

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday May 27 2015



Yarriambiack Shire Council Mayor Andrew McLean said that Council, in proposing a 4.75% general rate increase for the 2015/2016 financial year, had spent a considerable amount of time and energy in what was an extremely thorough and challenging budgetary process. As in previous years, a significant proportion of this year's budget deliberations were allocated to critically reviewing and assessing Council's current service provisions. An extra challenge in formulating the 2015/2016 budget was the decision by the Federal Government to freeze the indexation of the Local Government Financial Assistance Grants for the next three years until 2017-2018.

Council in accordance with the Local Government Act 1989 Section 159 has also increased the Municipal Charge from \$63.60 to \$68.20c on all properties. Mayor McLean believed that the Council Municipal Charge rate is one of the lowest in the State.

In determining the rate increase Mayor McLean said that Council had also taken into consideration the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) research into rates and charges levied by other municipalities. Mayor McLean added that Councillors had unanimously resolved to maintain the differential rate provided to the farming sector at 23%.

After several months of deliberation, Yarriambiack Shire Council is particularly confident that it has formulated a balanced budget that delivers on many of the strategies, considerations and priorities identified in the four year Council Plan.

Chief Executive Officer, Mr Ray Campling added that this year was undoubtedly the most gruelling budget that he had presided over during his twelve years as CEO of Yarriambiack Shire Council, but also admitted that seems to be the situation every year. Mr Campling said that the situation will be even more challenging next year with the proposed introduction of rate capping. Mr Campling said that it was initially intended to increase the 2015/2016 rates by 7.5% in accordance with Council's rating strategy.

Council revised its proposed rate increase to 4.75% for 2015/2016 following some very healthy and constructive debate between Councillors and the Executive Management Team in addition to feed back received by the community from Council's extensive annual community engagement and visitation program. Council had also taken a number of crucial external and internal influences and factors into consideration which will impact significantly on the services provided and delivered by Council, including escalating direct and in-direct general costs.

Mayor McLean said that he was particularly appreciative of the input received from the community as it was generally very well presented. He also said that communities had in recent years become more appreciative and understanding of the confines of Council's budget and the difficulty Council had in maintaining and balancing existing service levels and provisions without increasing rates unrealistically.

The budget is always a delicate and confronting juggling act with much care taken to ensure that service provision and community needs are a priority. When examining and planning for both the short and long term it is encouraging that the community is interested and aware of the budgetary process, this offers capacity for partnerships and collaborative working relationships. A collaborative approach linking partnerships with stakeholders is the key element to achieving the best results for our communities.

Mr Campling also identified Council's ability to effectively source and secure community grant funding as an immense benefit and something that the community very much appreciated. Although this particular form of funding assistance does not alleviate the pressure to increase rates, it positively provides the community with additional infrastructure benefits that would normally not be available or achievable through Council's general budget processes. It is definitely the opinion of Council that the 2015/2016 budget is financially responsible and endeavours to address the objectives and strategies identified in Council's Strategic Plan.

Mr Campling said that Council's total operating budget for the 2015/2016 financial year will be \$21.545 million of which \$11.314 million will be generated from rates and charges, with the remainder predominantly being derived from State and Federal Government grants totaling a projected \$8.871 million with user charges, fees and contributions etc representing in the vicinity of \$1.359 million.

Mr Campling said that the proposed budget incorporated a number of significant projects including the allocation of \$7.586 million towards capital works expenditure of which \$4,924,000 has been allocated towards the maintenance of roads including sealed, gravel and dirt roads, of which Council maintains in the vicinity of 5,000kms; in addition to an amount of \$212,000 towards footpaths, \$311,000 for kerb and channelling and \$900,000 for plant, machinery and equipment.

An amount of \$30,000 has being allocated in the 2015/2016 budget for the final stage of the Lighting the Regions Program which is the upgrade of street lights from standard energy lights to energy efficient LEDs. Council has also been successful in securing funding of \$30,000 for the development of a Sport & Recreational Strategy.

The 2015/2016 budget will also incorporate reconstruction works to key roads Banyena Pimpinio Road \$536,400 pavement renewal, Watchem Warracknabeal Road \$351,340 pavement renewal, Patchewollock Tempy Road \$316,206 pavement renewal, Sea Lake Lascelles Road \$274,045 upgrade to construct and seal, Brim West Road \$365,394 pavement renewal. In addition Council also intends to install a new weather station at the Warracknabeal Aerodrome, upgrade of lighting at the Hopetoun and Warracknabeal Aerodromes, upgrade Brim Public Toilets, Minyip Senior Citizens, Woomelang Senior Citizens, Depots and Warracknabeal Town Hall.

Council has also increased its contribution towards Swimming Pool, Recreation Reserves and Hall Committees by 2%, in addition the various Progress Associations and Consultative Committees will be provided with a contribution of \$1,000 each to assist with administrative and other related costs.

Mayor McLean congratulated Councillors and the Executive Management Team on their professionalism and overall approach to the budget process and conceded that although it definitely wasn't an overly exhilarating budget it was unquestionably a fundamentally sound and practical budget, designed to best address and cater for the realistic needs, expectations and requirements of the Yarriambiack Shire. The Mayor added that Council is seeking community feedback in respect to the draft budget by Tuesday, 23 June 2015.

Copies of the draft budget can be viewed at the Warracknabeal Shire Offices, Rupanyup Shire Service Centre and at Gateway BEET, Hopetoun. The full budget document will also be available on Council's website: www.yarriambiack.vic.gov.au.

Media contact: Ray Campling, Chief Executive Officer – ph. (03) 5398 0104