...>

COMMUNITY SESSION
PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

Gunnedah Town Hall
Wednesday, 14 August
6.30pm-8pm

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.

Gunnedah Shire Council

Like Share

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 14 · 🌐

Community information session about potential Special Rate Variation now in progress at the Town Hall.

Erin Carroll and 5 others · 2 shares

Like Share

Gunnedah Shire Council
August 27 · 🌐

Don't forget, you can still have your say about the proposed rate variation. You can find out more, and find the link to the survey and other ways to have your say here: <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...> You can find the rates calculator - that will give you an estimate of your own rates under a proposed rate variation on the same page. Submissions will close on Friday, 6 September, 2024.

Gunnedah Shire Council
September 2 · 🌐

We are still seeking your view on a Proposed Special Rate Variation for Gunnedah Shire. You can fill out the survey here: <https://app.keysurvey.com/f/41742584/741f/> And find out more information here: <https://www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au/.../proposed-special-rate...> Submissions will close on Friday.

Gunnedah Shire Council - Following
Reels - Aug 8 · 🌐

4:11 | 5G

gunnedahshire

Ordinary Rate Calculator
Enter your Rate Assessment No, or start entering your address

144

rates-app.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Do the numbers on your proposed Special Rate Variation that is being considered.

HAVE YOUR SAY
PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.

Gunnedah Shire Council

Gunnedah Shire Council
Government organization

Send message



Gunnedah Shire Council
September 5 at 11:12 AM · 🌐



Submissions for the proposed Special Rates Variation close tomorrow. Our survey is available online!

**HAVE YOUR SAY
PROPOSED
SPECIAL RATE
VARIATION**

Let's plan for the future of our region, together.




Gunnedah
Shire Council

Gunnedah Shire Council
Government organization

 Send message

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gunnedah_shire Gunnedah Shire Council is planning for the future of the region, by considering the proposal of a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to maintain, and potentially enhance the services the community currently receives.

With initial community consultation on the SRV to be undertaken over the coming weeks, an SRV will allow Council to increase its general income above the rate peg, to provide the services and infrastructure desired by the community. SRVs can be either for a single year or over multiple years and can be permanent or temporary.

At Council's ordinary meeting on 19 June 2024, Council endorsed the 2024/25 Operational Plan that included the action to begin consultation with the community about a potential SRV.

The potential application will be for a permanent SRV of 38.88% over two years. This will be comprised of a 24% increase in the first year (2025/26) and a 12% increase in the second year (2026/27). Both years include an assumed rate peg of 5%.

The proposed SRV would only apply to the rates portion of the bill (usually listed as the first item on the bill e.g. "Residential Gunnedah") and not the separately listed essential charges such as waste and water.

Council will be engaging with the community over the coming weeks to gather feedback, share information and answer any questions around the proposed SRV. A series of drop-in sessions will be available for residents and ratepayers to attend, along with an online form for community members to provide feedback on Council's website.

Edited · 8w

Liked by hisgalus and others
August 2

Add a comment... [Post](#)

Appendix K – Community Information Sessions

Community Information Session - Curlewis village

Date: 05 August, 2024	Time: 5.30pm – 7.30pm
Location: Curlewis Community Hall	Attendees: approx 65

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

Initially the sentiment of the community feedback session reflected significant frustration, scepticism and dissatisfaction, however as the session went on, the community felt more informed, empowered and open to a conversation around the SRV. Although the overall mood and feeling in the room became less hostile by the end, participants still felt disconnected from decision-making processes, highlighting concerns about their voices being overlooked and questioning the transparency and fairness of Council decisions. Many expressed frustrations over long-standing unaddressed issues and a sense of inequality compared to Gunnedah. There is also a tone of weariness, as some community members mention years of raising concerns with no resolution. Regardless of their frustrations, Curlewis has a very proactive Progress Association, very willing to work alongside GSC to improve village and Council relations, and to support any works undertaken within the village.

Key Themes

Lack of Community Engagement and Transparency:

- Questions such as "Do we actually have a say here?" and "When does the community get to view these surveys?" suggest that the community feels excluded from meaningful participation in Council decisions.
- The lack of public knowledge about IPART and scepticism toward consultations further indicates a gap in communication and trust.

Service Disparities Between Rural and Urban Areas:

- Multiple complaints express dissatisfaction with the perceived imbalance of services between Curlewis and Gunnedah. The community feels neglected, citing a lack of infrastructure, storm water drainage, and adequate public amenities with disability access, in comparison to Gunnedah's parks and dog runs.
- Comments about not receiving services despite paying rates reflect a sense of injustice.

Unaddressed Infrastructure and Safety Concerns:

- Repeated mentions of ignored requests for tree removal, intersection lighting, storm water drainage, and overgrown areas highlight ongoing safety concerns in Curlewis.

Specific examples, like the inability for people in wheelchairs, on mobility scooters or with prams to be able to adequately commute throughout the village when there's been heavy rain, as deep puddles remain for a long time, preventing free movement around the area; a tree "dangerously leaning" near the road, and lack of maintenance of public spaces, point to the community's frustration with being overlooked by the Council.

Discontent Over Rate Increases and Spending:

- Community members expressed confusion and anger over rate increases, asking where the money is going and what benefits they will receive in return. Questions about the allocation of funds for projects like the Gunnedah Airport, which they perceive as benefiting a minority, demonstrate a sense and belief of financial mismanagement.
- Comments on the rising cost of renting public venues for community events such as the local dance school classes, along with the lack of community input on spending priorities, deepen the sense of alienation.

Long-Term Neglect and Unresolved Issues:

- There is a recurring theme of asking for improvements or services "for years" with no action from the Council. This is coupled with a broader sense that rural areas are continuously deprioritised in favour of larger towns.
- Requests for basic services, like bollards and disability access to the public toilet block, being ignored exacerbates the community's frustration with how decisions are made.



Community Information Session – Gunnedah

Date: 07 August, 2024

Time: 10am – 2pm

Location: Gunnedah Town Hall & Verdict Coffee Shop

Attendees: approx. 60

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

The community information session was planned for outside The Verdict Café however significant community interest triggered the need to maintain the session but to move the initial (and majority of) attendees to an impromptu town hall presentation. The session began with a tense atmosphere, with community members highly critical and vocal about their dissatisfaction with the SRV and the informal “pop-up” method of consultation. Concerns were raised immediately, particularly around the lack of a formal meeting and the perception that their opinions were not being heard. The move from the informal site outside the café to the Gunnedah Town Hall for the initial crowd reflects the intensity of the situation, with many attendees arriving prepared to express their frustration. The sentiment of this became mixed, shifting from initial tension and opposition to a more receptive and engaged tone as discussions progressed. While there was clear frustration at the outset, constructive dialogue and effective communication from Council representatives helped ease tensions allowing for more productive conversations. Around 60 people were moved into the Town Hall, and the session outside Verdict Café continued, with a further 17 individuals engaging in one-on-one conversations happily and willingly, unaware of the prior tension provided by the initial crowd in attendance.

Key Themes

1. Demand for Transparency and Inclusion:

- A consistent theme was the community's desire for transparency and ongoing communication. People raised concerns about the decision-making process, particularly around major projects like the Gunnedah Airport and the Saleyards, and wanted to know how money is being spent.
- The community emphasised the importance of holding public meetings, with some attendees expressing disappointment that no initial community meeting had been planned. They also called for meetings after hours and in rural locations like Mullaley, to allow broader participation.

2. Service Delivery and Efficiency Concerns:

- Multiple comments reflected frustration with Council operations, particularly around staffing and resource allocation. Some believed that Council workers were inefficient, and the Council as a business could be run better.
- Questions about wage spending and the Council's surplus funds also pointed to a desire for more accountability regarding how resources are being managed.

3. Concerns Over Financial Management:

- The community questioned the size of the proposed rate increase, wanting more details on forecasting and why these financial issues weren't addressed sooner. They expressed concerns about financial inefficiencies and a lack of proper financial projections.
- Comments around the funding of the Airport upgrade also sparked concern, with people questioning whether the decision was financially wise, given its impact on the community.

Community Information Session - Tambar Springs

Date: 08 August, 2024

Time: 9.30am – 12pm

Location: Tambar Springs Community Hall

Attendees: approx. 23

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

The sentiment of this community feedback session was largely negative, marked by frustration, dissatisfaction, and a strong desire for transparency and accountability from the Council. The community expressed concerns about financial management, inadequate communication, and the perceived lack of services provided to this rural community. However, there is also an underlying desire for constructive dialogue to petition the State and Federal Governments around how they fund Local Government; this was evidenced by calls for continued engagement and solutions to ongoing issues.

Key Themes

1. Frustration with Financial Management and Cost Blowouts:

- The community raised significant concerns about cost overruns on projects like the airport, Koala Park, and Saleyards, with some attendees questioning where the money has gone and why these blowouts occurred.
- Many people felt that their rates were not being used effectively, with dissatisfaction over proposed rate increases. They questioned what value they were receiving for their contributions, especially business owners and farmers, who felt they were getting little in return for their high rates.

2. Lack of Transparency and Communication Issues:

- A recurring theme was the community's frustration with poor communication from the Council. There were complaints about unanswered emails and phone calls, as well as a general sense of not being heard or respected by the Council.
- The community called for clearer, more frequent communication about Council decisions, particularly around financial matters and the allocation of resources. Several people suggested the need for better communication through channels like the website and formal reports.

3. Concerns about Service Levels and Infrastructure:

- Many community members voiced their dissatisfaction with the state of local infrastructure, particularly roads, which were seen as poorly maintained. Farmers expressed frustration that they were doing the "heavy lifting" financially in terms of rates paid, but not receiving adequate services in return.
- There was a clear call for a reduction in service levels to match what is being paid for and for a detailed breakdown of the services provided and their associated costs.

4. Desire for Ongoing Engagement and Action:

- The community emphasised the need for continued consultation and more frequent meetings. They want a clearer understanding of how their feedback will be incorporated into Council decisions and reports.
- Suggestions were made to further involve lobby groups such as NSW Farmers and CWA, to collectively raise concerns with higher levels of government, particularly around rate increases and infrastructure issues.

5. Scepticism Toward Council Operations and Efficiency:

- Many attendees expressed scepticism about the efficiency of Council operations, with some calling for internal reviews to reduce costs and improve accountability. There were concerns about the number of Council employees and whether their roles were necessary or productive.
- There were also comments about the perceived inefficiency of consultants and the suggestion that services could be delivered more efficiently internally.

