



Minutes

Unscheduled Council Meeting

Tuesday 3 June 2025

to be held at 1:00 PM

Council Chambers

Swan Hill Town Hall

53 – 57 McCallum Street, Swan Hill. VIC 3585

Confirmed 17 June 2025

Chairperson.....

Public Access

Open to the public and live streaming from
Council's website: www.swanhill.vic.gov.au



Vision Statement

Built on strong foundations that embrace our rich History and natural environment, our region will be a place of progressions and possibility. We are a community that is happy, healthy and harmonious - we are empowered, we are respectful and we are proud.

Our Mission

We will lead, advocate, partner and provide efficient services and opportunities for growth and the wellbeing of our community, environment and economy.

Our Values

Council values our residents and community and will be responsive to their needs. In pursuing our objectives, we believe in, and are committed to, the following values:

Community engagement - We will ensure that our communities are consulted, listened to and informed.

Leadership - We will be at the centre of our community and by actively engaging our community we will form the collective view on strategic issues and will then express our views through strong advocacy and action.

Fairness - We will value and embrace the diversity of our community and ensure that all people are treated equally.

Accountability- We will be transparent and efficient in our activities and we will always value feedback.

Trust - We will act with integrity and earn the community's trust by being a reliable partner in delivering services, projects and providing facilities.

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1 Procedural Matters

1.1 Welcome

Mayor, Cr King assumed the chair and declared the Unscheduled Council Meeting - 3 June 2025 open at 1:00 pm.

1.2 Acknowledgement Of Country

Mayor, Cr King read the Acknowledgement of Country.

"Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, and pays its respects to their elders, past and present."

1.3 Opening Declaration

Cr Broad read the prayer.

"We beseech you Lord, that we may be granted wisdom, understanding and sincerity of purpose, in the decisions we are called on to make for the welfare of the people of the Rural City of Swan Hill."

1.4 Apologies / Leaves of Absence

CM 2025/67 Motion

Apology from Cr Englefield.

MOVED Cr McPhee

That the apology from Cr Englefield be accepted.

SECONDED Cr Rogers

The Motion was put and CARRIED 6 / 0

1.5 Directors / Officers Present

Scott Barber, Chief Executive Officer
Michelle Grainger, Director Development and Planning
Helen Morris, Acting Director of Corporate Services
Leah Johnston, Director of Infrastructure
Ash Free, Finance Manager
Sharon Lindsay, Executive Assistant
Tamara Matthews, Executive Support

1.6 Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

Nil.

2 Officer Reports for Decision

2.1 Receive and Hear Submissions to the Draft 2025-26 Budget

Directorate: Corporate Services
File Number: S15-06-19
Purpose: Information Only

Council Plan Strategy Addressed

4. Leadership - We will ensure accountable leadership, advocacy and transparent decision making.

4.1 Excellent management and administration

4.1.3 Sound, sustainable:

- Financial management • Excellence in service delivery • Strategic planning

Current Strategic Documents

Budget

Declarations of Interest

Council Officers affirm that no general or material conflicts need to be declared in relation to the subject of this report.

Summary

The purpose of this report is to enable Council to receive and hear submissions to the Draft 2025-26 Annual Budget.

At the close of the submission period, 10 submissions were received. One submitter has requested to speak to their submission.

Discussion

Council advertised for submissions to its Draft 2025-26 Annual Budget beginning Wednesday 16 April 2025. Notification of the Draft Budget was provided on Council's website and social media. It was advertised in the Swan Hill Guardian on 17 April 2025, the Robinvale Sentinel on 24 April 2025 and online through Let's Talk, Council's community engagement platform. Submissions were invited from 16 April 2025 to 16 May 2025 (31 days).

The Statutory period for making submissions has now passed. As required under the Local Government Act 1989, Council must now formally receive, hear and then consider all submissions.

At the close of the submission period, 10 submissions were received. One submitter has requested to speak to their submission.
Copies of all submissions received are attached to this report.

Summary of Submission 1

The submitter suggests that more funding is required for the Swan Hill Outdoor Pool facilities maintenance. Water slide, pool gates, garden maintenance, and changeroom facilities require upgrades. Submitter also mentions the lack of projects that create growth within the municipality.

