



COFFS HARBOUR CITY COUNCIL
SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA
(PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE)
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
COFF AND CASTLE STREETS, COFFS HARBOUR
20 APRIL 2006

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(PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE)

20 APRIL 2006

Mayor and Councillors

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

4 DRAFT 2006/2009 MANAGEMENT PLAN - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Purpose:

To present Council with a summary of Community Submissions to the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan. This report recommends that Council proceed with its application for a 9.56% special variation to general income. It also recommends that Council withdraw its proposal to seek the consent of the Minister for Local Government for an extension of the term of the City Centre Business Rate by three years.

Description of Item:

The Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan includes a \$21.5m package of major capital works called the Community Facilities Program. It is proposed that the Community Facilities Program be funded, in part, by a 9.56% rate variation.

The draft plan also proposes an extension of the City Centre Business Rate for three years to facilitate funding for an additional \$1.4m in capital works as part of the ongoing City Centre revitalisation program.

Both rate proposals have been extensively promoted during the preparation of the Draft Management Plan and throughout the public exhibition period. Community response to both proposals has been generally supportive.

4 Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan - Community Consultation ...(Cont'd)

Sustainability Assessment:

- **Environment**

If approved, the 9.56% rate variation will facilitate a range of projects which will repair environmental degradation, enhance landscaping and heritage values and contribute to the greening of the city. A number of the projects will assist in promoting community awareness and connectedness to the natural environment.

- **Social**

The Community Facilities Program has been developed in response to community demands. The projects are expected to assist Coffs Harbour to grow as a diverse, connected and sustainable community. The proposed 9.56% rate variation is generally regarded as a reasonable and affordable means of delivering positive outcomes for the community without causing hardship for ratepayers.

- **Economic**

The proposed rate variation (to support the Community Facilities Program) will have an additional impact on ratepayers. As stated above, this impact is considered to be reasonable and affordable in relation to the scale of the infrastructure program supported by a rate variation. It is expected the overall financial impact will be alleviated in the longer-term by the contribution the CFP projects will make to the sustainable economic development of the city.

Consultation:

The Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan was prepared after extensive consultation with Councillors and staff over a four-month period. A number of briefing sessions were held with community groups – including ratepayer groups, rural landowners, City Centre property owners and local Chambers of Commerce – prior to the adoption of the Draft Management Plan by Council on 16 March 2006. A 32-day public exhibition period commenced on Saturday, 18 March 2006 and concluded on Tuesday, 18 April 2006.

Complete sets of Draft Management Plan documents were placed on display in the following locations:

- Council Administration Building foyer
- The three branches of the Coffs Harbour City Library
- General Stores at Karangi, Coramba, Nana Glen and Red Rock
- Corindi Beach Post Office
- Ulong Rural Transaction Centre
- Coffs Harbour Visitor Information Centre

Media releases were issued on 16 and 20 March 2006 and a Draft Management Plan media briefing was staged on 20 March 2006. The releases and the briefing clearly detailed the rate variation and City Centre Business Rate extension proposals.

4 Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan - Community Consultation ...(Cont'd)

Council advertised and hosted a public meeting at the Coffs Harbour Catholic Club on Wednesday, 22 March 2006 to discuss the Draft Management Plan and the rate proposals.

Advertisements, drawing attention to the Draft Management Plan and inviting community submissions, were placed in all three local newspapers throughout the public exhibition period. A two-page advertising feature, detailing the Draft Management Plan and the rate proposals, was published in the Coffs Coast Advertiser on Wednesday, 29 March 2006 and in the Woolgoolga Advertiser on Monday 3 April 2006.

The Draft Management Plan was posted prominently on Council's website – www.coffsharbour.com.au - with a homepage link detailing the plan and the rate proposals and providing direct downloads of the plan documents. During the exhibition period, the Draft Management Plan was downloaded 969 times, the Draft Program Budgets were downloaded 384 times, and the Draft Fees and Charges were downloaded 237 times. The website also provided a direct link for visitors to make online submissions to the Draft Management Plan.

Related Policy and / or Precedents:

This is Council's thirteenth Draft Management Plan prepared under the 1993 Local Government Act.