6. Collective Action and Advocacy:

- Several community members proposed more drastic actions, such as collectively refusing to pay rates to force the Council and State Government to take notice of their concerns. This highlights the level of frustration and a willingness to push for change through non-traditional means.
- The idea of banding together and going to the State Government to demand solutions for systemic issues was raised multiple times.
- Comments around the airport project also sparked concern, with people questioning whether the decision was financially wise, given its impact on the community.



Community Information Session - Carroll village

Date: 13 August, 2024

Time: 10am – 12pm

Location: Carroll Community Hall

Attendees: approx. 9

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

The sentiment in this community feedback session was one of interest, frustration, concern, and scepticism. The key themes revolve around dissatisfaction with how Council services are being delivered to the villages, financial management issues, and a perception of inequity, particularly among rural residents. Despite these frustrations, there is also a desire for more tailored solutions and effective communication.

Key Themes

1. Frustration with Service Levels and Infrastructure Maintenance:

- **Graded Roads and Depreciation Concerns:** Some community members feel that the services they receive, such as road grading, are insufficient compared to the rates they are paying. Rural ratepayers, particularly a farmer attending the meeting from Emerald Hill, expressed concern about paying high rates with limited visible benefits, especially regarding road maintenance and other critical infrastructure.
- **Water Management and Road Engineering:** The community of Carroll raised specific complaints about poor road engineering, causing water to pool on roads. They compared their situation unfavourably to other Councils, like Broken Hill, which they see as better at addressing infrastructure issues.

2. Perception of Inequity:

- **Rural vs. Urban Services:** There is a clear feeling among rural ratepayers, especially farmers, that they are shouldering a disproportionate burden of rate increases while receiving fewer services in return. They feel overlooked compared to urban areas, with one community member stating that Carroll feels "forgotten" by the Council.
- **Land Value and Rate Increases:** The frustration stems from rate increases tied to land values, particularly for larger landholders. Rural residents voiced concern that they are being unfairly impacted compared to other groups, such as mining or

village residents, and suggested that the percentage mix of rate contributions should be reconsidered.

3. Lack of Responsiveness and Communication from the Council:

- **Delayed Projects:** Carroll residents expressed frustration over delayed infrastructure projects, such as the toilet facilities that have been on hold for five years. The community feels they are constantly being blocked or deprioritized in favour of more urgent projects elsewhere.
- **Lack of Maintenance:** Concerns were raised about the lack of consistent maintenance for local infrastructure, such as road mowing and tree trimming, with residents having to repeatedly contact the Council to get services done.
- **Consultancy Fees and Bureaucracy:** Some attendees questioned the Council's use of consultancy fees in the SRV (Special Rate Variation) process and whether such expenditures are justified. There was also scepticism about the Council's administrative staffing levels, with a suggestion that there are too many vacancies and that service delivery in administration is overly bureaucratic.

4. Concern over Financial Management and Transparency:

- **Asset Depreciation and Management:** Several community members expressed concern about the depreciation of Council assets, particularly the saleyards, and questioned why depreciation figures couldn't be adjusted. There is confusion over why the Council is not replacing assets as they depreciate, with some suggesting this could impact long-term financial planning.
- **Council's Debt Level and Rate Increases:** Questions were raised about the Council's overall debt level and how the proposed SRV will impact the Council's income. Some residents were unsure how raising rates would generate more income if it were merely covering maintenance costs rather than providing additional services.

5. Scepticism Towards State and Local Government Initiatives:

- **Planning Portal and IPART Consultation:** The state's planning portal and its impact on local government was seen as a burden, adding more administrative costs without significantly improving processes. There was also disappointment that the upcoming IPART community consultation would be conducted online, with some feeling this format limits genuine engagement.
- **SRV Process and Consultation:** While some residents are not opposed to the SRV, they expressed a strong desire for more community-driven initiatives, especially in areas like Carroll, where improvements are needed. There was also scepticism

about how decisions regarding budget shortfalls and over-budget projects are made, with concerns about transparency in the SRV process.





Breeza Village Progress Association Meeting

Date: 13 August, 2024

Time: 10am – 12pm

Location: Breeza Village Progress Association Meeting

Attendees: approx. 15

Discussion Summary

Attended on behalf of Gunnedah Shire Council by Cr Rob Hooke, GM Eric Groth, media liaison Marie Low, Breeza Village Progress Association members spoke about the Proposed SRV, as well as a number of Council services, raised by Village members.

Limitations on the local waste service – being open only at certain times, issues around items having to be bagged, and the issue that white goods are not accepted. Residents are requesting skip bins because they say people are instead taking their rubbish to Curlewis.

The condition of the fence was raised at the cemetery, with locals feeling it is in need of attention.

There were overall concerns regarding the affordability of the proposed rate increase in correlation with their perceived lack of services provided to the Breeza Village.

Photo: Breeza meeting.



Community Information Sessions – Gunnedah

Date: 14 August, 2024

Time: 10am-12pm (Verdict Coffee Shop)

6pm – 10.30pm (Gunnedah Town Hall)

Location: Gunnedah Town Hall & Verdict Coffee Shop

Attendees: approx. 105

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

The community feedback session was marked by a sense of deep frustration, scepticism, anger, and concern, particularly focused on local governance, financial management, and infrastructure issues. The dominant sentiment throughout the session is one of dissatisfaction, with attendees voicing anger, distrust, and anxiety about the Council's ability to manage resources effectively.

Key Themes

1. Distrust and Scepticism Toward the Council:

- Questions around transparency and inefficiency were raised repeatedly, such as doubts about how rates are used, with attendees questioning the allocation of funds, including unnecessary expenditures on signage and infrastructure (e.g., "time and temperature sign").

2. Frustration with Infrastructure (Roads):

- Roads are a major recurring theme, especially from farmers who feel that the Council has neglected rural infrastructure, commenting roads are often vulnerable to flooding, thus isolating older residents.
- Multiple participants shared stories of dangerous roads and accidents caused by inadequate maintenance, emphasizing the life-threatening risks poor road conditions pose.

3. Economic Concerns:

- Many attendees raised concerns about the Council's operational costs, especially in terms of wage growth outpacing the rates collected.
- Rate increases were another source of contention, with people questioning the need for an SRV (Special Rate Variation) when they perceive that there's been mismanagement of funds.

4. Calls for Efficiency and Staff Reductions:

- Several attendees, called for reducing Council staff and operational costs to balance the budget, especially criticising what they saw as inflated wage bills.

5. Emotional Responses and Advocacy:

1. Emotional appeals at the town meeting were prevalent, such as the woman who shared her story about her sister rolling her car due to poor road conditions, and impassioned concern for safety on local roads.
2. Applause followed comments about Council's inefficiency and for calls for reducing rates indicating strong community alignment on these frustrations.

6. Engagement but Overriding Discontent:

1. While there were some polite exchanges (e.g., a man thanking staff for flyers), the overall tone was adversarial, with heated interactions, such as yelling, upset behaviour, and people repeatedly challenging the Council representatives.

7. Distrust Toward Rate Increase Proposals:

- Many attendees felt that the justification for the rate increase was insufficient. They were particularly concerned about being asked to shoulder higher financial burdens while questioning the Council's efficiency.





Gunnedah Shire Council

August 14 · 🌐



Community information session about potential Special Rate Variation now in progress at the Town Hall.



👤 Erin Carroll and 5 others

2 shares

👍 Like

➦ Share

Community Information Session – Gunnedah Library

Date: 15 August, 2024

Time: 10am – 12pm

Location: Gunnedah Library

Attendees: approx. 8

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

The single attendee's feedback carries a positive and constructive tone, mixed with some frustration toward certain issues. He was impressed with how the Council conducted the Gunnedah Town Hall presentation the night before, particularly with GSC's GM Eric Groth and Director Kelly Stidworthy and how they both spoke. He was conversational, open to expressing his thoughts, and conveyed respect for the effort put into the meeting, especially on the communication front.

Key Themes

1. Constructive Criticism:

- He suggested simplifying the presentations, emphasizing the need to "keep it simple stupid" and avoid overwhelming the audience with too many figures. He advocated for sticking to "big picture thinking" rather than delving into personal matters.
- Attendee expressed his understanding of the community's struggles, acknowledging that "everyone is hurting" and urging the Council to reconsider whether certain initiatives are truly necessary.

2. Frustration with Council Efficiency:

- Despite positive interactions with Council staff when attending Council administration front desk ("they are polite and nice"), he was frustrated with the Council's lack of action on development-related complaints, particularly regarding traffic and entry points.
- His scepticism extended to the notion of a potential future amalgamation with Tamworth, which he viewed as a risk/source of false promises.

3. Call for Transparency:

- He urged the Council to be more transparent in their communication, especially regarding funding and projects. He advised clarity on grants and programs, noting that it "looks bad" when details are not made clear.



Photo: Gunnedah Shire Library, generic photo: source Namoi Valley Independent.

Gunnedah West Rotary Club Information Session

Date: 15 August, 2024

Time: 7 – 9pm

Location: Gunnedah West Rotary Club Briefing

Attendees: approx. 25

Discussion Summary

Attended by General Manager Eric Groth, Director of Corporate Services Kelly Stidworthy from Gunnedah Shire Council and Local Government Consultant Chris Weber, a formal presentation was given to the attending members of the Gunnedah West Rotary Club around the Proposed SRV. With an opportunity for the attendees to ask questions, a number of items of feedback and questions were given to Kelly and Chris. Including:

- Rural properties have a different rate differential applied to them.
- Why doesn't Council increase rates by smaller increments each year instead of waiting and then asking for a large SRV?
- Don't include slides in your presentation if they are hard to read.
- On the slide that says if there is no SRV there would be a local economic impact, there is also an opposite economic impact to residents who will need to pay more under the SRV, particularly those on a fixed income.
- What is the Council spend on large projects like the airport, saleyards and koala sanctuary?
- How much did the consultant cost for the Kitchener Park Upgrade plan and why does the proposal from Council only support one sport there rather than multi-use?
- How much did the consultant cost for the Kitchener Park Upgrade plan and why does the proposal from Council only support one sport there rather than multi-use?
- The SRV figures you have quoted include the rate peg, which we would have to pay anyway. Why don't you advertise the figures without the rate peg to make it appear more palatable?