Summary of Submission 2

The submitter requests funds toward an investigation of the planning process relevant to the demolition of 82 Herbert St (Roxy Theatre).

Summary of Submission 3

Request for more Council maintenance within Woorinen South, and works requested on Kerb and Channel fronting property.

Summary of Submission 4

The submitter requests Council assistance with the rabbit control on EF Butler Reserve. Rabbit burrows have become a hazard to users of this facility.

Summary of Submission 5

The submitter requests a reduction of fees for animal release at Council Animal Pound facilities and for the consideration of a discount for pensioners from such fees.

Summary of Submission 6

Request for a new off-street car parking facility within the Swan Hill CBD. Has Council considered funding within the budget for improved facilities at the buildings leased to childcare providers at Manangatang, Nyah West and Swan Hill?

Summary of Submission 7

The submitter requests an assessment of a proposed new route for the Lake Boga township for those trucks using the Lake Boga - Ultima Road.

Summary of Submission 8

Submission regarding the budget allocation for the Robinvale Off Leash Dog Park and the suitability of the proposed location.

Summary of Submission 9

The submission raises several questions to the Draft Budget.

1. Information requested on what the \$20.4M forecast expenditure in the Economic Development Service area for 2024/25 and 2025/26 relates to.
2. Request for more detailed budget information on programs and services across Council, particularly the Swan Hill Livestock Exchange.
3. Requests information as to why consultant fees are \$2.23M in 2024/25. Detail on these costs are requested.
4. Information requested as to why Councillors and corporate management fees increased from a budget of \$2.3M to a forecast actual of \$3.3M and then reducing to \$2.5M in 2025/26. Details on fluctuations requested.
5. Information requested as the items included in the Other Income line item.
6. Information requested as the items included in the Other Expenditure line item.

7. Information requested as to why the capital works amounts in the Waste Management area alternate with a nil amount every second year.
8. Information requested as to what items are considered as Other Infrastructure in the statement of capital works.
9. Information requested as to why there is a variance within the employee costs of staff within the various departments of Council.

Summary of Submission 10

The submission makes several requests from Council to be able to deliver actions that address 1. Climate, Electrification, Emissions and Equity; 2. Liveability, Greening, Cooling and Shade; 3. Acting upon the Economic Development Strategy 2024-2030; 4. Roadside Weeds and Pest Management Program; 5. Rivers, Water Quality, Urban Riverfronts; 6. Food security; 7. Waste and Circular Economy; 8. Active Transport; 9. Environment and Sustainability Unit.

Submission requests from the budget are as follows:

1. Request for the emissions measuring project (\$15K) and carbon offsets grants (\$20K) be reinstated in the budget.
2. Set up an advisory committee to work on developing a Safe Climate/Emissions Strategy. Requesting \$50K.
3. Request to work with Council on a proposed advocacy document on renewable energy.
4. Request for a scheme to provide rebates for upgrading home energy efficiency for ratepayers.
5. Request to retrofit Council buildings for energy efficiency. Suggested Robinvale Rec Centre; Community Centre Nyah; Performing Arts Centre, Town Hall; Robinvale Community Centre; Swan Hill Outdoor Pool; Swan Hill Leisure Centre; Swan Hill Library.
6. Allocate \$500K for the purchase of electric vehicle fleet.
7. Allocate \$35K from the budgeted \$74K surplus for tree planting.
8. Funding for the creation of a Significant Tree Register. Suggestion of allocating \$20K.
9. Requesting funding for Robin St Robinvale Avenue of trees, shade structures and seating. No amount specified.
10. Funding for native gardens, seating, public artwork, information and historical boards, for Swan Hill, Nyah, Boundary Bend and Robinvale River Walks and other towns eg. Lake Boga, Ultima, and Manangatang. No amount specified.
11. Council assistance to ratepayers to install household and local business batteries.
12. Information requested as to where in the draft budget the action to "Advocate and prepare for renewable energy transition" can be displayed.
13. Request an additional \$50K of rates funding for an increase in Roadside Weeds and Pest Management.
14. Additional funding for the Milloo St wetlands in Swan Hill.
15. Requesting \$1M for the design of plans for infrastructure that ensures all stormwater run-off is as clean as possible before entering the river eg. new wetlands in the southern part of Swan Hill.
16. Further funding for the Robinvale Urban Riverfront Masterplan 2023.
17. Request for \$100K for the Little Murray Urban riverfront project.
18. Request to provide funding for the expansion of the Environment unit at Council with more staff and budget to allow for work on areas such as improving the health of our rivers, lakes and natural areas.