Statutory Requirements:

Section 402-407 of the 1993 Local Government Act outlines the requirements for Council's Draft Management Plan.

Council is required, among other things, to adopt a Management Plan by 30 June each year. The draft plan must be placed on public exhibition for a period of 28 days. Council must consider submissions received on the draft plan before adopting the final plan.

Section 508 (2) of the Local Government Act outlines the requirements Council must satisfy in submitting an application for Special Variation to General Income. The application should include a summary of responses received before, during and after the exhibition of the Management Plan with respect to proposed rates and charges. The application should also give an indication of the number of responses (including the number for and against the proposal) and Council's response, if any.

Issues:

In September 2005, Council foreshadowed its intention to seek a rate variation to support the proposed Community Facilities Program in 2006/2007. This proposal was the subject of a publicly-tabled report to Council as well as media releases in September and December 2005. One letter was received from a ratepayer in January 2006 in which, in passing, the variation proposal was described as a "more reasonable request". This is the only correspondence Council has received from ratepayers on this matter prior to the adoption of the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan.

4 Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan - Community Consultation ...(Cont'd)

Public Meeting

The public meeting of 22 March 2006 was attended by twelve people. A comprehensive presentation was put forward by the General Manager, Mayor and Director of Corporate Services, with strong emphasis placed on the detail of the Community Facilities Program and rate variation proposals.

While there was some discussion about the detail of some of the projects, there was a general degree of support for the proposed Community Facilities Program. No opposition was expressed to the rate variation proposal, however there was some interest in the life of the variation and the process of using it to raise loans.

The general tone of the meeting was one of support for the Community Facilities Program and acceptance of the need for a rate variation to fund it.

Community Submissions

A total of 37 community submissions to the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan were received by Council at the close of the public exhibition period. A full summary of submissions is attached.

Last year, Council received 427 submissions to its Draft 2005/2008 Management Plan (409 relating to the infrastructure/rate rise proposal put forward in that plan). In the preceding year, Council received 91 submissions (54 concerned with a rating restructure following a valuation 'spike' in properties, particularly at Sawtell).

Most of the submissions to the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan relate to individual funding allocations (eg, seeking roadwork or footpath improvements at specific locations, gas heating in a community hall, etc.).

A total of six submissions make reference to the Community Facilities Program:

- Three express opposition to the funding of the program through a proposed 9.56% rate variation.
- Two argue that funding should be diverted away from the Community Facilities Program and spent on 'basic' infrastructure (footpaths, kerb and guttering, etc).
- One expresses full support for the rate variation and the Community Facilities Program.

Coffs Harbour has more than 28,000 rateable properties. It could be argued that the muted response – demonstrated at the public meeting and by the submissions - suggests that Council's proposals are viewed as reasonable and affordable by the majority of people in Coffs Harbour.

If the local media is any measure of public opinion, there appears to be a level of support in the community for the works program and rate variation proposal. News coverage has been overwhelmingly positive, and editorials in the city's major newspaper have encouraged the community to support Council's plan.

Council has prepared the Community Facilities Program proposal after extensive consultation with the local community. The program offers a measured response to an ongoing demand. The supporting rate variation is a responsible strategy to deliver the proposed works within a realistic timeframe.

4 Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan - Community Consultation ...(Cont'd)

It is recommended that a summary of community submissions be forwarded to the Minister for Local Government to support Council's application for a Special Variation to General Income.

City Centre Business Rate

Letters were sent directly to all 320 City Centre property owners on 23 March 2006 outlining Council's proposal to extend the term of the City Centre Business Rate by three years to facilitate funding for new works in the CBD. Each letter included a survey form, asking property owners whether they supported or opposed the proposal. CBD ratepayers were allowed three weeks to return their survey forms.

At the close of the survey period on 14 April 2006, 132 survey forms had been received. Of these:

- 85 (64.4%) support the proposal (includes 19 Council-owned properties)
- 47 (35.6%) oppose the proposal

A number of survey forms were accompanied with comments from property owners. A summary of those comments is attached.

While the survey demonstrates a level of support, it is not considered sufficient to warrant Council pursuing the rate extension proposal at this time.