Photo: GM Eric Groth, Kelly Stidworthy and Chris Weber with members of the Gunnedah West Rotary Club.

Gunnedah Sunday Markets Community Information Session

Date: 17 August, 2024

Time: 8.30am – 1pm

Location: Gunnedah Markets, Wolseley Oval

Attendees: approx. 55

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

Overall, the feedback revealed a mix of dissatisfaction with current service quality and maintenance, alongside constructive suggestions for improvement and optimization. The sentiment was focused on addressing specific issues, enhancing operational efficiency, and investing in new facilities and amenities to benefit the community.

Key Themes

Frustration and Dissatisfaction:

- **Service Quality:** Numerous comments expressed frustration with the quality of various services, including maintenance of roads, footpaths, and public facilities. The sentiment here is predominantly negative, highlighting dissatisfaction with the execution of recent work and ongoing issues.
- **Infrastructure Maintenance:** Concerns about leaking public toilets, poor road re-sealing, and the condition of Rowena Street reflect a negative sentiment toward the Council's infrastructure maintenance practices.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **Operational Improvements:** There are several suggestions for improving Council operations, such as reducing reliance on contractors and managing staffing levels. This reflects a constructive sentiment aimed at optimising resource use and operational efficiency.
- **Enhancing Facilities:** Suggestions include setting up a learn-to-swim business, charging more for swimming lanes, and beautifying the town with bronze koala statues. These reflect a positive and proactive sentiment toward enhancing community facilities and amenities.

Concerns About Cost and Efficiency:

- **Cost of Development:** The higher cost of land development in Gunnedah compared to Narrabri indicates a concern about financial efficiency and the need for better cost management.
- **Contractor Use:** A call to reduce the use of contractors suggests a concern about cost efficiency and a desire for more in-house management of tasks.

Calls for Action:

- **Addressing Specific Issues:** Feedback includes calls to address specific problems such as damaged aircraft removal, airport maintenance, and footpath repairs. This indicates a direct and urgent sentiment focused on resolving practical issues.



Community Information Session – AgQuip

Date: 20-22 August, 2024

Time: 8.30am – 5pm

Location: Agquip Field Days – Gunnedah Shire Council Stand

Attendees: approx. 27

Discussion Points

Overall Sentiment

Overall, the feedback sessions highlighted a mix of frustration and appreciation, with strong calls for improved transparency, better value for money, and enhanced service delivery. The emphasis was on addressing specific issues, improving current practices, and ensuring that financial and operational decisions are communicated clearly and fairly.

Key Themes

Frustration and Discontent:

- **Rate Increases:** Some feedback expressed significant frustration and concern about the substantial increase in rates. The sentiment was strongly negative, highlighting financial strain and dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of benefits.
- **Service Quality:** Several comments reflected dissatisfaction with the quality of infrastructure work and service delivery, indicating a negative sentiment toward how issues are being managed.

Positive Feedback:

SRV Presentation: The presentation on the SRV is praised for its clarity, and there is positive feedback regarding the Council staff's efforts in maintaining rest areas, showing appreciation for their hard work.

Concern and Criticism:

Transparency and Accountability: Questions about the costs of new branding, consultants, and compliance costs revealed a critical sentiment toward the Council's financial transparency and accountability.

Infrastructure Issues: Concerns about the lack of proper signage, septic tank maintenance, unpaid invoices, and inadequate road repairs suggest a critical view of the Council's handling of infrastructure issues.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **Service Enhancements:** Feedback suggests improvements in service delivery, such as better maintenance practices and extended operating hours for facilities. This reflects a proactive and constructive sentiment aimed at addressing specific issues

Financial Impact and Fairness:

- **Rate Increase Concerns:** The significant rate increase and its perceived unfairness are central issues. Stakeholders feel the increase is disproportionate and that they are not receiving commensurate benefits.
- **Value for Money:** There is a recurring theme of questioning whether the services provided justify the costs. Feedback highlights concern about receiving value for money.

Service and Infrastructure Quality:

- **Maintenance Issues:** There are multiple concerns about infrastructure maintenance, including road repairs, septic tank issues, and unpaid invoices. This indicates dissatisfaction with the quality and reliability of services.
- **Operational Improvements:** Requests for more frequent road maintenance and better management of facilities reflect a desire for improved service delivery and infrastructure management.

Transparency and Accountability:

- **Cost Transparency:** Feedback seeks clarity on the costs associated with Council's new branding and consultancy services. There is a call for better transparency in financial matters.
- **Community Consultation:** Questions about the level of community consultation for projects like Kitchener Park indicate a desire for more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **Enhanced Service Delivery:** Recommendations include improving the quality of current services, extending operational hours, and better communication regarding infrastructure projects. This suggests a constructive approach to resolving issues.





Gunnedah Library “Brain Trainers” Briefing

Date: 2 September, 2024

Time: 10:30 – 11:30am

Location: Gunnedah Library

Attendees: approx. 8

Discussion Summary

Attended by Director of Corporate Services Kelly Stidworthy from Gunnedah Shire, a casual conversation was had with attending community members (mainly within pensioner demographic) for the ‘Brain Training’ gathering at the Gunnedah Library. A number of important issues, statements and questions were raised within those conversations, including:

- Pension rebates for rates have not increased for many years
- The cost of everything is going up and there is nothing to offset the increase in costs pensioners are experiencing
- Could the SRV be spread over three years to help with managing the increase in costs as pensioners are on a relatively fixed income?
- The increase in rates (and other costs) may prevent people from being able to retire
- Physical access for elderly and disabled people is an important consideration for Council
- Could Council investigate selling effluent to farms out of town, solar panels for street lighting or even a solar farm for Gunnedah to reduce costs and increase revenue?
- The information reported publicly was a bit confusing and having it explained in person helps make it clearer.

The final point reinforces the importance of face-to-face engagement and strengthens this delivery method to be a priority for any future approaches made by Council in tackling big issues within community.



Gunnedah Shire Council

Community Strategic Plan and Special Rate Variation

Community Information Pack

2 August 2024



AGENDA

- **Community Strategic Plan**
 - Current Community Strategic Plan themes
 - Are they still current and appropriate.
- **Financial Sustainability & Special Rate Variation**
 - Current Financial position
 - Our options
 - Why consider an SRV?
 - SRV value for discussion
 - Impact on ratepayers
 - Where will the money be spent?
 - How do we compare to others
 - Is it just Gunnedah Shire in this position?
- **Discussion**

Community Strategic Plan Review

- **Current Themes**
- **Theme 1: Engaging and Supporting the Community**
 - Focused on community leadership, engagement in decision-making and Council's role as an organisation and the need to fund and manage infrastructure.
- **Theme 2: Building our Shire's Economy**
 - Focuses on an increasing population, investment and diversifying the Shore's economic base.
- **Theme 3: Retaining Our Quality of Life**
 - Focuses on creating positivity of country living, in a supportive and friendly community.
 - It is a great place to bring up a family. Parklands, open space, sporting and cultural facilities offer a wide range of recreational opportunities. "There is always something to do if you are interested."
- **Theme 4: Protecting and Enjoying Our Beautiful Surrounds**
 - Focuses on our beautiful surrounds include the open plains, landscapes, waterways, native flora and fauna as well as our built environment, heritage, parks and urban streetscapes.
 - Covers agriculture benefits from productive soils and mining from high quality coal deposits.
 - Notes the importance of the balance between development and industry and maintaining biodiversity.
 - Covers the need for our precious koalas need to be protected and nurtured.

Themes: Are they still current?

- Where do we want to be in 10 years' time?
- What are our current priorities and aspirations?
- Is the community willing to pay for additional services (either new or increased services)
- Are our current themes still current?
 - *Engaging and Supporting the Community*
 - *Building our Shire's economy*
 - *Retaining our quality of life*
 - *Protecting and Enjoying our beautiful surrounds*

Open New Horizons



Gunnedah
Shire Council

Current Financial Position Forecast Operating Result



- Councils' current rates income is approximately \$16m per year and has an operating deficit of \$3.1m/year in the General Fund excluding Domestic Waste Management.
- This means Council is spending \$3.1m less than required to maintain its assets and for each year this continues, the asset renewal backlog increases by \$3.1m
- GSC's general fund is currently in a stable but weakening financial position, heavily reliant on State and Federal grants. (for example, the \$3.1m deficit includes additional roads funding not guaranteed after 28/29)
- GSC has limited unrestricted cash reserves and without addressing this, GSC will move into a negative unrestricted cash position within three years. This cannot be allowed to happen.
- It is important to note the bank account balance does not equal the unrestricted cash reserves. There are concerns \$10m in the bank may be seen as 'not bad' which is misleading.

What are our options

The options Council has available include:

- 1. Reducing service levels, which will impact the local economy,*
- 2. Sell and/or dispose of assets that will reduce the associated on-going expenses,*
- 3. Increase income raised through rates, user fee and charges, and other sources, or*
- 4. A combination of the above options.*

Open New Horizons



Gunnedah
Shire Council

Why an SRV?

- Efficiency gains can only cover a portion of the shortfall.
- GSC has very limited opportunity to increase own source revenue.
- Council's income base from rates is fixed. Any increase is limited to an annual 'rate peg' amount set by the State Government.
- The rate peg has not been sufficient to cover the true increase in the cost of running Council in recent years.
 - If the rate peg has been 2%pa below the real increased cost of services, it equates to a compound effect of 22% over the past ten years.
 - At 3% it equates to a compounded effect of 34% over the past ten years.

Open New Horizons



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Shire Council

How much does Council need?

- Council needs an additional \$3.1m per annum on top of normal cost increases (currently approx. \$800k per annum) to address the current known asset renewal gap in General Fund excluding domestic waste.
- Council also needs an additional \$1.5m per year to create capacity that will allow us to:
 - commence addressing the infrastructure backlog
 - The Roads and Buildings backlog is currently \$15m over 10 years.

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

What is the Proposed SRV?

- Council is discussing an SRV of 38.88% to be implemented over two years.
- The proposed SRV is for maintaining our assets by addressing the renewal gap and creating capacity to commence addressing the backlog of works.
- The implementation would be proposed as:
 - 24% in year one – this will address the current renewal gap to stop further asset deterioration, and
 - 12% in year – this will create capacity to commence addressing the backlog.

