

Key Strategic Documents Adopted

South Gippsland Shire Council has adopted the Annual Budget 2020/21 and Council Plan 2020-2024 at its meeting last week. These documents underpin the future direction of Council and are the foundation for the majority of projects and services provided by Council to the community.

The Annual Budget identifies costs associated with providing these essential assets and services and embodies aspirations for the year ahead.

The Council Plan establishes four key strategic areas of focus for Council and the community over the next four years. These set the context for Council to progress a number of significant projects across the municipality with the goal of ensuring South Gippsland remains a great place to live, and attracting economic investment and visitation.

South Gippsland Shire Chair Administrator Julie Eisenbise was pleased to adopt both the Annual Budget and Council Plan and had a positive outlook for the future.

“Indeed, it is a very important issue that we have a Council Plan. This is Step One for this year, next year we will be working very closely with the new Act which to implement the new visions for the Council. Indeed, these are the very important footprints for our Council.

“We also have a very positive budget and I think it will be a challenge for the staff to work through the rather large number of projects on this budget. It is important to note that we will get half yearly review and we may expect that to be a little fluid due to COVID-19 but we are much better to move into a new financial year with a budget already prepared,” said Administrator Eisenbise.

Both Administrators Christian Zahra AM and Rick Brown provided the following commentary surrounding the vital documents.

“These documents matter because they guide the work of Council over the next twelve months to four years. The four new Council Plan objectives are United Shire, Economic Prosperity, Integrated Services and Infrastructure and Customer Focused Organisation. These objectives set a different focus for the Council over the next four years. We hope that these objectives charter a successful course for South Gippsland Shire for the next four years as we partner with local community and local business to try and achieve those four objectives,” said Administrator Zahra AM.

“Objectives and values that underpin organisations also underpin communities. We are held

together by what we have in common and these are often common values, common objectives or both. The values objectives and concrete measures announced in the Council Plan in order to assess how we perform is critical, not only to the success of this Council but to the vibrance and success of the community,” said Administrator Brown.

“The major focus of next year’s budget is the Council’s response to the impact on the Shire of the coronavirus. Formulating this response raised several issues. For example, was the impact of the coronavirus pretty much the same in all municipalities or was it having a different impact in each municipality depending on local circumstances in each municipality? Should Council defer the budget until we knew precisely what impact the virus would have on South Gippsland and what support would be provided by the Victorian and Federal Governments?

“If we did delay the budget would that mean that providing support to South Gippsland residents would be delayed because Council could not spend the funds allocated to support the residents and small businesses affected until the budget was adopted?

“Were all ratepayers affected by the coronavirus or were some affected more than others? Should Council give some support to all residents or target its support at those residents and small businesses most in need of help?

“In answering these questions, it became clear that the virus is impacting different municipalities in different ways and that this Council needed to respond to the virus in a way relevant to our particular circumstances. It is these particular circumstances which drove us for example not to delay the budget, the effect of delaying the budget would have been that it would have delayed our capacity to provide assistance to those people that are in need. And as people would have seen that assistance will be to a total of \$2 million.

“We have proceeded with a 2 per cent rate increase and not gone down the route of rebates and other measures which are not targeted at those most in need. It would be inequitable to provide the same level of support to both those who don’t need it and to those that do need it. And that is why we have adopted the approach of the \$2M COVID-19 Community Support Package which will start to flow next month and why the approach we are taking is unique to this shire and not based on what may be happening in other places,” said Administrator Brown.

“Our Annual Budget determines our priorities and what it is that we will be able to fund over the next twelve months. In addition to the \$2 million coronavirus package, the budget provides for an almost \$40M capital works program. It includes a couple of major projects of real lasting benefit that will be felt at the household and community level right across South Gippsland. They are the reason local government exists; so that we can respond to the needs of regions and communities right across Victoria but for our particular district I think that we should be proud of the way which we respond to those needs and are addressing them – not just talking about them but doing something practical so they are met,” said Administrator Zahra AM.

The Budget includes the following key figures for the 2019/20 financial year: income of \$71.41

million and expenses of \$64.94 million; borrowings of \$3.29 million, with a capital works program of \$39.63 million and a \$2 million COVID-19 Community Support Package.

Those wishing to view the adopted Annual Budget 2020/21 and Council Plan 2020-2024 can find them on Council's website. Click on the Your Council tab and look for Key Council Documents.

Further details on the \$2 million COVID-19 Community Support Package are expected in July.

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