

The case for a rate increase

www.pmhc.nsw.gov.au/ratevariation

WHY HAVE ROADS AND PARKS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS NEEDING ATTENTION?

In December 2008, Council undertook a Community Survey of 600 residents. 'Maintenance of sealed roads' was the highest priority for residents. The results showed 'maintenance of sealed and unsealed roads' rated as one of the lowest satisfaction items in the survey.

More recently, similar findings were identified through the Towards 2030 and Social Planning Community Forums, Rural Consultations, Listening to the Community meetings and discussions with various community organisations.

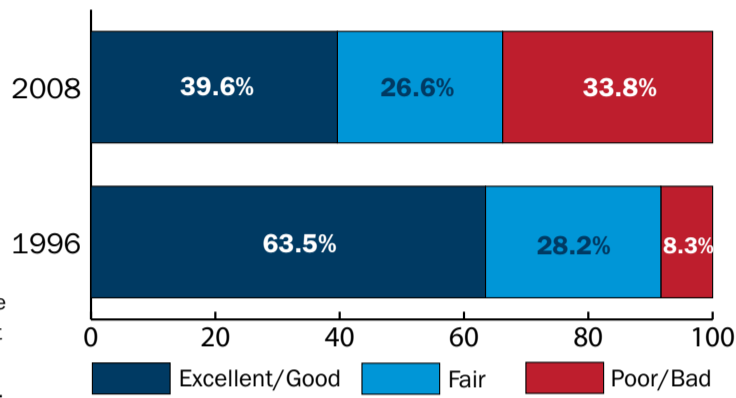
These consultations have also confirmed that our area's parks, reserves and public spaces are of high importance to the community.

Unfortunately the level of service that Council is currently able to provide in this area is not meeting community expectation. Complaints about open space maintenance have reached near record levels during 2009/10.

THE CONDITION OF OUR LOCAL ROADS

During the past decade, there has been a continual decline in the condition of our road network. Road condition assessments were undertaken in 1996 and 2008, through an independent audit, for all of our Council roads.

This graph (right) shows the decline in roads considered to be Excellent or Good and the increase in road condition classified as Poor or Bad.



One in three roads in the LGA are now considered to be in a poor or bad condition, compared to 1996 when it was less than one in ten.

HOW WILL THE FUNDING BE SPENT ON ROADS?

Council will allocate \$1.95 million from the Special Rate Variation to improving the condition of our roads. There has been community discussion on the state of the road network, the levels of maintenance expected and the difference between the community's expectations and current maintenance levels actually being delivered.

As part of Council's 'back to basics' program, a plan has been adopted to attempt to bring local roads back to an appropriate standard for both sealed and unsealed roads. In the Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area, we have 850 kilometres of sealed and 450 kilometres of unsealed roads.

Funding has been reallocated to roads maintenance includes heavy patching and rehabilitation works on several high traffic regional roads including Hastings River Drive, Ocean Drive, Bago Road, King Creek Road, Kennedy Drive and Blackbutt and Belah Roads.

A revised Resealing Program has been developed based on the current condition, roads hierarchy and traffic volumes. Resealing works are planned for high traffic arterial roads and the industrial area of Port Macquarie.

A significant portion of the \$1.95 million will be allocated to undertake more core road maintenance works currently compiled by Council. These works include maintenance grading of unsealed roads, more pavement repairs, additional roadside vegetation slashing and drainage improvements. While the increased funding will allow Council to complete more of the high priority works identified in the 'back to basics' report, some works will not proceed until further funding options have been identified.

Roadside signs will be displayed to show the community that improvement works have been directly paid for through the Special Rate Variation.

HOW WILL THE FUNDING BE SPENT ON PARKS AND RESERVES?

Council will allocate \$500,000 from the Special Rate Variation to improve local parks, reserves and open spaces which have been identified as being of high importance to the community. Within the allocation to Parks and Reserves, a range of services that are critical for the local community have been identified. These are:-

Parks and Reserves

An increase in funding will allow Council to mow its 450 parks, reserves and sporting fields more frequently, to undertake more regular garden maintenance and to present and maintain recreational assets including Town Green and Bain Park in much better condition.

Beach Safety

The beach safety education program was dropped from the Lifeguard Program two years ago as a result of reduced budgets. Subsequently there has been demand for the return of this program which provides a range of benefits for the community. The delivery of this service is in line with beach management best practice.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE AND ASK QUESTIONS?

Council is scheduling community information sessions to give residents the opportunity to ask questions and have a better understanding of the need for a Special Rate Variation and how it will be spent across the region. These meetings will be advertised in the Council Matters page of this paper.

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Message from Garry Payne, Administrator



At last Friday's Extra-Ordinary Council Meeting, I adopted the Draft Corporate Plan for 2010/2011. The Plan sets out Council's proposals for the next three years, with most attention focused on projects for the next 12 months. The Plan is now on Public Exhibition and I encourage residents to read the document and to make a submission.

Part of the Plan includes a Special Rate Variation of 7.4%. This is in addition to the capped 2.6% rate increase recently approved by the State Government.

When you travel around the area you don't have to look too hard to see we have a lot of work to do to bring our roads and parks back up to a reasonable standard. Surveys and consultation conducted by Council show that these two issues have been identified as being a priority to the community.

For a number of years and for a number of reasons our infrastructure including our local roads, parks and reserves has not received the attention it deserves.

While Council staff are working hard to make improvements, many roads are still in an unacceptable condition and our parks, reserves and sporting fields need continual maintenance. Unfortunately to carry out those improvements would cost more than our budget allows and therefore we will have to ask our community for help if we are to improve the situation.

During the past couple of years in an attempt to reduce a growing deficit, Council has taken some drastic steps to reduce expenditure which resulted in rationalising staff numbers and reducing service levels. We have cut these to the bone and we simply cannot afford to cut these levels any further if we are to continue delivering services for our ratepayers.

This action has resulted in savings of \$4.1 million across the organisation. Despite our best efforts, we are still forecasting a deficit of \$1.1 million.

The 7.4% Special Rate Variation Council is seeking will raise \$2.45 million. \$1.95 million will be spent on our local roads and \$500,000 will be allocated to improving maintenance on parks and reserves. While this increase will go part way towards addressing our rundown infrastructure, it won't enable us to meet all community expectations. Council recognises there is still a lot more work to do in coming years. I hope you support what Council is trying to achieve.

The rate variation would mean an overall rate increase of \$1.56 per week for the average ratepayer or \$81.28 per year.

As I have said previously, I am very conscious of the community's capacity to meet increased rates, but like so many other Councils across the state, additional funds are needed if we are to bring our basic services back to the level our community deserves.

Copies of the draft Corporate Plan are available from Council's libraries and offices or online at www.pmhc.nsw.gov.au/corporateplan

Tree Maintenance

Council's ability to undertake tree pruning and removal works has long been out of sync with community expectations. There are currently in excess of 600 trees listed for works on the Tree Works Schedule. An increase of funding will allow Council to make in-roads into the large number of trees scheduled for works.

Bushfire Management

Council is responsible for implementing measures that minimise the risk of bushfire moving from Council-owned or managed land to land owned by others. Council has assessed the bushfire risk associated with each park and reserve and a risk treatment has been developed for each site. The result has generated an extensive construction and maintenance responsibility for Council that at this point in time is not fully funded.



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