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Council budget to connect, innovate and diversify Gladstone Region

Gladstone Regional Council this morning handed down its 2019/20 Budget outlining its organisational priorities for the next 12 months.

Developed to support Council's 2019/20 Operational Plan, Gladstone Region Mayor Matt Burnett said the budget supported Council's vision for the region's growth, sustainability, prosperity and liveability.

Councillor Burnett said the 2019/20 Budget would:

- seek fair and equitable State and Federal Government funding to support the community
- strengthen partnerships with community and sporting groups through financial and in-kind support
- encourage and promote new and existing business and industrial development to promote growth and create employment opportunities within the region.

He said the budget's primary focus was on partnering with community groups, industry, levels of government and the community to deliver the best outcomes for the Gladstone Region, now, and into the future.

"Our economic objectives are to facilitate sustainable, financially and environmentally responsible initiatives to advance economic development in the Gladstone Region, for the benefit of the community," he said.

"To align with this objective, Council is investing \$18.1 million in the community development and arts and culture spaces, and a further \$14.7M in parks and environment.

"This reinforces Council's unwavering commitment to provide healthy environments and activities for engaged, involved and proud communities."

Major capital projects allocated funding in 2019/20 include:

- \$20.4M on upgrades to waste water (sewerage) infrastructure
- \$14.982M on capital roads projects – with \$2.9M funded by State and Federal grants and subsidies
- \$8.26M on upgrades to water supply infrastructure
- \$1.879M on footpath and cycle upgrades
- \$1.574M on bridge upgrades, renewals and replacements
- \$732,000 in parks projects
- \$685,000 on cemetery expansion and upgrades.

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Council's 2019/20 Budget will have a capital expenditure of \$74.89M with an operating surplus of \$1.8M.

"As we continue to embrace our vision to Connect, Innovate and Diversify, Council is proud to declare that, for the seventh consecutive year, we have drawn down no new borrowings," Cr Burnett said.

"Our focus on reducing existing debt with no new borrowings has seen our interest-bearing debt reduce by \$50.3M over the current term.

"By taking a strategic approach to capital purchases, this budget can support our asset infrastructure by ensuring the correct assets are being added to, renewed or upgraded in 2019/20."

Cr Burnett said Council would increase its general rate by 1.94 per cent or a total average of 2.39 per cent overall.

"The increase is to ensure that we continue to provide adequately for the maintenance of our assets and key services to our community in an efficient and environmentally responsible manner," he said.

Gladstone Regional Council's minimum general rate remains the second lowest of Category 4 and 5 Coastal and Regional Councils.

"The budget was developed using Council's new operating model, which is to be the custodian of the community's assets and services and to deliver maximum benefits to the community," Cr Burnett said.

One service that has faced significant cost pressures during the past financial year is Council's waste disposal and recycling program.

Cr Burnett said that a review of our future recycling and waste services has resulted in a slight increase to waste fees and charges so our landfill and transfer stations would meet all environmental obligations.

The region's waste fee for standard weekly and fortnightly recycling services will increase by 37 cents per week.

Cr Burnett thanked Federal and State Governments for their continued support and co-operation in building a stronger Gladstone Region.

"This year, Council continued our partnership with the Federal Government through the distribution of their Financial Assistance Grant," he said.

"Council's previous allocation of \$7.5M will be increased this year in line with our population, with \$2.2M specifically to be used on roads."

Council also welcomed capital projects funding of \$6.9M from both the Federal and State Governments via various programs, including Roads to Recovery and the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme.

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“Our works program benefited this year through our targeted approach to seek specific funding through a focused Grants Specialist role within Council,” Cr Burnett said.

“The investment from both tiers of governments will fund works such as sealing unsealed roads, bridge replacements in the southern parts of the region, footpath improvements and funding towards replacing SES vehicles.”

Cr Burnett said he was confident the budget would renew, rebuild and maintain Council’s cost-effective delivery of services to our region.

“Once again, Council has delivered a budget that balances the need to minimise costs for ratepayers with the long-term needs of a growing region,” he said.

“Council’s 2019/20 Budget is the product of much hard work by my fellow Councillors and Council officers, and I commend the work of all who contributed to deliver this budget focussed on our region’s continued prosperous and sustainable development.

“I am proud to present this fourth budget as Mayor.”

To view the full 2019/20 Gladstone Regional Council Budget, and an overview providing budget highlights, visit www.gladstone.qld.gov.au/budget