

Mayor's Budget Speech 2021

30 June 2021

Good morning. My fellow Councillors, CEO, staff, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present this Council's second budget as Mayor of Noosa Shire. Firstly, I would like to state that it is with great disappointment that I can't share this table with my fellow Councillors. The budget today is very much a collaborative and collective budget. It's a budget we've all worked hard on and its in many ways devastating that we can't all be together to share in this special time.

Last year we stood at this very spot and talked about a one in a hundred-year pandemic. We spoke about the significant challenges to our Council's finances and we discussed how we would have to adapt to a new financial, business and social environment that not many of us, or should I say, none of us would ever have expected.

12 months on and Covid is still very much with us. The impacts are still felt by the world, our country, our State and our Shire. Today is testament to that very fact. Over the past 15 months our Shire has shown resilience, determination and at its shown support of its own and operated positively with so many others.

The Noosa Shire Council Budget 2021/2022 epitomises all of those very things. It's determined, positive and forward thinking. And, most importantly, its community focused. Grass roots spending where our community needs it most. Our \$153 million budget, with the largest ever capital infrastructure budget of \$47m, provides a raft of new initiatives in support of the community. We have moved from survive, to revive, and now we thrive. Better roads, better footpaths, better cycleways, increased fire mitigation and management, better protection for our community, increased spending to support our community groups, are just some of features of this year's budget.

While we boldly increase infrastructure, facilities and resources for our community, we also acknowledge that our community has hurt during covid and we appreciate that times are tough for many of our residents. That is why we were determined to keep rate rises as low as possible.

Seventy five percent of ratepayers will see a general rate increase of no more than CPI of 1.5%. To put it in lay terms this means that when including all rates and charges, an average residential property owner can expect a total increase in their rates notice of \$44, which is equivalent to about 85 cents per week. Similarly, we are maintaining the current 5% discount on general rates.

A new initiative this year and one which I am particularly proud of is that we have waived the 3-year waiting period for new pensioner concession applications. This means that if you are a pensioner and you turn up in this town, you do not need to wait three years to be eligible for a concession on your rates. This applies immediately. Our role, our job is to help where we can. This initiative helps our elderly, and we are all proud of it.

Last year, I used the mantra “Save where we can to spend where we must”. It’s an ideal I still espouse.

More transparency surrounding the budget was initiated by the former Mayor and Councillors and they should be acknowledged for that. So with this as a foundation, for the first time we engaged our community in budget talks and sought feedback. We gave people an opportunity to voice their thoughts, and opinions, and, through our online Budget Tool we gave them the ability to understand and balance the budget and so highlight priorities as to where they think their money should be spent.

It was clear from all feedback, through all channels, face to face, online and through our budgeting tool, that residents wanted more funds directed to infrastructure, community initiatives and protection of our bushland reserves- our environment.

So, we listened, and now implement.

Part of our capital infrastructure record budget will include:

- Stage 1 of Tewantin Bypass- \$8.8m
- \$7.5m to replace 7 bridges across the Shire
 - \$1m replacement of Garth Prowd Bridget
 - \$1.47m for the Lawnville Road Bridget at Black Mountain
 - \$1.35m for Kin Kin’s Wahpunga Lane Bridge renewal
- \$4.6m to finish the Hinterland Playground
- \$1.4m to upgrade the Pomona Section of the Noosa Trail Network
- \$2.1m to complete the new Peregrine Beach Community House
- \$5.7m Road Reseal programme- for road resurfacing and gravel road re-sheeting
 - Pomona - School Street, Potter Street and Part of Pioneer Road all set for resurfacing
 - 500m of resurfacing for Pender Creek Road at Kin Kin and Camphor Road at Pinbarren
 - Reseal the remainder of Gympie Terrace
 - Renew the stormwater culverts within the road corridor
- \$1m to fill the missing links in our footpath network across the Shire including Tewantin, Sunshine Beach, Castaways Beach, Noosaville, Pomona and Cooroy This is something I know all Councillors will be proud of as we look at the formal adoption of our Walking and Cycling Strategy in July 2021.
- Upgrading busy intersection of Doonella Street and Memorial Avenue at Tewantin to boost capacity for the future

Other ‘big-ticket’ items include: Commencement of the restoration of Noosa Spit Dog Beach at \$1.09m and \$350k to replace the metal skate ramp at the Sunshine Beach skate park with a brand-new competition- grade ramp.

These projects are substantial. We have acted on what we've been asked to do. We must acknowledge and thank both the Qld State Government and the Australian Federal Government for the significant financial contributions they have made through grants such as Works for Qld, Unite and Recover, Building Better Regions and so forth. Without their financial assistance we would not have been able to implement what we have set out to achieve.

Last year we cut levies to ensure no rate rises. This year our transport levy is back to what it was in pre-covid days and our environmental and heritage levies although increased are still below pre-covid figures. Additional funds generated from these levies will allow investment in a range of initiatives and projects that will benefit the community.

We have also introduced new rating categories for transitory accommodation or short stay properties. This initiative addresses the impacts guests of these properties have on the demand for Council services and infrastructure, and ensures these properties also contribute to the cost of tourism promotion in the shire.

