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7 July 2020

Council commits to freezing its rates and charges in 2020/21 Budget

Gladstone Regional Council has handed down its 2020/21 Operational Plan and Budget, outlining its priorities over the next 12 months.

The theme of this year's budget is Our Community. Our Future, with the Operational Plan and Budget reflecting Council's focus on helping the community and economy recover from the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) health emergency.

Gladstone Region Mayor Matt Burnett said Council's 2020/21 Budget is centred around engaged and resilient communities, a healthy environment, outstanding customer service, smart asset management, operational excellence and economic resilience leading to growth.

"Despite the current uncertainty regarding the long-term impacts of COVID-19, Gladstone Regional Council is delivering a budget that ensures key projects are continued and new projects are brought forward to support continued employment opportunities," Councillor Burnett said.

"Council prepared this Budget during extraordinary and challenging times as COVID-19 impacted our community and economy in ways never experienced before.

"My Council has been working closely with our Recovery Committees and we understand the impacts COVID-19 has had on our economy and our community, and I am pleased to announce that Council will be freezing rates for the 2020/21 financial year.

"This means all ratepayers in Rural, Residential, Commercial and Light Industrial land categories (Rating Categories 1-16) will not pay more in general rates or service charges than they did last year.

"In order to give effect to the rates freeze, properties that would have otherwise received an increase due to the implementation of the rate cap, will receive a COVID-19 concession to reduce their effective general rate to be equivalent to the 2019/20 general rate levy."

The amount of this concession will vary between individual properties, but the net impact will be the same for all receiving this concession.

Cr Burnett also outlined freezes in relation to sewerage charges and water access charges.

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Water access and sewerage charges differ across the various schemes of Lake Awoonga, Miriam Vale/Bororen and Agnes Water/Seventeen Seventy.

However, in line with Council's commitment for the 2020/21 Budget these charges will be the same as levied for the previous financial year with respect to residential, commercial and light industrial Council customers.

"Refuse charges have also been frozen this financial year, applying to all premises receiving a domestic waste and recycling service."

Gladstone Regional Council's 2020/21 Budget features a \$64.8 million Capital Works program, which includes \$27.2m in State and Federal Government contributions, reflecting our effective strategy of seeking specific funding for capital project expenditure.

"During these uncertain times, Council is focused on building and maintaining our capital assets to support the standard of living in the Gladstone Region and seeking opportunities to partner with our community, industry and other tiers of government to ensure our region remains a great place to work, live and play," Cr Burnett added.

Key capital projects to be funded this financial year include:

- \$3.2m for Benaraby Landfill Cell Development
- \$2.3m for building and electrical improvements at Gladstone Tondoon Botanic Gardens
- \$1.55m for gravel road resheeting
- \$1.4m for bridge replacements at Gorge Road and John Clifford Way at Lowmead
- \$730,000 for the Goondoon Street footpath renewal
- \$690,000 for the Agnes Street carpark at Agnes Water
- \$200,000 for safety improvements for Turkey Beach Road.

Cr Burnett said continuing to grow partnerships with other levels of government and outside organisations was crucial in lowering the cost on ratepayers while navigating through a pandemic-induced downturn.

"External government funding will provide Council with some support for the year ahead, allowing for service continuity and infrastructure spending to stimulate our economy," Cr Burnett said.

"Council partners with both the State and Federal Governments, community groups, industry and other economic partners to ensure we are well positioned to deliver the best outcomes for our community now and into the future.

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“Council will receive \$15m from the State and Federal Governments which includes \$8.2m from the Federal Government’s Financial Assistance Grant (including indexation), \$5.2m from the Queensland Government’s COVID Works for Queensland program, and \$1.6m through the Federal Government’s accelerated Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program.

“This financial assistance will provide much-needed stimulus and allow for the acceleration of shovel-ready projects located across the region.

“The Queensland Government’s COVID Works for Queensland program will help deliver projects this financial year including the rejuvenation and upgrade of Gladstone Aquatic Centre, an upgrade to Cassy Lives Skate Park and a playground replacement program across the region.”

As Council continues to embrace our vision of Connect, Innovate and Diversity, funds have been allocated for three strategic projects.

Work will proceed on the concept design phase of the Boyne Tannum Aquatic Recreation Centre, the development of the Gladstone Coal Exporters Sports Complex (Marley Brown Oval) and the Boyne Burnett Inland Rail Trail.

Cr Burnett said that he was proud to present the first Budget of the new Council term, adding that for an eighth consecutive year Council has no new borrowings.

“Despite global uncertainty, Council has delivered a budget that balances the need to minimise costs for ratepayers with the long-term needs of the Gladstone Region,” he said.

“My fellow Councillors and Council officers have put a lot of hard work into this budget, and I would like to thank and commend the work of all who contributed to deliver a budget that remains focussed on our region’s prosperity and sustainable development.”

Please visit www.gladstone.qld.gov.au/budget to view the full 2020/21 Gladstone Regional Council Operational Plan and Budget overview and highlights.

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