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

Implications of the SRV Options

Do Nothing

- Always an option and the default scenario if no decision to proceed is made.
- Will result in a further deterioration of assets and an increase in the asset renewal backlog.
- Will ultimately mean a lower level of service over key asset classes

38.88% increase implemented across two years and retained permanently

- Will allow for the assets to be maintained at current targeted service levels
- Will create capacity to address a portion of the backlog of renewal works.
- Will create some capacity to address the impacts of cost shifting and match future grant opportunities.
- Implementing over two years will reduce the single year impact on ratepayers and time to build resources to utilise the funds.
- Will allow more time to seek other funding sources
- Potential to not apply full amount if alternate funding can be sourced.

Impacts of the SRV Options – No SRV

Category	2024/25 Average per annum	Year 1 Increase / per annum	Year 1 Increase / per week	Year 2 Increase / per annum	Year 2 Increase / per week	2026/27 Average per annum
Residential	\$1,106	\$54	\$1.04	\$58	\$1.12	\$1,218
Business	\$5,899	\$286	\$5.50	\$309	\$5.94	\$6,494
Farmland	\$5,337	\$258	\$4.96	\$280	\$5.38	\$5,875

Under this option the impact would be:

- Our sealed and gravel road networks would deteriorate.
- Council would not be able to maintain the range of facilities and services currently provided.
- Council would rely heavily on grant funding to renew existing assets.
- Community and recreational facilities such as pools and buildings will continue to deteriorate if grant funding is not successful, and potentially closed when the risk of operating becomes unacceptable.
- Council's backlog of roadworks would continue to increase and gravel roads would not be improved.



Impacts of the SRV Options – 38.88% increase

Category	2024/25 Average per annum	Year 1 Increase / per annum	Year 1 Increase / per week	Year 2 Increase / per annum	Year 2 Increase / per week	2026/27 Average per annum
Residential	\$1,106	\$264	\$5.08	\$164	\$3.15	\$1,534
Business	\$5,899	\$1,405	\$27.02	\$877	\$16.87	\$8,181
Farmland	\$5,337	\$1,271	\$24.44	\$793	\$15.25	\$7,401

The proposed SRV is anticipated to generate an additional revenue of \$6.2 million over a two-year period from 2025-2026 to 2026-2027 and will be used to fund maintenance of local infrastructure, including:

- Grading unsealed local roads to meet existing service levels;
- Additional maintenance of rural roads;
- Roadwork and renewal of urban streets;
- Increased bitumen resealing and gravel re-sheeting to keep our roads at a good standard and prevent them from deteriorating;
- Culverts, causeways, drainage and footpath renewal; and
- Community assets renewal.

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Shire Council

Where would the money be spent?

Rate Peg Only	24% increase in year 1	12% increase in year 2
Additional income of \$777,000 (based on 5%).	Additional income of \$3.82m	Additional income of \$2.38m
The funds would be split to cover award wages increases and contractual obligations with any residual allocated to asset classes and priority works if/where possible. (e.g. the 24/25 award wage increase equates to \$500,000 for general fund excluding waste).	\$800k – general cost increases due to award wages increase and contract obligations Infrastructure Renewal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2.1m – Transport • \$500k Open Space • \$400k – Buildings • Stormwater – TBD <p><i>Transport includes Sealed Roads, Unsealed roads, Bridges, Signage</i></p>	\$900k – general cost increases due to award wages increase and contract obligations \$1,500,000 ➤ commence addressing the backlog of works (Commencing with Roads and Buildings).

None of these scenarios include any capacity to address items such as the Cultural precinct Masterplan, Admin building upgrades until at least year five and assuming future rate pegs cover the true increase in operating costs.

What do you get for you General Rates?

- Residential - \$21.27 / week, Business - \$113.44/week,
- Farmland - \$102.63/week (values and services exclude Water, Sewer and Domestic Waste)

- Roads, bridges and transport services
- Libraries/library services
- Cemeteries
- Sporting facilities and grounds
- Events and festivals
- Arts and cultural facilities
- Swimming pools/Aquatic centres
- Parks and playgrounds
- Community buildings/halls
- Development Control and Planning
- Street cleaning / Street Lighting
- Public Amenities
- Emergency Services (RFS, SES, Fire & Rescue, ESL)
- Community safety/crime prevention / Graffiti management

- Youth Services
- Local area/town centre appearance
- Health / Food safety
- Weed / Vegetation control
- Stormwater drainage/flood management
- Litter control & rubbish dumping
- Protecting the natural environment
- Tree management
- Economic Development
- Domestic animal control
- Tourism
- Protecting heritage values and buildings
- Community Engagement
- Governance / Elected members / Grant applications
- Advocacy

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

How will the SRV impacts my Rates



ABN 60 163 655 793
Administration Building
63 Edge St, Gunnedah
PO Box 63, Gunnedah, NSW 2380
Enquiries (02) 6740 2100
Email: council@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au

Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
GUNNEDAH NSW 2380

RATES AND CHARGES NOTICE 01/07/2024 to 30/06/2025

RATES ACCOUNT NUMBER	
DATE OF POSTING	17/07/2024
DUE DATE	31/08/2024
RATEABLE VALUE BASE DATE	1/07/2022
RATE CATEGORY	Residential Gunnedah

eNotices

To have your notices emailed
Register at gunnedah.enotices.com.au
Reference No: 0B9D30F36S

PARTICULARS OF RATES AND CHARGES	CENTS IN \$	RATEABLE VALUE	AMOUNT
Residential Gunnedah	0.01172653	49,900	\$585.15
GWS Availability Charge	242.50	1	\$242.50
Sewer Availability Charge	638.40	1	\$638.40
DWMS 1- 140L waste/240L rec/240L green	440.00	1	\$440.00
Waste Management Facility Fee	86.90	1	\$86.90

	2024/25 Value	25/26 - 24% SRV	26/27 - 12% SRV	25/26 Annual Increase	25/26 Weekly Increase	26/27 Annual Increase	26/27 Weekly Increase
Residential Gunnedah	\$ 585.15	\$ 724.57	\$ 811.56	\$ 130.42	\$ 2.69	\$ 96.99	\$ 1.87
		25/26 - 5%	26/27 - 5%				
GWS Availability Charge	\$ 242.50	\$ 254.63	\$ 267.36	\$ 12.13	\$ 0.23	\$ 12.73	\$ 0.24
Sewer Availability Charge	\$ 638.40	\$ 722.62	\$ 756.96	\$ 34.42	\$ 0.69	\$ 36.14	\$ 0.70
DWMS 1- 140L waste/240L rec/240L green	\$ 440.00	\$ 462.00	\$ 485.30	\$ 22.00	\$ 0.42	\$ 23.30	\$ 0.44
Waste Management Fee	\$ 86.90	\$ 91.25	\$ 95.53	\$ 4.35	\$ 0.09	\$ 4.56	\$ 0.09
	\$ 2,042.95	\$ 2,255.26	\$ 2,439.79	\$ 212.31	\$ 4.09	\$ 363.52	\$ 3.34

Daily interest will be calculated on overdue Rates and Charges at 10.5% per annum.

1st INSTALLMENT	2nd INSTALLMENT	3rd INSTALLMENT	4th INSTALLMENT	TOTAL PAYMENT DUE
\$512.95 31/08/2024	\$510.00 30/11/2024	\$510.00 28/02/2025	\$510.00 31/05/2025	\$2,042.95

DEDUCT PAYMENTS MADE SINCE 12/07/2024

Impacts of the SRV Options - detailed

Rating Category	Sub-Category	Base Scenario (5% in 25/26)			Year One Increase (24% in 25/26)			Cumulative Year Two Increase (24% in 25/26 and 12% in 26/27)				
		Average Rate by Category	Increase in Average rate per annum	Additional Cost per week	Average Rate by Category	Increase in Average rate per annum	Additional Cost per week	Average Rate by Category	Increase in Average rate per annum	Year two weekly increase	Cumulative increase in Average rate per annum	Cumulative Additional Cost per week
Residential	Ordinary	\$993.37	\$46.02	\$0.89	\$1,173.04	\$225.70	\$4.34	\$1,313.84	\$140.80	\$2.71	\$366.50	\$7.05
	Rural	\$1,294.24	\$59.92	\$1.15	\$1,528.89	\$294.16	\$5.66	\$1,712.36	\$183.47	\$3.53	\$477.63	\$9.19
	Gunnedah	\$1,251.00	\$57.75	\$1.11	\$1,473.94	\$283.58	\$5.45	\$1,650.81	\$176.87	\$3.40	\$460.45	\$8.85
	Village	\$614.32	\$28.29	\$0.54	\$725.54	\$139.51	\$2.68	\$812.57	\$87.03	\$1.67	\$226.54	\$4.36
Business	Ordinary	\$1,027.07	\$47.23	\$0.91	\$1,213.25	\$233.41	\$4.48	\$1,358.24	\$145.22	\$2.79	\$378.40	\$7.28
	Gunnedah	\$7,288.80	\$337.29	\$6.49	\$8,607.60	\$1,656.09	\$31.85	\$9,640.58	\$1,032.98	\$19.87	\$2,689.07	\$51.71
	Business Power Generation	\$12,151.13	\$562.30	\$10.81	\$14,349.69	\$2,760.86	\$53.09	\$16,071.78	\$1,722.09	\$33.12	\$4,482.95	\$86.21
Fermland		\$5,595.43	\$258.89	\$4.98	\$6,607.85	\$1,271.31	\$24.45	\$7,400.80	\$792.95	\$15.25	\$2,064.26	\$39.70
Mining		\$331,774.99	\$15,359.02	\$295.37	\$392,042.13	\$75,426.21	\$1,450.50	\$439,087.13	\$47,045.00	\$904.71	\$122,471.21	\$2,355.22
Additional Yield			\$777,378.75			\$3,817,734.71			\$2,381,205.71			

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Shire Council

What if I am struggling to pay my rates

- Council is aware of the rising costs faced by the community. These same drivers are one of the key factors driving this conversation.
- Council has reviewed and updated its Councils 'Hardship Policy' which works to provide relief.
- Council is reviewing options to minimise the impact of any potential rate rise on residents including consideration of a potential freeze of some annual charges
 - e.g., domestic waste and sewer charges for one year if the SRV proceeds to minimise the impact on the community.
- Council will also seek to ensure the community are aware of the various methods available to pay rates. For example, demonstrate how residents can pay their rates in smaller but more frequent payments, e.g., weekly/fortnightly/monthly.

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Shire Council

What is Council doing to improve efficiencies?

