Author name: Anonymous

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Submission: Criteria 2 requires a "demonstrated need for higher increases to charges". There is no evidence that any of the projects proposed by Council are 'needs'. Rather, they appear to be 'wants'. I agree that most of the projects would be nice to have, but none of them are essential for Council to continue to operate.

Council has, in recent years, demonstrated a strong capacity to fund large-scale projects without the need for a rate increase. Over $4million has just been put into a sports club in Medowie, raised from s94 funds and loaned money. Hundreds of thousands went into a croquet court at Raymond Terrace, paid for by loaning money. The Men's Shed at Raymond Terrace was paid for by selling a Council property and the Shed themselves fundraising. Upgrades to many local sports fields are being funded through various grants and campaign commitments.

To demonstrate this point, I encourage you to read the last few editions of the Port Stephens Examiner. Local politicians have been out and about in the local area, pledging money and services for the Port Stephens community on a weekly basis.

The ability to produce funds for these projects is always present, and Council, to its credit, works hard to secure grants and commitments for all sorts of projects. This approach can and must continue, and shows that there is no need for a rate increase. If Council thinks it can truthfully claim that they are unable to fund these projects without a rate increase, then the people of Port Stephens - myself included - will be rightly concerned about Council's own rating of its ability to fund projects outside of a rate rise.

It's clear that Council has a strong capacity to secure and utilise outside funding, demonstrating that there is no need to increase rates to fund these projects.

Concern has also been raised by ratepayers and internally, that the vast majority of the proposed projects have no detailed costing behind them. Any of those projects could cost significantly more