Noosa is regarded by many as a tourist town. In fact, we're officially the best in Qld. We are well and truly open for business and we welcome visitors with open arms. Our continued commitment to Tourism Noosa in the form of \$2.52 million in funding is testament to this. We are, however, also acutely aware that houses which are solely or predominantly for the purpose of hosting short term visitors impact our community. This is seen in increased pressures on our infrastructure, our waste, our roads, our parking. The new transitory accommodation rating categories have been introduced to address this, however what does not change is that our residents, who choose to rent out their properties for short stay accommodation up to 60 days, as per the town plan, incur no additional rating increases. Similarly, our residents who choose to home host or rent out a room in their home for short term accommodation- up to 90 days per year also incur no additional changes to their rates. We acknowledge and appreciate that many of our residents rely on this additional or supplementary income and we are determined to ensure that they don't bear the brunt of any increased charges.

In this accommodation sector we have also budgeted for additional funds and resources to manage the roll-out of the new short-term accommodation local law as management of short- stay properties. This is still a source of concern for our residents and something the State Government is not addressing. Besides the huge increases to capital infrastructure there are many things about this budget that I am particularly proud of.

The record \$1m being spent on community grants is something which I think all Councillors are so proud. The additional appointment of a community development officer here at Council will also ensure that we provide as much support as we can to these groups and our broader community. So many of our community groups: and there are over 300 in this Shire, do much of the 'heavy lifting' in helping our vulnerable, our at risk, our juniors, our seniors, our workers, our sportspeople, our elderly and so on. It is a privilege to stand with them and behind them and support the wonderful community works they do.

Our business community- small businesses are very much the lifeblood of this Shire, and we have over 7000 of them. They continue to be supported. Our \$35k in economic development grants will continue and we continue to provide internal support to many of our businesses through our Peregrine Digital Hub, our mentoring, and the continuation of our business round table.

Speaking of influential Shire groups - the environmental groups and advocates in this community should be pleased with the addition of \$276k to boost funding for environmental levy initiatives and an increase of \$50k in our grants program to further Council's net zero emissions goal as well as support the community's efforts to reduce emissions.

Waste is a core council business and we have allocated \$500k for an additional weighbridge at the Noosaville Waste Facility which is much needed to address congestion concerns for customers.

Our mobile library is back in business this coming year- providing a smaller more flexible bus- enabling it to visit more people at more places and the addition of our library kiosks makes access to books and reading that much easier for many of our residents.

The Council has instigated some really 'big things' but there are other 'smaller things' that we have enacted. Increased communication to our Hinterland residents through the publishing of Your Noosa in community newspapers, increased consultation and support of Kin Kin through our dedicated engagement officer Ian Williams, and an additional investment of \$22k in flying fox management.

There's much to be proud of in this budget. And no doubt we will hear from each of the Councillors about what matters to them most.

I've spoken about many things, yet there is one area which I haven't addressed. I'll do so now. I stood on an election platform of increased fire management, of increased mitigation and of increased preparedness.

Last year we increased our fire mitigation but this year, I am incredibly pleased to announce that we have increased our fire management budget by 100%. We have allocated an additional \$300k for fire management and mitigation. We have doubled our cool fire burns to seven planned burns a year, widening almost 2 kilometres of existing fire trails around our Bushland Reserves and the creation of two kilometres of brand-new fire trails. Importantly, we'll appoint a dedicated fire management officer to train up our own staff so we can carry out our own controlled burns without relying on private contractors. We have also introduced a bushfire resilience and response levy on our rates notice as we acknowledge that this isn't just a rural issue- it's one that can and did affect all areas of our Shire.

In addition to on the ground resources, this budget also includes \$1.96m to fund the development of the exciting Digital Hub fire tech living lab, which once completed will be a 'living' bushland laboratory and testing ground for cutting-edge technologies for the early detection of bushfires. Noosa is becoming known as a centre of excellence for bushfire-fighting technologies, and this project will assist in cementing that reputation.

The investments being made in this budget will ensure we can be well prepared for the upcoming fire season to ensure we manage our risks, and our community is safe as it can be. Like our budget, it's bold, it's brave and it's all about the community.

This year, like last, we have put a focus on delivering tangible outcomes for our community. Providing "grassroots" style projects that will make a difference to the lives of our residents. Considering the challenges, we have faced, I am incredibly proud to be delivering, alongside my other councillors, a budget of this calibre which is another investment in enhancing our lifestyle and providing a bright future.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Deputy Mayor and my fellow Councillors for their deliberations and sensible approach to formulating this budget. I believe it's a good one, a great one and we have all worked together to achieve it.

I also want to thank the Council management team for their detailed work in preparing this difficult budget especially the CEO Brett de Chastel and our hardworking finance team led by Trent Grauf and overseen by our Director of Corporate Services, Michael Shave.

They have carefully analysed every detail and our finance staff have provided sage advice to all of us. Their hard work to get us where we are today has not gone unnoticed. It is appreciated and it is acknowledged, and we are very grateful.

It should be noted that we are now officially back in SURPLUS. We have modest operating surplus of \$309k a year earlier than expected as part of our 4-year recovery plan and I would again like to acknowledge Michael, Trent and all the team for achieving this remarkable result.

I used it last year, but I'll use it again:

Finally, to quote a great Humanitarian and former President:

'A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values'. Barack Obama.

To our community it is you who we value, and it is with you in mind that this budget was crafted. Grassroots spending. Spending where we need, where we can, where we must, to ensure the greatest benefit to you, our community. Thank you.