- Council will also continue improving its operations, however there is not enough capacity to cover the full amount of the asset renewal gap through efficiency gains alone.
- Efficiency gains are normally used to offset unexpected expenses, such as cost shifting, and minimise future increases.
- Recent improvement and savings include:
 - Insurance savings,
 - Reduced electricity costs (street lighting and Sewer treatment Plant),
 - Service Review program,
 - Changed unsealed roads techniques (compaction v dry grading),
 - Parks and Gardens (GPS line marking, irrigation systems),
 - IT system improvements and Planning portal integration, and
 - Library service improvements.

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Shire Council

Is it only Gunnedah Shire Council?

- No, Financial sustainability is a significant issue across local government in NSW.
- Recent years have seen:
 - Significant Cost shifting (e.g., Emergency Services Levy)
 - Increased regulatory costs (e.g., increased audit costs),
 - Growth in asset base. (largely created from grant-funded projects, which are good for the community but create ongoing funding requirements),
 - Labour market challenges, and
 - Large increases in the cost of maintaining assets (e.g., increased price of steel, concrete and associated services).

There are currently multiple reviews being undertaken across the sector to review how we ensure appropriate and sustainable Councils into the future. These include

- Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability, and
- Inquiry - Ability of local governments to fund infrastructure and services.

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

Is it only Gunnedah Shire Council (cont.)

Across the North-West and the New England, the following Councils have applied for and received SRVs in the past two years.

- Tamworth Regional Council – 36.3% over two years (24/25)
- Armidale Regional Council – 58.8% over three years (23/24)
- Liverpool Plains Shire Council – 18.1% in one year (23/24)
- Tenterfield Council – 43% in one year (23/24)
- Walcha Council – 57.74% across three years (23/24)

Across the state

- Nine (9) Councils made applications for 24/25, and
- 17 applications in 23/24.

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Shire Council

Timeline

29 July – 6 September

- Community Consultation

9 September – 23 September

- Report on outcomes in preparation for new Council
- Update draft CSP on feedback from consultation

October

- Present findings to new Council

November / early December

- Final decision on SRV application by new Council

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

How to get information and provide feedback

Information

- Council's website
 - Background Information
 - Rates Calculator
- Community Engagement Sessions
- Newsletter's
- Call Council's customer service team

Feedback

- Community Engagement Sessions
- Council's website
- Email Council
- ***IPART will also undertake consultation if an application proceeds***

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Gunnedah
Shire Council

Q&A

- **Where do we want to be in 10 years' time?**
- **What are our current priorities and aspirations?**
- **Is the community willing to pay for additional services (either new or increased services)?**
- **Are our current themes still current?**
 - *Engaging and Supporting the Community*
 - *Building our Shire's economy*
 - *Retaining our quality of life*
 - *Protecting and Enjoying our beautiful surrounds*
- **How does the potential SRV application affect your feedback?**

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Appendix

➤ Comparison of Rates

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Shire Council

Comparison of Rates – Neighbouring Councils

Rates comparisons for Gunnedah to the two neighbouring Councils closest in services from the 2024/25 financial year.

	Average Residential rate \$			Average Business rate \$			Average Farmland rate \$		
	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
	Current Year	(1st SV year)	(2nd SV year)	Current Year	(1st SV year)	(2nd SV year)	Current Year	(1st SV year)	(2nd SV year)
Gunnedah Shire Council	\$1,106.17	\$1,369.68	\$1,534.04	\$5,898.78	\$7,304.32	\$8,180.84	\$5,336.54	\$6,607.85	\$7,400.80
Narrabri Shire	\$1,143.18	\$1,200.34	\$1,260.36	\$2,921.42	\$3,067.49	\$3,220.86	\$4,437.54	\$4,659.42	\$4,892.39
Tamworth Regional	\$1,387.41	\$1,595.52	\$1,675.30	\$4,942.02	\$5,683.32	\$5,967.49	\$2,530.45	\$2,910.02	\$3,055.52
Average	\$1,063.63	\$1,186.21	\$1,264.69	\$3,652.78	\$4,156.38	\$4,466.46	\$4,290.81	\$4,756.86	\$5,087.21
Difference to Average (\$)	-\$159.13	-\$28.25	\$66.21	\$1,967.06	\$2,928.92	\$3,586.67	\$1,852.55	\$2,823.13	\$3,426.85
Difference to Average (%)	-14.385%	-2.063%	4.316%	33.347%	40.098%	43.842%	34.714%	42.724%	²⁶ 46.304%

Appendix M – Written Submissions

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 2 August 2024 2:55 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: Rate Increase.

Dear Council Members,

I would like to express my extreme frustration with the discussion around rate rises for the Gunnedah area, in particular for farmers. With the new increase we are looking at and an additional \$2000 per year. It is extremely frustrating when we receive no services from council, yet are expected to pay 4 times more than a family/ residential house in town who has access to all services provided by council. Particularly when the rate of wage increases is nowhere near reflecting the increases in bills and service costs. I would like to express my distaste when explaining where the money will go; roads, council infrastructure and parks and gardens. All of these should be able to be maintained without such a huge increase. If the council and it's contractors would stop blowing budgets by millions of dollars (saleyards, bridge overpass, concrete roundabout) maybe there would be enough money to do other things!

I am FURIOUS that I will go from paying over \$5000 a year to OVER \$7000! I cannot fathom such a huge increase. It is absolutely irresponsible by council thinking that this is fair when every family is struggling to pay bills and feed their family.

I DO NOT support this rate increase.

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Farming Resident.

From: Gunnedah Shire Council - gunnedah.nsw.gov.au [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 4 August 2024 9:31 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: New submission from 'Subscribe to Council'!

We have a new "Contact Us" form submission on www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au!
Please take any necessary action to register these details and forward the request to the appropriate staff member(s)

First Name

[REDACTED]

Last Name

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Phone Number

[REDACTED]

Email Address

[REDACTED]

Comments

I know that most people believe that a lot of miners live here in town , but I'm sure that there is a lot of people will not be able to afford to live here or invest.

Thanks in advance,
Gunnedah Shire Council Webmaster

[REDACTED]
Special Rate Variation Submission
PO Box 63 (63 Elgin Street)
GUNNEDAH NSW 2380

7 August 2024

I write to oppose the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV).

My family live and farm on the Southern Boundary of the Gunnedah Shire Council; we also farm country in the Liverpool Plains Shire Council.

We live on an unsealed Shire road approximately 50kms from Gunnedah. We have no Council supplied garbage service, no Council supplied sewerage service, and no Council supplied water.

Our gravel road gets graded twice a year (if we are lucky) and is in a permanent state of disrepair.

Approximately 90% of heavy freight generated from our business (grain or stock) travels South, meaning it travels less than 10kms on a Gunnedah Shire Council road.

While we do avail ourselves of some services in Gunnedah (ie farm supplies, machinery, parts, groceries etc) we very rarely use any other Council supplied services.

I understand that Council feels compelled to provide sporting, library and other such services and contribute to the general amenity of the town. I think a disproportionate cost of this falls on rates raised from farmland. I feel the proposition of a SRV is a Band-Aid attempt to push the general funding problems down the road but does not address the obvious fundamental problem — the way Council raises finances is unsustainable. [REDACTED] own statement points this out where he says "...like other Councils, we have been negatively impacted over time by the rate peg not keeping up with actual cost increases, reduced levels of financial assistance, cost shifting from other levels of Government and an expanding infrastructure base, which is needed to support our growing community".

Personally all I see is an attempt by Council to "cost shift" its financial problems onto ratepayers who have no ability (on the whole) to pass on these cost increases or absorb them.

In the case of a farming business like our family we are "price takers" in the international markets and have no ability to raise prices for grain or livestock to cover input price increases.

Councils and their Representative bodies should be working hard to lobby State and Federal Government to obtain a more sustainable funding arrangement. As I stated earlier a SRV over two years seems to me to be not getting to the heart of the problem.

The table supplied to support the section "How would the increase impact me" is quite misleading. While the numbers may well be correct it gives the impression that the rate rise would be inconsequential.

The impact on my home and businesses would be as follows (as best I can work out):

Three Titles total	
2023-2024	2024-2026 with proposed SRV
\$35,700.55	\$49,082.03

This is an increase of approximately \$13,381.48 within two years. This is NOT an insignificant amount.

The proposed SRV increase follows an increase on just one of our land titles from 22-23 of \$13,733.79 to 23-24 \$20,297.16 = \$6,563.37 for ONE title in ONE year.

Note to that we have absorbed a significant increase on rates for our Liverpool Plains Shire Council properties this year as well.

I also feel that having been through this process once before, that for you to say Council has yet to make a decision on whether to proceed with an application for a SRV quite disingenuous! I doubt this process would have started without a determination to proceed to an application.

I am sure that like me, most other ratepayers feel powerless to stop the process regardless of the fact that we do not get our money's worth from the Council for what we already pay each year.

Regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 August 2024 10:13 AM
To: Council Email
Subject: NO to the special Rate Variation

To whom it may concern,

I wish to express my thought concerning the Special Rates Variation within Gunnedah shire.

I do not want the special variation rate rise.

I understand and also want growth in our shire but I also see a lot of jobs badly done and then having to be repaired over and over again in our shire. One example and the biggest one is the repairing of roads. This to me is wasted funds brought forward through bad management.

Maybe being transparent with community members on the actual budget and where proposed fund are allocated will give us rate payers confidence in where our hard earned money is going.

Before the members of this community are forced to pay excessive rates it would be beneficial for council to rectify this issue and then see where the budget would stand.

Please reply to my email so I know my voice has been heard with your thoughts on my concern.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

From: Gunnedah Shire Council - gunnedah.nsw.gov.au [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 August 2024 10:41 AM
To: Council Email
Subject: New submission from 'Subscribe to Council'!

We have a new "Contact Us" form submission on www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au!
Please take any necessary action to register these details and forward the request to the appropriate staff member(s)

First Name

[REDACTED]

Last Name

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Phone Number

[REDACTED]

Email Address

[REDACTED]

Comments

I strongly disagree with the proposed rate rises, and the rushed timing of the proposal. Let it be considered by the incoming council in a careful considered manner, with time for community feedback. The rise above pegged rates cannot be justified on the grounds outlined. Get some flood mitigation measures worked out first.