19. Swan Hill Sustainability Group requests funding food security initiatives such as Mildura's "Food Next Door" project. They would welcome a discussion about Council supporting a project like this in Swan Hill and Robinvale.
20. Further support for gardening clubs and community gardens.
21. Information requested as to where funding for the Active Transport Strategy is reflected in the budget.

Consultation

The submission process is part of the consultation process for the budget.

Financial Implications

The consideration of submissions has no direct financial impact. If changes are made to the Draft Budget due to any of the submissions, then the financial implications will vary depending on the nature of the change.

Social Implications

The consideration of submissions has no direct social impact. If changes are made to the Draft Budget due to any of the submissions, then the social implications will vary depending on the nature of the change.

Economic Implications

The consideration of submissions has no direct economic impact. If changes are made to the Proposed Budget due to any of the submissions, then the economic implications will vary depending on the nature of the change.

Environmental Implications

The consideration of submissions has no direct environmental impact. If changes are made to the Proposed Budget due to any of the submissions, then the environmental implications will vary depending on the nature of the change.

Risk Management Implications

The consideration of submissions has no direct risk management impact. If changes are made to the Proposed Budget due to any of the submissions, then the risk management implications will vary depending on the nature of the change.

Attachments: 1. 2526 Budget Submission redacted [2.1.1 - 19 pages]

Options

1. After considering the submissions Council can choose to amend or adopt the 2025-26 Annual Budget.

Recommendation/s

That Council:

1. Receive and hear submissions to the Draft 2025-26 Annual Budget.

2. Prepare responses to the submissions and table at the scheduled Meeting of Council on 17 June 2025.

CM 2025/68 Motion**MOVED Cr McPhee****That Council:**

1. Receive, hear and consider submissions to the Draft 2025-26 Annual Budget.
2. Prepare responses to the submissions and table at the scheduled Meeting of Council on 17 June 2025.

SECONDED Cr Rogers**The Motion was put and CARRIED 6 / 0****CM 2025/69 MOTION****MOVED Cr Rogers****That standing orders be suspended at 1:06 pm to hear submissions.****SECONDED Cr Broad****The Motion was put and CARRIED 6 / 0**

Ms Kelly spoke to the submission on behalf of the Swan Hill Sustainability Group.

CM 2025/70 MOTION**MOVED Cr Rogers****That standing orders be resumed at 1:19 pm.****SECONDED Cr Jennings****The Motion was put and CARRIED 6 / 0**

Let's Talk # 1

Contribution ID: 5990

Member ID:

Date Submitted: Apr 16, 2025, 08:17 PM

Q1 First Name

Short Text Lisa

Q2 Last Name

Short Text Leigh

Q3 Phone number

Number

Q4 Email address

Email

Q5 Comments

Long Text

Disappointed to see no funds invested in improving our local pool- we use this frequently and noticed it was significantly deteriorating this year- the water slide is desperate for maintenance, the pool gates broken, unsafe and don't lock or shut, the gardens and bamboo falling away from the fences , the change rooms awful and filthy. The steps so rusted they cut your feet- but dare we complain in fear you'll take it away, which leads me to discuss the extremely high expenditure of staff wages of the council- and performance of these rolls- how are they meeting community needs- a lot of employment but a very unhappy community in terms of representing the wants and needs of our community-

Also noticed the extremely decline in the sale yards- perhaps a ready made decision considering feedback only closed today 16/4/25 - raises eyebrows and concerns !

And notably nothing that screams growth - excitement or joy in our township- nothing that brings doctors or education or entertainment.