It should also be noted that, in preliminary discussions with Department of Local Government executives, Council has been advised that it would be premature to apply for such an extension. The City Centre Business Rate was approved in 2000 for twelve years. The Department has made it clear that an application to extend the rate is unlikely to be considered while the rate still has six years to run.

Accordingly, it is recommended that Council notes the level of support for an extension of the City Centre Business Rate but withdraws its application to the Minister for Local Government.

Implementation Date / Priority:

Subject to Council approval, a summary of Community Submissions to the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan will be forwarded to the Minister for Local Government as soon as practicable to support Council's Application for a Special Variation to General Income.

Following receipt of the Minister's determination on the application, Council will review the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan (taking into consideration community submissions) with the intention of adopting a 2006/2009 Management Plan by 30 June 2006.

Subject to Council approval, the proposal to seek an extension of the City Centre Business Rate will be withdrawn.

4 Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan - Community Consultation ...(Cont'd)

Recommendation:

That:

1. Council note the Community Submissions to the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan.
2. Based on the response demonstrated by the Community Submissions, Council reaffirm its decision to seek a special rate variation of 9.56% in 2006/2007 to support the Community Facilities Program
3. Council note the results of its survey of City Centre property owners in relation to its proposal to extend the term of the City Centre Business Rate by three years.
4. Council withdraw its proposal to seek the consent of the Minister for Local Government for an extension of the term of the City Centre Business Rate.
5. Following the adoption of the 2006/2009 Management Plan, Council write to all those who lodged submissions or survey forms to thank them for their participation in the Management Plan process and to advise them of the outcome relating to their correspondence.

Attachments:

Attachment A

Community Submissions to the Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan

The Draft 2006/2009 Management Plan has been on public exhibition for 32 days from Saturday, 18 March to Tuesday, 18 April 2006.

At the close of the public exhibition period, Council had received a total of 37 community submissions to the draft plan. A full summary of submissions is attached.

Of the submissions:

- 17 represent requests for funding for specific projects. As well as Facility Management Committee requests, these include:
 - a concrete ford at Mole Creek
 - a number of footpath projects
 - an upgrade of Woolgoolga Swimming Pool
 - a bus shelter
 - dust sealing of part of Keoghs Road
 - extension of Fitzroy Oval amenities
 - drainage work at Advocate Park
 - the development of a new tourism marketing plan
- 3 object to the new water pricing policy
- 1 objects to the CBD rate extension
- 3 concern fees and scheduling of the new waste strategy
- 3 object to the 9.56% rate variation and some or all of the Community Facilities Program.
- 1 supports the 9.56% rate variation and the Community Facilities Program.
- 1 'major' submission from Sawtell Progress Association questioning funding for some Community Facilities Program projects and seeking a number of roadwork and footpath projects.
- 1 'major' submission from United Residents Group of Emerald effectively supporting the rate rise proposal but seeking the expenditure of rates on existing problems – eg, street lighting, bus shelters, kerb and guttering, footpaths, drainage – and the deferral of the Community Facilities Program until 2007/2008.
- The balance of submissions cover budget mechanisms, opposition to the Base Amount rating system, and other issues.

Last year, Council received 427 submissions to its Draft 2005/2008 Management Plan (409 relating to the infrastructure/rate rise proposal put forward in that plan). In the preceding year, Council received 91 submissions (54 concerned with a rating restructure following a valuation 'spike' in properties, particularly at Sawtell).

Attachment B

EXTENSION OF THE CITY CENTRE BUSINESS RATE

Additional comments provided with survey forms submitted by City Centre property owners.

Areas not considered to benefit from the rate extension (and therefore should not pay):

- Grafton St
- Little St
- West High St
- Elizabeth St
- Park Ave

Works requested for:

- Urara Park
- West High St
- Highway through CBD (Signage adjacent to Grafton St motels)
- Scarba St
- More parking needed!!!!

Works included in the proposed program not considered important:

- Shade structures in Park Ave carpark
- Traffic lights (Gordon St/ Harbour Dv)
- Lift in Castle St carpark

Who should pay for these works:

- Only businesses in the CBD
- Capital works (therefore should be funded from normal rates)
- Other accommodation places outside the CBD should also pay because they also benefit from the works.