Thanks in advance,
Gunnedah Shire Council Webmaster

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 August 2024 4:02 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: SVR

If you think the councillors will not receive severe pushback by the public you are wrong.

To keep you people in check, I'm think I might run for council.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, 10 August 2024 9:15 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Customer Request [REDACTED]

Good Morning,

[REDACTED]

Without wanting to appear like another individual complaining about Council's shortcomings, I sadly find myself starting to fall into that camp. Having observed the commentary around the community engagement (or lack thereof) in relation to the rates variation proposal I would suggest that there is an obvious and distinct disconnect between realistic commercial business and how Council appear to operate.

On another matter, I would like to formally request that a more permanent solution be worked on for the gully's on Perfremet Road that get washed badly during each flood event. There are residents that are currently cut off from leaving their properties with some of them being elderly. They have been unable to get to town since Tuesday and this issue occurs every time there is a flood event. I understand it will be a costly exercise but if the calculations were to be conducted on the expense of repairing this road over the past 20 years, I am sure the council would find it may have been more cost effective to simply do the job properly once and for all.

If we are going to be expected to pay more rates, I would like to see some more value. As it currently stands we pay higher rates due to land value/size yet get less services than the majority of ratepayers. We manage our own household water provisions, deal with our own sewage and do not get any sort of value for waste management fees that appear as part of the fees we are charged. Our roads are rarely in good condition in this part of the shire so I think if the rates rise does occur, Gunnedah Shire Council needs to lift their game for rural ratepayers.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 13 August 2024 5:38 AM
To: Council Email
Subject: Rate Increase

To whom it may concern,
Let it be known that I, [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] who pays rates for [REDACTED] is OPPOSED to any rate increase.

Sent from my iPhone

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 13 August 2024 4:06 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: SRV

TO COUNCILLORS AND STAFF

It seems you have been overspending and have no intention of tightening council spending belts. Why don't you cut spending on non essential items and stick to the basics? The out of control cost of living surely requires this. Ratepayers resent your joyful playing with their money.

[REDACTED]
Sent from my iPad

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 14 August 2024 6:17 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: Rate Rises - Response

Good evening,

I am emailing in regards to the proposed rate rises that the Gunnedah Council wish to impose. I would like to formally complain at the proposed rates and wish to convey that we are TOTALLY AGAINST any rate increases. In the last 2yrs we have had MASSIVE rate increases, yet we are now starring down the barrel of an increase that I cannot believe we are seeing. We own a number of properties in the Gunnedah shire, and it has come to a point where our business can no longer sustain such increases. We are at the point where we are now going to have to consider whether we start laying off residents of the Gunnedah shire who work for us just so that we can afford to pay for services that we do not get from the shire council.

We pay for THREE separate garbage collections across our properties, yet we do not receive a collection on one of them. Our roads are worse than ever! Last year we had 11 tyre punctures on just one of our vehicles that travels down the Orange Grove Road due to an incredibly shaly rough road that is graded a long time apart and requires urgent gravel top up. We have also had many other punctures on other vehicles. I am appalled that this is being considered, I think that if the council was far better with the use of our money, this would not be required. How about the number of people working on a road now? How do we have 2 people standing at a traffic light just so that 1 person can press a button to let traffic through. Every time I drive through a road work there are people sitting in cars and camp chairs doing absolutely nothing! Is the council blind to this? The reason you are looking for increased rates is because you are disgustingly wasteful with our money. Do you think a multi-million dollar koala corridor is needed if you are struggling with your budget? Is it the most urgent service that is required for the rate payer? The vast majority would say no! So why are you spending on these things?

[REDACTED]

From: Gunnedah Shire Council - gunnedah.nsw.gov.au [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 23 August 2024 11:26 AM
To: Council Email
Subject: New submission from 'Subscribe to Council!'

We have a new "Contact Us" form submission on www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au!
Please take any necessary action to register these details and forward the request to the appropriate staff member(s)

First Name

[REDACTED]

Last Name

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Phone Number

[REDACTED]

Email Address

[REDACTED]

Comments

Cost must be of high importance the GOV local state and federal) all have NO MONEY.
And than Need.... What do we actually need in this global recession???????

No not change ovals around, we need kitchener to have basket ball courts and be accessible to the school. no learn to ride area, its not the city. proper working amenities need to be at all grounds as does seating grandstands something to sit on. And thats it. but again how much does it cost?? Maybe we should just wait a few years till times improve for people.

Thanks in advance,
Gunnedah Shire Council Webmaster

24th August 2024

SCANNED

27 AUG 2024

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
re: Rate Variation Consultation.

Dear Sir,

Having attended the Consultation meeting in the Town Hall, I was not surprised at the angst displayed by those who attended.

I was particularly concerned at the attempt to claim a contribution of \$3.7 million towards the carleyards when in fact it was contributed by the Associated Agents.

Also your response to numerous questions as to the efficiency of staff and the continued response that you believed it to be 100%. Anyone in business knows that 100% efficiency is well-nigh impossible.

Comments by the consultant and yourself that Council has a large amount of "Restricted Assets" that cannot be used as General Revenue under any circumstances I found very disturbing. I refer to a \$700,000 deficit on the initial clean up of the Koala Park. When I heard this on the ABC I immediately rang [REDACTED] and asked why and where these funds would come from. The answer was that a large proportion would come from the Water and Sewer Fund. I was surprised by this, explaining that I had contributed near \$350,000 to this in headworks charges and that it was a Restricted Asset not designated for cleanup.

Perhaps some humility, transparency and austerity would go a long way in gaining ratepayers confidence.

As you probably can gather, I am totally opposed to any rate variation until this is demonstrated.

Yours Faithfully.



From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 3 September 2024 9:16 AM
To: Council Email
Subject: Objection to Proposed Special Rate Variation by Gunnedah Shire Council

I wish to express my concerns regarding the Gunnedah Shire Council's (GSC) proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) of 38.88% over two years commencing in 2025/26.

Why is the SRV needed over two years and not a longer timeframe of say 4 years?

The proposed SRV follows a SRV of 39.72% over four years from 2013/14 to 2016/17. This increase is permanent and is reflected in current rates. The GSC Annual Report for 2022/23 on page 26 states:

"Council has largely achieved the additional works outlined in the SRV application from additional revenue generated. The SRV increase has been retained in Council's rating base, and has positioned Council to meet additional operational and capital funding requirements, as Gunnedah Shire continues to grow and prosper."

How is it, that within 18 months, the council is again requesting more funds via a proposed 38.88% SRV from ratepayers to meet operational and capital requirements?

The allocation of rates between categories places an undue impost on farmland, as residents of rural areas do not use or utilise many of the facilities within the town of Gunnedah or the remote villages. My personal rates will increase by over \$24,000 over the two years. As a business, I can't approach my boss and ask for a pay rise to cover rising costs of living. My revenue fluctuates wildly with the seasons and prices achieved for the goods I produce are set by local and international markets.

The imposition of rates between categories needs to be addressed so that ratepayers are more likely to be charged for the level of service provided by GSC on a per capita basis.

In addition to the SRV, will user charges be increased by a similar amount?

Will the GSC continue to lobby State and Federal Governments for Grants to assist in the repair of roads and buildings?

GSC has not provided any details or evidence as to efficiency gains or savings they have made or plan to achieve.

Have council employees made productivity gains to assist council (and ratepayers) meet its obligations? For example will employees assist by working on RDOs? Has there been a review of Headcount within HQ? Can services be outsourced more cheaply or shared between local councils?

How will GSC ensure that SRV income is spent on the maintenance of assets? Will the funds be quarantined and

spent on roads and buildings? Will GSC be accountable and inform ratepayers as to how the extra income is spent?

Council roads (both sealed and unsealed) are badly maintained. Potholes on unsealed gravel roads reappear within a few weeks of being graded due to the techniques adopted by GSC staff. Holes are covered over by loose material that disappears as quickly as it was filled. Potholes on sealed roads are occasionally filled but, in a lot of cases, the filling is quickly lost and the pothole reappears. There is nothing more frustrating for a ratepayer than seeing poorly maintained roads. Repair the road once but please do it properly.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: Gunnedah Shire Council - gunnedah.nsw.gov.au <webmaster@gunnedah.nsw.gov.au>
Sent: Tuesday, 3 September 2024 2:17 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: New submission from 'Subscribe to Council!'

We have a new "Contact Us" form submission on www.gunnedah.nsw.gov.au!
Please take any necessary action to register these details and forward the request to the appropriate staff member(s)

First Name

[REDACTED]

Last Name

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Phone Number

[REDACTED]

Email Address

[REDACTED]

Comments

No to rate rise. Due to increase cost of living.
We get nothing for it
Council rate rises in Elgin street is a joke

Thanks in advance,
Gunnedah Shire Council Webmaster

25th August 2024

Gunnedah Shire Council

Re: Submission to Gunnedah Shire Council proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV)
Proposed SRV alternative

Background

In July 2024 Council began public consultation for a proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) of 38% spread over two years to raise an additional \$6.2 million.

There were multiple public information sessions held in the Gunnedah Shire to gain public feedback for the SRV. It was clear from these sessions that, there was considerable resistance to the proposal. The farming sector saw this as the biggest concern, where some farming rate payers would face large increases. For an average family farm, the increase would be about \$20,000 in rates and on the larger farms the increase would be over \$40,000 per year.

The Council attempted to explain the proposal to the public and there was an understanding that Council's finances have been affected by external factors. These factors include, the push back of cost from NSW Government onto Local Government as well as the reduction in Federal funding. Federal government funding to Local Governments has plummeted from 2.5% share of Federal Government revenue to 0.5% share of revenue.

Other sentiment from the community was that Council should get its "own house in order" and be more efficient.

There was also a reluctance from the public to see services diminished, in fact there was very strong support to spend more on rural roads.

Recommendations:

My proposed solution would be to have a fairer option that shares the burden more equitably:

- A special rate variation of 10% per year for three years.
 - It is noted that the rate pegging rise which will occur irrespective of any special rate variation will be 5% p.a.
- Efficiency measures of at least \$1,000,000
- Sale of surplus assets of at least \$ 9,000,000.
- An additional increase to the ad valorem rate for mining.