Q6 Would you be interested providing feedback on other Council Strategic Financials Plan and Documents

Multi Choice

No

Submit your comments on the draft Budget 2025/26



Let's Talk # 2

Contribution ID: 6040

Member ID:

Date Submitted: Apr 17, 2025, 04:20 PM

Q1 First Name

Short Text Anniemae

Q2 Last Name

Short Text Goldring

Q3 Phone number

Number

Q4 Email address

Email

Q5 Comments

Long Text

There needs to be more funds and priority allocated toward the investigation of the planning documentation and the handling in particular of Robinvaes planning documents which has seen an observed overlay outlined in the previous survey completed in 2000 at the address of 82 Herbert Street which was the Roxy Theatre which was demolished without evidence of following proper channels and dissolved of address has been sited as being now listed within into the council owned 76 Herbert St, clearly indicated by the photos readily available in the heritage scheme which was ONLY the maples building not the inclusionary land around and certainly not the structure that was recommended in the scheme as remaining in one piece.

I request a council formal investigation into the mismanagement of this address. Additional it can be clearly seen that a small town development report done on the region excluded to the limitation of the study Robinvale - while appreciating that the small town does have associated number the study itself is misrepresentation as it has no indication of Managatang and Boundary Bend being reliant on the town for resourcing.

Q6 Would you be interested providing feedback on other Council Strategic Financials Plan and Documents

Multi Choice

Yes

Submit your comments on the draft Budget 2025/26



Let's Talk # 3

Contribution ID: 6062

Member ID:

Date Submitted: Apr 18, 2025, 08:34 AM

Q1 First Name

Short Text Leonard

Q2 Last Name

Short Text Rickard

Q3 Phone number

Number

Q4 Email address

Email

Q5 Comments

Long Text I would like to see things around woorinen south being done like our tree being done it is lifting the front drain from the roots and when it rains the water runs into our carport

Q6 Would you be interested providing feedback on other Council Strategic Financials Plan and Documents

Multi Choice

Submit your comments on the draft Budget 2025/26



Let's Talk # 4

Contribution ID: 6245

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 02, 2025, 03:52 PM

Q1 First Name

Short Text Alison

Q2 Last Name

Short Text Gibson

Q3 Phone number

Number

Q4 Email address

Email

Q5 Comments

Long Text

Can the council help with rabbit management at the EF Butler reserve. Cr Stuart King and Anusha Samuel have inspected the site and a study has been done in consultation with the 5 user groups and the neighbors at the reserve. Approval was given and there has been no progress. RDA has spent \$7000 at the reserve rabbit proofing its sensory garden. The burrows are hazard to all who use the reserve. As President of the Swan Hill Rda centre I am responsible for my volunteers safety and in turn risk management. We got a quote from Ben Cardenas which totally unreasonable.

Q6 Would you be interested providing feedback on other Council Strategic Financials Plan and Documents

Multi Choice

No

Submit your comments on the draft Budget 2025/26



Let's Talk # 5

Contribution ID: 12007

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 07, 2025, 03:10 PM

Q1 First Name

Short Text Anonymous

Q2 Last Name

Short Text

Q3 Phone number

Number

Q4 Email address

Email

Q5 Comments

Long Text

Pound release prices are so high, and very difficult for people experiencing poverty to get their pets, who are like family members, back out of the pound.

I would like to suggest having a pensioner fee for pound release at half price and / or to accept payment plans for pound release. This isn't currently allowed and is unfair.

Q6 Would you be interested providing feedback on other Council Strategic Financials Plan and Documents

Multi Choice

No

Submit your comments on the draft Budget 2025/26



Let's Talk # 6

Contribution ID: 12012

Member ID: 287

Date Submitted: May 07, 2025, 10:22 PM

Q1 First Name

Short Text Chris

Q2 Last Name

Short Text Jeffery

Q3 Phone number

Number

Q4 Email address

Email

Q5 Comments

Long Text

1. Can Council commit to undertaking a new car park for public access on the site of the old bowling green on Curlewis Street to increase parking availability on for CBD workers.

With CBD buildings turning into larger office spaces eg, Swan Hill Health, Uniting Aged Well, DOJ, CUC and introduction of fees for private car park around Swan Hill Club, getting a parking spot for all day parking is difficult. Staff are parking in Commercial Hotel rear car park taking up spaces for patrons.

While the old green may be targetted for future use in the Swan Hill Riverside Masterplan - this plan is a long-term plan and subject to investment.

2. What is Council doing to improve the Council buildings leased to Childcare providers in this budget eg (Manangatang, Nyah West and Swan Hill) that has been identified in recent studies requiring improvements to improve OHS.

