



Community Budgeting – the process continues

South Gippsland Shire Council hosted its 2015/16 Community Budgeting nominees at a forum yesterday. Council's first foray into Community Budgeting – the allocation of \$400,000 to each of Foster, Korumburra, Mirboo North and Venus Bay, with the projects to be recommended by community panels – was discussed, particularly its shortcomings and how it could be better implemented next financial year.

Twenty-three nominees attended, giving Councillors the opportunity to hear first-hand about why the nominees had been interested in participating, what impediments they saw in attracting more nominees, what capital works projects they would have supported, and how Community Budgeting had been perceived in their communities.

While there was general support for the project and consensus that it should be revisited in 2016/17, many in the group felt that the project was rushed and that most people either didn't know about the project or didn't understand what was involved. There was also quite a robust discussion about who should get to sit on the panels.

Mayor of South Gippsland Shire, Councillor Bob Newton was appreciative of the time people had committed to attend the forum. "It is opportunities such as this – even if it is to discuss how something could have been done better – that help us to improve as Councillors. We know that our communities want more say in how Council works with them. We know that Community Budgeting has been successful around the world. We now know that we rushed the process. This forum was about us getting feedback so we can do it better next time around.

"The issue for us as Councillors is that it's not simply finding \$1.6 million in the budget to fund the capital works, we need to have an understanding about the extra costs to run a project like this. Some of the participants yesterday asked why we hadn't sent letters to every household, others asked why we hadn't purchased full-page ads or run community forums. Frankly, the reason is cost. We now understand that for Community Budgeting to be a success we need to allow more time to educate our communities, but we also need to allocate enough money outside the \$1.6 million to ensure that the project is properly financed."

Council will receive a report at its June meeting detailing how the Community Budgeting project could be implemented in 2016/17 for projects to be undertaken in the 2017/18 financial year.

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