Submission to Gunnedah Shire Council proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV)

Areas of Concern

- Uneven distribution of the 38% SRV, with the agricultural and business sectors bearing too much of the burden.
- The 38% SRV is spread over a two-year period and results in an exorbitant increase to farmers and business and needs to be spread out over three years.
 - Example: Armidale Council are proposing a 50% SRV spread over three years.
- Mining needs to be contributing more as it is a driver of the expansion in the community's demand for new services.
 - Example: Armidale Council's proposed Renewable Energy Fund (REF) should provide their community with a \$70m fund for infrastructure spending.
- The SRV needs to be coupled with cost savings. I can identify over \$1,000,000 in cost savings.
 - Example: Armidale Council are proposing efficiency gains of \$1,000,000 in their SRV.

Suggested Savings

- With the completion of the saleyards, water supply, airport upgrades and the Koala Park by the end 2024, there are no major projects being undertaken that need managing. The downsizing of Council projects would require less administration.
- The swimming pool lost \$1.3m last year.
 - Suggested solutions: This needs better management by closing the 25m pool in Summer and only operating the 50m pool.
 - Installation of solar at the pool would significantly reduce the cost of electricity
 - Using volunteer lifeguards when available
 - Closing the pool in the middle of the day to save wages and to reduce swimmers' exposure to sun.
- The airport lost \$185,000 last year despite being closed for six months while the new runway was built.
 - Suggested solution: Need to outsource the slashing and ground maintenance to local farmers or the Aeroclub.
- In 2023/24 the GSC Library lost \$498,682, the Civic lost \$423,784, there are cost savings that could be made in these activities.
- Close the small grants programs such as the Business Partner Program. This would save one staff member and return cash of at least \$150000 to the general fund.
- The Planning section needs to be a separate entity.
 - Suggested solution: The Planning division needs to operate under strict cost recovery guidelines and be benchmarked for efficiency.
- Sale of Assets.
 - Suggested solution: Sale of GoCo as it is outside Council's role. Other assets that should be sold are surplus land and the Koala Sanctuary.

1. Suggested Cost Saving Estimates

	estimated savings
Pool	
Pool Solar installation cut the electric water heating and pumping cost	\$ 150,000
Pool reorganise opening times saving wages	\$ 100,000
Incorporate use of trained volunteers	\$ 100,000
Increase usage by promoting	\$ 20,000
Airport	
Outsource slashing	\$ 50,000
Lease surplus land for cropping	\$ 20,000
Small grants programmes	
Suspend the grants programmes. Cash saved	\$ 120,000
Save one administration salary	\$ 100,000
Travel Expenses	
Only one staff member and one councillor to attend conferences	\$ 100,000
Planning	
Planning to be a stand alone business unit with full cost recovery	\$ 100,000
Engineering	
Reduction of one staff member as major projects are completed	\$ 100,000
Consultants	
Reduce the engagement of consultants	\$ 150,000
Management restructure	
Review organisational structure to reduce 1 management positions	\$ 120,000
<u>Total Suggested Estimated Cost Savings</u>	<u>\$ 1,230,000</u>

2. Suggested Sale of Surplus Assets

GoCo Building	\$ 1,000,000
GoCo Business	\$ 1,000,000
Sale of Council owned surplus land	\$ 2,000,000
Sale of Koala Sanctuary	\$ 5,000,000
<u>Total Suggested Estimated sales of assets</u>	<u>\$9,000,000</u>

3. Suggested New Capital Expenditure

The \$9m raised from the sale of assets should be re-invested in capital works such as:

- Betterment program for rural roads, including drainage improvements
- Upgrades to Council Offices
- Complete the development of addition sporting fields at the Riverside Precinct
- Find suitable solutions for the loss of the Tech Paddock at the Showground to accommodate parking
- Develop more youth activity areas within parks such as a skatepark and basketball courts
- Installation of solar electricity at the pool, offices and works depot.

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah NSW 2380

5th September 2024

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council

Submission re Special Rates Variation

Good afternoon

We wish to make the following comments and raise questions, regarding Council's proposed special rate variation.

It is noted that residential rates increased by 5.719% from 1/7/2025. This means the net increase from 2024 to 2026 is 41.72%.

Also note that water availability charge increased by 4.979% from 1/7/2025.

More concerning is the increase in Water Use charges from 1/7/2025.

Tier 1 19.32%

Tier 2 19.32%

Tier 3 19.44%

We understand that water related charges are separate from residential rates. It is fair and reasonable that the Council provides rate payers with an explanation, justifying the increase in water charges, well over three times the CPI.

Could you please explain why the new water use charges are not listed in Council's 2024-25 Fees and Charges.

Regarding the proposed special rate variation, we note the reasons, include an approximate \$3.1m operating deficit in the General Fund.

Part of the reasoning why special rate variation is needed, refers to cost shifting to Local Government, by other levels of government, councils are under constant financial pressure to deliver the same services for less.

If this is the case, one would expect to see every Local Government Council in NSW applying for a special rate variation of a similar magnitude to that being sought, by Gunnedah LGA.

A check of current SRV's being sought statewide by NSW LGAs reveals this is not the case.

We ask that Council provide specific details of expenditure, over the last two fiscal years which have led to the conclusion that there is an approximate \$3.1m operating deficit in the General Fund.

Can you inform us of expenditure on the following projects, more than grant funds received, for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 fiscal years.

Koala Park

Airport

Saleyards

Can you also advise what specific infrastructure projects are being considered in future and estimated costs for same.

On a separate note, Council has sought community comment on upgrade at Wolseley Park and Kitchener Oval. Whilst these projects may be desirable, in some eyes, they are hardly necessary, if Council is in deficit as stated.'

What are the projected costs for these upgrades?

Are these works included in Infrastructure future costs as part of the SRV.?

We also wish to express concern, that discussion re the special rate variation and Wolseley Park and Kitchener Oval upgrades, was offered, as curb side meet and greet sessions.

It was disappointing that the Council chose not to offer well-advertised town hall meetings, to address the community regarding the special rate variation and the sporting field upgrades.

The council needs to be fully transparent when asking rate payers to pay more, just to maintain existing service levels. It is surely reasonable to provide specific advice on significant items affecting the Council's bottom line in the future.

It is egregious, for Council to rely upon general statements, regarding the council's financial position, when attempting to convince rate payers, to accept the proposed special rate variation.

We have little doubt that Council as a whole, have a great level of responsibility, to maintain an open and honest relationship with the community.

In conclusion, we must express our disapproval of the proposed special rate variation and the proposed upgrade of Wolseley Park and Kitchener Oval.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 6 September 2024 11:33 AM
To: Council Email
Subject: Submission on Propose Special Rate Variation (SRV)

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Gunnedah Shire Council's proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) commencing 2025 for over a 2 year implementation timeframe.

Have attended a presentation at Tambar Springs Hall 8th August 2024, called into the council site at Aq Quip and have had email correspondence with a staff member trying to work out why our council has proposed 38.8% SRV increase to our current council rates. Such a high percentage on our farmland rates is not acceptable as farmland used for business (not including hobby farmland size) already pays a very high premium for not much in return. Since the last SRV approximately 6 years ago the most important service for us is a safe and useable road. We have gone from 4 grades a year to one maintenance in 2 years, that is only following complaining about the dangerous and treacherous condition. The changed unsealed road techniques (compaction v's grading) has not been a win for the rural road user. Roads are a need for us not a want. As rate payers in this shire that is our number one priority from Council.

While on the subject of road works, the widening of the bitumen from Broken Dam to the Mullaley Mountain on the Black Stump Way is already breaking up. Could see it was a terrible job when first completed less than approximately 12 months ago. Hoping the job outside Bourbah and Inering properties are going to last longer. A total waste of money paying for a bad job. Years ago the council dug out a deeper causeway on the Trinkey Forest Road just off the Wondabah Road and now its what usually closes the road after small amounts of rain. The remaining Trinkey Forest and Strang Road are in reasonable condition after a grading re sheeting and compaction in July this year. Now it will be interesting if a follow up maintenance program occurs without having to email a complaint.

Research and discussions with council representatives indicate the roles and responsibilities of local governments have changed with the biggest impacts felt by rural and remote councils in the state. The federal government has reduced their funding and needs to reinstate the Commonwealth Tax Revenue (CTR) back to 1% as the current 0.55% is insufficient and the state government has imposed large proportions of cost shifting to Local Councils therefore needs to alter the split of operational and special purpose funding to increase operational funding.

Understanding the above funding issues we still do not support the 38.8% SRV as our council rates are quite significant now for the limited services out here 60km's from town. A flat rate increase \$490.00 per annum for all 6,451 rate payers would be more palatable until Local Governments can resolve the 3.1Million shortfall in the state and federal funding. As rate payers we all pay our taxes and rates and still expected to keep paying more for a very broken system, otherwise we will be continually asked to keep paying increased SRV's endlessly.

The mining companies operating in the shire need to be taxed more with rates as their gross earnings and profit margins certainly have been exceptional recently and need to contribute to road and other infrastructure wear and tear. Basically the current Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPA) with council apparently is set in stone and from our understanding not a great deal was struck from our council and the money given out to the community funding really is only equivalent to beads and mirrors. This space has great scope with out hitting the ratepayer more than the \$490.00 extra per year.

Council perhaps could reevaluate efficiencies. Eighteen Million dollars is a huge wage bill particularly when also engaging outside consultants and contractors seems excessive.

The swimming pool has been a disaster, still leaking from all accounts.

Re evaluate how well the roads are fixed and assess the work for value of money being spend.

Roads are our main priority and as such our observation of the past and current road works efficiencies one cannot help question other aspects of the councils efficiencies. This is a concern when more solid funding is being proposed. The council needs to improve the ability to communicate with rate payers as the current system is not satisfactory. Open communication is important for the wellbeing of the council and all ratepayers.

We did attempt the survey online, however the survey did not give an options for other comments as the supplied options did not reflect our thoughts.

Again thank you for the opportunity to express our views on this SRV proposal as we believe there are other avenues to fund the council's current shortfall of operational funding.

Kind regards

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the sender.

5th September 2024

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
Elgin St Gunnedah NSW

Re: Special Rate Variation (SRV)

Dear [REDACTED]

I would like this letter to be presented with your submission to IPART so they can see that through the consultation the Council has done with its rate payers there is resistance and rejection of the outrageous increase proposed.

I attended the Tambar Springs meeting and the general consensus in the room is that the farmers, who will be adversely impacted by this rate rise, are not only against it but questioning why we would agree to a rate rise to keep the only service we use being roads at a level that are already very very well below standard and unacceptable.