Q6 Would you be interested providing feedback on other Council Strategic Financials Plan and Documents

Multi Choice

Submit your comments on the draft Budget 2025/26



Lake Boga Inc

Mayor and Councillors

Swan Hill Rural City Council

45 Splatt St

Swan Hill 3585

Heavy Truck Route Lake Boga

This is to request a change to the heavy truck route through Lake Boga. This change has been identified in Lake Boga's Community Plan. The current route for trucks entering Lake Boga via Ultima Rd is turn right into Sudan St then left into Lalbert Rd then out on to the Murray Valley Highway (MVH). This route is very dangerous as it goes through a residential district and past the Primary and Pre School's. Alternatively, trucks journey down Marraboor St and turn right at Station St. This route is also unsuitable and dangerous as it passes through residential areas and the Lake Boga shopping precinct. Both routes have experienced many near misses as the trucks, of ever increasing size, "thunder" through town.

Identification of suitable alternatives is difficult but to turn left at Long Lake Rd then right at Back Boga Rd and on to the MVH is the preferred route. Lake Boga Inc, at the suggestion of Senior Council staff, would like to request that Council set aside funds to undertake a detailed planning study to determine the most suitable alternative route. This Study should evaluate the current situation, examine alternatives, fully cost them and recommend the most suitable alternative route.

We look forward to your response to this request. If you would like more information regarding the request, I can be contacted on

Regards

Steve Matthews

Chairperson Lake Boga Inc.

Swan Hill Rural City Council - DRAFT Budget 2025/26

Submission – Robinvale Off Leash Dog Park

References:

- A. Swan Hill Rural City Council Draft Budget 2025/26
- B. Item B.19.83 Off Leash Dog Trial Area – Review as presented to Council on 20 August 2019 (including the Online Survey Results January 2019)
- C. DEECA webpage – New and upgraded dog parks – as at 31/3/25
- D. Robinvale Riverfront Masterplan Final Landscape Masterplan Report prepared by GroupGSA date 12/9/23
- E. Swan Hill Rural City Council Planning Scheme
- F. Swan Hill Rural City Council Domestic Animal Management Plan
- G. Environmental Protection Authority Victoria – Residential noise and the law

Purpose

The purpose of this submission is threefold; firstly, to identify issues with the proposal to develop an off leash dog park in Robinvale and secondly if it is decided to go ahead and construct such a park that it should not be located on the site recommended in the masterplan, Reference D. And lastly that if Council determines not to go ahead with the off leash dog park that the allocated Council Cash be reallocated to the benefit of Robinvale.

Report to Council Item B.19.83 Off Leash Dog Trial Area - Review

A survey throughout the municipality was conducted in January 2019. 103 responses were received. 12% of responders did not want a permanently fenced dog park to be established.

Centenary Park Robinvale was included as a trial area. 54 people who live in Robinvale responded. And with regard to those who had registered their dogs and assuming equal distribution of responses it is likely that 46 Robinvale respondents had registered their dogs. Of the respondents, 24 said they had used the Robinvale site. There were many negative comments about the trial which included identifying Centenary Park as 'Prickle Park'. The top location for Robinvale was identified as 'along the riverside'.

The report stated:

'It is recommended to consult further with community members to decide on the final locations for a permanent dog park, particularly in Robinvale as many responders did not identify a location and contained concerns only'.

The final recommendations were:

- 1. Consider the development of two off leash dog parks (Swan Hill and Robinvale) as part of the 20/21 budget and the review of the ten year major projects plan.
- 2. Continue the off leash dog area in Tower Hill Swan Hill.
- 3. Cease the trial in all other locations.

Cr McPhee amended the motion to include:

- 4. Investigate the opportunity of a timed off-leash dog park.

The motion was carried.

To date there has not been any further consultation with the Robinvale community since the release of Reference D which identifies two locations for Robinvale but recommends a site in Centenary Park.

Budget for the Off Leash Dog Park

The budget is listed as \$250,000.00 with \$125,000.00 sourced from Grants and \$125,000.00 sourced from Council Cash, 4.5.2 – 25/26 Budget page 47. Given a budget has been presented the following can be assumed: the site has been chosen, a cost estimate has been received, a request for tender has been drafted and a provisional start and end date identified.

