



MEDIA RELEASE

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Increasing Investment in Huon Valley Roads

Huon Valley Council last night passed a five per cent general rate increase to invest more in roads and strategic land use and township planning.

Acting Mayor Sally Doyle said the 2022-23 Budget, adopted at last night's Special Council meeting, will help upgrade and improve roads throughout the Huon Valley, with a significant commitment of almost \$950,000 to the maintenance of unsealed and sealed roads.

"A 55 per cent increase in spending on our roads enables us to put a robust framework in place to improve roads for residents in the Huon Valley. We know that some of our roads are a major cause of frustration for residents. You told us more needs to be done. We listened and we're acting."

Acting Mayor Doyle congratulated Acting Deputy Mayor Sue Clark for her amendment to the motion that had recommended an eight per cent rate increase.

"The 2022-23 Budget can be regarded as a budget of response. It is responding to community feedback by not only increasing our investment in some key areas that have previously been under-invested, but the amendment made by Cr Clark acknowledges that some people in our community are doing it tough financially and we are listening to their concerns.

"I understand a five per cent rate increase on top of what people are already dealing with may be difficult, and I encourage ratepayers who are experiencing financial difficulty to reach out and discuss what options are available to them," Acting Mayor Doyle said.

On average, ratepayers in the Huon Valley pay around \$23 per week in council general rates. For the average ratepayer the increase in rates will equate to around \$1.50 extra per week.

Communications & Media Officer

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“We have a Financial Hardship and Payment Assistance Policy that provides assistance to ratepayers and community members experiencing difficulty in meeting financial obligations to Council due to genuine financial hardship. The policy and application form are available on our website.”

Acting Mayor Sally Doyle said a significant rate increase was necessary as Council invests more money in the priority areas for the community, deals with ongoing operational challenges with the two medical centres, and an operating deficit of approximately \$2.93 million.

“We have had numerous challenges in recent years that have put a lot of financial pressure on our operations: the 2019 bushfires; COVID-19; increase in demand for services; population growth; and a large portfolio of infrastructure that requires significant funds to operate, maintain and replace.”

Traditionally, Huon Valley Council has charged its ratepayers low rates. Despite being the 8-12th largest council in Tasmania (depending on the measure used), the average rates in the Huon Valley have been the fifth lowest of the 29 Councils across the State.

“Rates are our largest revenue source - 56 per cent of our revenue comes from council rates - and an increase will allow us to begin to address the deficit and ensure continued investment in services that are valued by and benefit the community,” Cr Doyle said.

“In 2020-21 Council resolved to not increase the general rate as a response to support the community given the unknown outcomes of COVID on the economy and ratepayers. A shortage of GPs for the medical centres in Geeveston and Dover has also had a financial impact and the centres will operate at a significant deficit in 2022-23.

“Ultimately what it comes down to is we want to make sure we can better meet the needs of our community both now and into the future and balance community expectations and Council resources.”

Acting Mayor Doyle said the recent valuations carried out by the Valuer-General will mean for some ratepayers the increase will be more than five per cent.

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“Valuations on individual properties will have changed by differing degrees and this affects the distribution of the rates burden, so some ratepayers will receive higher increases than five per cent, while others will receive lower increases or even decreases.

“It’s important to understand that increased property values does not mean we increase the total amount of revenue received from rates. It is simply a redistribution of the rates burden and the overall amount of rates collected does not increase as a result of the new valuations.”

Property owners will be notified soon of their new valuations by the Valuer- General. Notices will include details of how property owners can object to the new valuation if they believe it be inaccurate.

The 2022-23 Budget will see investment of \$674,000 to strategic planning and town planning. A portion of this (\$400,000) has been allocated from reserves.

“This investment means we will be developing local planning provisions to protect heritage values in townships. Under the current interim planning scheme and draft Local Provisions Schedule there is a lack of comprehensive heritage protections that consider local character and features of a place,” Acting Mayor Doyle said.

“We will also develop plans to support rezoning of land in townships to meet the current and forecast demand for residential land for the next 5- 10 years. We will develop strategies that inform planning and development assessments to avoid problems such as fragmentation of agricultural land and reactive planning issues.

“Land use planning is about determining the future of the places where we live, work and play. By setting policies, development strategies and establishing a framework for decision making, planning provides a forum for our aspirations: what we want our society, our settlements, our infrastructure, our landscapes to look like, and how we want them to function.”

Acting Mayor Doyle said the Huon Valley is a growing region with more people choosing to live here.

“We are committed to both short-term and long-term investment in roads and planning as changes occur in our communities.”

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Internally, the Huon Valley Council is investing \$150,000 into leadership and culture.

“There is a lot of pride and passion among our staff, and we want to make sure we nurture this. These are the people who contribute to the amenity of our spaces and places and help deliver vibrant and connected communities,” Acting Mayor Doyle said.

“A healthy and happy workplace flows out to the community and benefits us all.”

A further \$61,000 will be invested in ICT security and backup arrangements, \$25,000 in a staff survey, and \$47,000 in a strategic review of Children’s Services to ensure the services are keeping up with the needs of families in the valley.

For further information about the budget please visit www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au

Council resolved that the Huon Valley Long Term Financial Plan be deferred for consideration by the Council following the October 2022 elections.

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