Of the 30 services that rate payers can use or expect the top one is roads. Their maintenance directly affects the productivity and viability of our businesses. Of all the services listed the majority of farmers in the room are only getting roads and they are subsidizing the remaining services for others in the community. If you want to use the services, then a user pays system needs to be addressed so that we are not subsidizing the 29 supplied services that do not get used by rural rate payers.

We understand the state government is passing costs onto councils but strongly object to council passing costs onto us. Change the system and stop using our rates for the benefit of town resident to use a dog park, garbage service, art gallery, cycleways, playgrounds etc when the roads are in such disgusting and dangerous disrepair. Even with the supplied cycleways that rates are providing we still have cyclists using the Wandabah Rd that is already narrow for trucks to pass safely and is most definitely a death waiting to happen. Show us how our already exorbitant rates benefit our business.

If the council doesn't have the money to do all that it needs then they will need to look like every other person and business at their budget and work out where the inefficiencies are so that these can be addressed. The use of consultants and staff outside our community would be the first thing you could save Millions of dollars on. Another preferred option to address a short fall is to decrease services. Don't raise our rates, cut expenditure on the 29 services we don't use. Focus on the one service we NEED to operate our business to pay our rates. If council needs more money for the other 29 services take that up with those that want them. Please note that is a want not a need! Try and figure out the return on investment for all these services and what these services financially provide. Compare that to the financial necessity of good roads and what these roads provide for our nation. It's embarrassing that our forefathers could build them with their limited tools and machinery compared to our society that can't even maintain them.

In summary, as an individual and as a community we strongly oppose the 38.8% rate rise and have no confidence in the council being able to provide safe and well maintained roads which is the only service we get for the money we pay in rates. Previous rate rises have resulted in worsening road maintenance.

Your Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

6 September 2024

[REDACTED]
p +61 2 6927 0700
nuveen.com/naturalcapital

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Attention: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

[Special Rate Variation Submission](#)

This letter is in relation to the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) being considered by Gunnedah Shire Council.

The property [REDACTED] is managed by Westchester Group of Australia Pty Ltd (WGA) on behalf of its owner, [REDACTED]

We have reviewed the proposed SRV with respect to [REDACTED] and would like it noted that we are opposed to the increase in fees being proposed (Option 2: Special Rates Variation). It is the preference of [REDACTED] that Gunnedah Shire Council continue with the status quo with rates only increasing by rate peg amount annually.

As WGA manages many properties across Australia, we have considered and compared the rates charged by Gunnedah Shire with other Councils providing similar services in the region. When considering the current cost of rates, in terms of the areas they are applied to, Gunnedah Shire Council is already one of the most expensive Councils within the regions in which we operate even before the proposed SRV.

Whilst we acknowledge that it is evident additional expenditure is required to maintain and upgrade council roads and infrastructure, we believe that the proposed SRV and the impact that the additional expense will have on landowners and businesses operating in the region, is unreasonable and not sustainable. As such we would urge Council to consider other means of meeting the current funding shortfall.

Please feel free to contact me directly should you have any further questions regarding this submission.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

6 September 2024

[REDACTED]
p +61 2 6927 0700
nuveen.com/naturalcapital

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Attention: [REDACTED]

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Please feel free to contact me directly should you have any further questions regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

6 September 2024

p +61 2 6927 0700

nuveen.com/naturalcapital

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Attention: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

[Special Rate Variation Submission](#)

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[REDACTED] is managed by Westchester Group of Australia Pty Ltd (WGA) on behalf of its owner,
[REDACTED]

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Please feel free to contact me directly should you have any further questions regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

6 September 2024

p +61 2 6927 0700

nuveen.com/naturalcapital

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Attention: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

[Special Rate Variation Submission](#)

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Please feel free to contact me directly should you have any further questions regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 6 September 2024 3:54 PM
To: Council Email
Subject: Proposed SRV

[REDACTED]
Special Rate Variation submission
PO Box 63 (63 Elgin Street),
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Dear [REDACTED]

I have read the material you have made available on this matter, attended the Tambar Springs Information session, discussed it with incumbent Councillors and listened carefully to Farmland ratepayers across Gunnedah Shire.

Subsequent to that process outlined, I submit there is no material acceptance by Farmland ratepayers of the proposed 38.88% SRV, but a moderate tolerance exists for a one off < 10% SRV increase, conditional on > 10% reduction in Gunnedah Shire expenditure.

The consensus is that apart from maintaining roads and waste management as core business, the majority of other Shire activities must either move to cost recovery operation, be moth-balled and/or be disposed of.

There is widespread awareness among ratepayers that the neighbouring shires Farmland rates on equivalent lands are currently a little over half of the cost per hectare compared to Gunnedah Shire charges. The proposed 38.88% SRV increase would in effect make Gunnedah Shire Farmland rates double the cost per hectare of equivalent neighbouring farmland.

There is now a strong and understandable interest by numerous Farmland ratepayers in varying the shire boundary or a Shire amalgamation in the face of this ill-conceived SRV.

Please review, renovate and reset Council budgets, just as all farms in your shire are doing right now!

Regards, [REDACTED] Ratepayer



5th September 2024



Gunnedah Shire Council
Elgin Street, Gunnedah NSW 2380

RE: Special Rate Variation (SRV)

Dear 

I am informed that my submission, along with all the others, will be presented to IPART, so they can observe that your council has adequately consulted with its ratepayers, listened to them, and heeded much of what they have suggested.

After all, they pay your wages, and therefore, you are their servants, and most obliged to listen to their deep concerns regarding this suggested outrageous rate increase.

I attended your special meeting in the Gunnedah Town Hall, a couple of Wednesday nights ago, and observed that my estimate of approximately another 100 rate payers also attended that evening.


I addressed the gathering of concerned community members in the Gunnedah Town Hall and posed the following questions to you:-

1. How many staff members do not live in the Gunnedah Shire area?

You said you did not know, but would come back to me. As to date, you have not.

2. My second question - how many staff are given cars for their convenience, especially those living outside the Shire boundary?

You said you did not know, but would come back to me. As to date, you have not.

3. I asked the moderator of the entire evening,  (who managed approximately 95% of the evening's business), as to whether he was a consultant. After some hesitation, he said YES.

My new question to you,  is how many consultants does the council employ at the moment?

During the meeting, a question was asked of you. For memory: "Surely when cost cutting needs to be addressed by any organisation, staff numbers and their efficiency must be one of the first questions to be addressed".

Your answer, from memory, was that you believe that your staff are 100% efficient. There was an audible sigh of disbelief from the audience.

My question now, and for IPART to acknowledge, is that if your staff are 100% efficient, why then do you need consultants like [REDACTED] to run a meeting? I gather also that [REDACTED] was present throughout the 3-day AgQuip event, which also seems to be a waste of money.

I will try to cover other areas, BUT, vehemently endorse all areas as outlined in submissions from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] I will not reiterate their points here.

If these two rate payers have valid points, then there would appear to be real savings, which could be made in reducing costs and selling assets.

Surely the council does not need 206 full-time staff, as stated in the meeting, if they are 100% efficient, as stated by you, [REDACTED]. May I suggest that the council looks to reducing staff, by say, 30%, therefore 30% of their overall wages of \$23million would be an initial annual saving of some \$7million. This reduction of staff must be seriously investigated.

I acknowledge this would result in reduced services, BUT, then perhaps these services could then be met by pay-as-you-use. I say this, because out of one overhead slide presented that evening, it showed 30 services that a rate-payer can use or expect, that council provides in its suite of services. Out of these 30 services, the top one was road maintenance. In my address to the hall, I said this was the only service that I needed, and this service in particular was the largest complaint, and concern, for all those present that evening. It was the most talked about, complained and contested area.

I received a huge in-favour response from all present, with much applause.

In short, all farm owners agreed that this was their greatest concern, and none of our present rates would seem to be addressing this very poor state of the secondary roads that we all have to use.

If this is the case now, with roads that are only serviced, say, once every two years, when it should be three times per year, then why would one have any confidence in an improvement in this regard, with a 38.8% increase in this rate rise?

My other points to be noted, (which are also referred to by others), are:

1. The mining industry needs to step up and pay its due percentage of rates, alleviating the poor farm owners.
2. I gather the Valuer General is about to conclude their new farm valuations, which I am sure will be a significant increase in valuation, therefore further compounding the impact of the rate rise to be well above your suggested 38.8%
3. You should complete a well-reviewed clean out of all your inefficiencies, across the board, as any other organisation would have to do in these difficult circumstances. I am absolutely

certain there would be huge saving to be made if your fellow councilors were prepared to "grasp the nettle".

FINALLY, at the end of my address to the entire audience, I asked the following question:

"Please show, by raising of hands, anyone here tonight who supports this SRV"

I would note that NOT ONE SHOWING OF HANDS COULD I SEE.

My response was "I rest my case" and sat down to vigorous applause.

In closing, I wish to note that I, amongst everyone else I have spoken to, cannot support your totally unacceptable suggested rate rise.

Yours Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature and name of the sender.

6 September 2024

p +61 2 6927 0700

nuveen.com/naturalcapital

[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Attention: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Special Rate Variation Submission

This letter is in relation to the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) being considered by Gunnedah Shire Council.

The property [REDACTED] is managed by Westchester Group of Australia Pty Ltd (WGA) on behalf of its owner, [REDACTED]

We have reviewed the proposed SRV with respect to [REDACTED] and would like it noted that we are opposed to the increase in fees being proposed (Option 2: Special Rates Variation). It is the preference of [REDACTED] that Gunnedah Shire Council continue with the status quo with rates only increasing by rate peg amount annually.

As WGA manages many properties across Australia, we have considered and compared the rates charged by Gunnedah Shire with other Councils providing similar services in the region. When considering the current cost of rates, in terms of the areas they are applied to, Gunnedah Shire Council is already one of the most expensive Councils within the regions in which we operate even before the proposed SRV.

Whilst we acknowledge that it is evident additional expenditure is required to maintain and upgrade council roads and infrastructure, we believe that the proposed SRV and the impact that the additional expense will have on landowners and businesses operating in the region, is unreasonable and not sustainable. As such we would urge Council to consider other means of meeting the current funding shortfall.

Please feel free to contact me directly should you have any further questions regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

6 September 2024

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[REDACTED]
Gunnedah Shire Council
PO Box 63
Gunnedah NSW 2380

Attention: [REDACTED]

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Yours sincerely,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]