At Reference C the funding awarded to Robinvale is \$225,000.00 and not \$125,000.00 as shown in the budget. The listing in Round 2 Projects also states that the location is Centenary Park. This gives rise to concerns. Why is only \$125,000.00 shown in the budget as Grants with the other \$125,000.00 to be sourced from Council Cash? What has happened to the other \$100,000.00? And if the site is not yet decided, as further consultation is required, why is it listed as Centenary Park?

Robinvale Riverfront Master Plan

GroupGSA are a global architecture, interior design, landscape architecture and urban design studio. Their studios are in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Ho Chi Minh City. The group completed the design for the Albury Riverside Precinct. I have visited this precinct. It is lush with vast expanses of lawn and many mature shade trees. It is an asset to the city. However, on reading the initial draft of their plan for the Robinvale waterfront it became obvious they did not appreciate or understand many fundamental aspects. The most obvious blunders were the inclusion of private land in the development, inclusion of land ie. Robinvale-Euston Memorial Park, that is managed under an MOU and therefore to be excluded, but is still in the plan and identified as Bill McGinty Park which is incorrect, the suggestion that 'ocean views' would be appreciated while walking along the boardwalks which suggested a cut and paste from another plan, and the inclusion of a pontoon protruding into The Cut that would effectively block any boats from traversing through The Cut.

The plan identifies two sites for an off leash dog park. The first is located on the southern boundary of Centenary Park and is tucked in behind the Senior Citizens Building. The second site is located in an area described as Riverfront East. The second site should be moved further south to the Vic Parks fence line away from the The Cut. The plan states that based on the analysis of the two locations, intended usage and existing conditions, Centenary Park is the more appropriate and recommended option.

The plan does not include any real analysis, does not address usage and nor does it discuss existing conditions. The plan does mention Pros and Cons for each site. It does not mention References B, E, F or G. The table below is as presented the plan. Comments made by this author are in red.

Dog Park Option 1: Centenary Park South:

Pros	Cons
Large area of natural open space	As it is located adjacent to the neighbouring residential houses it may have certain impact to the resident (Fundamental and significant issue – a show stopper. The site extends across the frontage of four houses. Residents in areas zoned GRZ are entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their home. The identified site is zoned GRZ and according to the Swan Hill Rural City Planning Scheme it is probable that an off leash dog park would be prohibited on this site.)
Close to the major amenities (Not relevant if you are exercising your dog)	(Situated very close to an unfenced playground and picnic area for all. Any dog not on a leash will be a concern for all. Dogs don't necessarily like each other, or people, and dog fights may eventuate in an area with toddlers and elderly being especially vulnerable.)
Easy access	

Dog Park Option 2: Riverfront East

Pros	Cons
Large area of natural open space	Location is far from the other amenities (If it your intent is to exercise your dog then other amenities are irrelevant)
Potential stimulator of other activities in the eastern side	The existing important flora and fauna could be affected by the dogs. (Dogs are walked off leash and swum in the area already and it will continue to be so. The area is surrounded by the natural environment. The same concerns could be associated with the intent to construct pontoons, paved areas board walks, terraces, and seating along McLennan Drive. The report notes that a docking station for commercial boats could also be considered.)

The area was once used by the Robinvale Pony Club so it can't be described as having special value.	
Easy Access	
According to the plan no earth features, shell middens or scarred trees have been identified on this site.	

Swan Hill Rural City Council Planning Scheme

Off Leash Dog Park - Option 1. This option covers land that is zoned General Residential. While the scheme allows domestic animal husbandry with a maximum of two animals without a permit, it prohibits 'animal training', and 'domestic animal boarding', and it is suggested that by extension an off leash dog park would be prohibited. The scheme requires consideration as to whether the development is compatible with residential use. It is not.

Off Leash Dog Park - Option 2. This option covers land that is zoned Public Conservation and Resource. The site was previously used as a horse riding and horse training arena for the Robinvale Pony Club. A permit is not required for a boat launching facility, camping or caravan park, car park or informal outdoor recreation. These uses suggest that an off leash dog park would also be an appropriate use. Parks Victoria sheds and office are located within this zone as are boat ramps, toilets and a caravan park. The master plan also proposes viewing platforms, boardwalks, pontoons, picnic and seating clusters, and a range of riverfront interventions such as significant terracing in front of the Community Centre down to the river. The suggested off leash dog park aligns with the general requirements of the planning scheme for land zoned PC&R and within the scope of the development activities described throughout the plan.

Swan Hill Rural City Council Domestic Animal Management Plan

The plan identified that in 2016/17 there were 2,549 registered dogs in the municipality yet only 103 people responded to the survey. This demonstrates a lack of interest in the development of off leash dog parks as only 4% of people with registered dogs responded, assuming one registered dog per person.

The plan identified that the most common complaints received by council are roaming animals and barking dogs. Should the off leash dog park be situated adjacent to peoples' homes it is likely the number of complaints will increase. And Council is required to respond to the complaints.

Shouldn't Council's plans aim to reduce or mitigate the likelihood of noise complaints, of dogs being a nuisance and to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and other animals? So why locate the off leash park on land zoned General Residential and which abuts private homes.

Environmental Protection Authority and the law

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) focuses on noise pollution, including that from dogs, under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. If dog barking persistently or continuously disturbs a neighbour, it can be considered a nuisance, and the owner can be issued a notice or fine by their local council. If the recommended option is agreed and as the Swan Hill Rural City Council determined the location of the dog park, and if the dogs created a nuisance through noise, this could give rise to an absurd outcome. Council as the responsible authority would be required to issue a notice against itself and prosecute itself. A common sense approach would dictate that an off leash dog park should not be developed on land zoned General Residential or contiguous to land zoned General residential. And that a reasonable distance between the dog park and houses, such as that provided for the off leash dog park in Tower Hill, be defined.

Value for Money

The proposal does not represent value for money for the community. It is a fair assumption that many dogs would reside 'out of town' and would never require or use an off leash dog park. 'Their' dog park is their property and the river and its surrounds. And given only 46 people with registered dogs from Robinvale responded to the survey, a \$250,000.00 capital expenditure for an off leash dog park is an extraordinarily expensive project.

The survey discovered that users did not wish to pay a fee to use the dog park as they considered their registration costs and rates should cover capital and ongoing costs. Yet for instance, those people who use the Lesisure Centre, a Council owned and maintained facility, a user fee is paid. Council also sets and reports against KPIs for use of the facility. Would Council do the same for the off leash dog park? Has Council included the costs of maintaining the off leash dog park in their operational budget?

Conclusion

Many factors surrounding the proposal do not appear to have been well considered. Is it worth spending \$125,000.00 of rate payers' money for the benefit of a few? It is requested Council reviews the decision to develop an off leash dog park in either location with a view to reallocation of \$125,000.00 of Council Cash to other higher priority works in Robinvale such as beautification of Perrin Street or to enable elements of Stage 2 of the playground, such as the flying fox and BBQ areas to be developed as soon as possible. Robinvale has been waiting since 1974 for Centenary Park to be appropriately developed in to a park suitable for the enjoyment of the entire community.

RESIDENTS & RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION INC - A0057050E

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY | PRESERVING DEMOCRACY | PROMOTING COMMUNITY AND OPEN COUNCIL DEBATE

President: Robyn Wilkie | Telephone: | Email:
Secretary: Roger Day | Telephone: | Email:
All Correspondence:

25-7

16 May 2025

Scott Barber and Councillors
Swan Hill Rural City Council
45 Splatt Street
SWAN HILL VIC 3585

Dear Scott and Councillors,

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity afforded us and the Community to review the draft 2025/2026 Council Budget. It is appreciated that Council is willing to provide the public with the opportunity to look through next year's budget. With that being said, we acknowledge that no one in our membership is a qualified accountant, and as such, we are asking questions primarily out of ignorance and out of genuine concern.

Let me start on page 12. We have assumed a lot of things. That bracketed figures are in the positive and the non-bracketed figures are in the negative. For instance, **Economic Development** states for 2023/24 there was an **operational expenditure** of \$2,656,000 and a **capital expenditure** of \$1,527,000. This totals an expenditure of \$4,183,000. This is offset by revenue of \$7,306,000. From this the surplus for this service is \$3,123,000. This is completely understandable. Our concern however lies with the 2024/25 forecast. In this we see an **operational expenditure** of \$1,382,000 (half the year before) and a **capital expenditure** of \$13,873,000 (almost 10 times the year before). This totals \$15,255,000 offset by revenue of \$5,912,000 which leaves a deficit of \$9,343,000. However, the figure is actually represented as a surplus (we assume because of the brackets). May be a simple typo but to the casual observer, seems that all is going well with this service. The 2025/26 budget shows operational expenditure of \$918,000 and capital expenditure of \$6,573,000 giving a total of \$7,491,000 minus revenue of \$2,936,000 leaving a deficit of \$4,555,000. This is represented correctly and so we recommend the typo be fixed. However, the Association is requesting a breakdown of the **Capital Expenditure** over those 2 financial years please. The total is \$20,446,000. Looking at the Statement of Capital Works it is hard to gauge exactly what is Economic Development as opposed to Property, Plant and Equipment or Infrastructure. Although we do note that new asset expenditure nearly equals that amount but for one financial year only. The concern is that we don't see a lot of details, just large sums of money allocated without really much clarification.

But moving along.

Part of the concern raised by members of the Association is that the information presented doesn't give us an insight as to how operational and capital expenditure are assessed. We asked Mayor Cr. King this question prior to the SHRLE Forum we held on Tuesday May 6. We asked to see a P&L for the Livestock Exchange and were told this:

With respect to your first question requesting more detailed "line item" information from the P&L for the SHRLE, this information cannot be provided. It is not appropriate for things such as wages, insurances, etc to be presented, questioned or debated in a public forum. Further, they are operational matters rather than governance or strategic matters that the Mayor would typically comment on. Also, subject to a couple of the options in the report, if an interested party or parties wanted to operate, lease or purchase the SHRLE then detailed information would of course be provided under strict commercial in confidence agreements.

Of course, we understand that this isn't open to debate at a Community Forum, but now that that is over, we are still wondering if the Association can sight such a document, especially for a vast majority of Services listed in the Draft Budget. There are breakdowns for Capital Works, for Staff cost for Human Resources and for Rates Determination. The figures we chase are of course buried somewhere in these statements, but for clarity's sake, seeing them tied to the different services would make submission to this draft budget so much simpler. All we can do is make an educated guess which may be way off target. I'm sure Council would not want to see the Residents and Ratepayers Association get a wrong opinion about how our public money is being spent.

Page 1 of 2

For instance, we noted on page 113 that the cost Swan Hill Motorplex Strategic Review was \$60,000 but nowhere can we see how much the contentious SHRLE Strategic Review cost. Concern has been raised that these costs are there, but unidentified to public scrutiny despite the Council stating on page 6 under **Our Values** and **Accountability** – We will be transparent and efficient in our activities and we will always value feedback.

In light of this we are asking a series of questions regarding some of the budget items. I have already listed a couple above but in the interests of brevity I will bullet point the main ones from the meeting we held regarding the Budget.

- Page 39 it states in **4.1.8 Materials and services, Consultants**. Forecast for this financial year is \$2,226,000, but in the next financial year that figure drops to \$597,000. It actually beggars' belief that Council could spend that much money on Consultation for 2024/25. Can we have a breakdown of who received what please?
- **Services – Councillors and corporate management**. Forecast this financial year for operation expenditure is \$2,305,000 and yet next financial year this increases to \$3,139,000 for the coming financial year and drops again the following year to \$2,550,000. Can we ask why there is such a jump?
- **3.7 Rates Determination Statement. Other Income** is slated to be \$5,600,000 forecast for this financial year and next year budgeted for \$9,248,000. Is it possible to get more detail of what makes up "**Other Income**"?
- Same as **Other Expenses** please?
- **3.5 Statement of Capital Works** – why does **Waste Management** alternate with a nil amount every second year?
- What **other infrastructure** will cost \$3,752,000 this financial year and \$3,572,000 next financial year?
- The Prime Minister of Australia's salary along with key Bureaucrats is available for public scrutiny, yet the same seems to be not true for Council staff. So, we did an average.
Corporate Services is projected to cost \$4,895,000 next financial year for permanent staff. The number of permanent staff next financial (and subsequent years) is 30. This equates to an average salary of \$163,166 per staff member.
Infrastructure has permanent staff costing 6,743,000 and a total of 80 full time staff, this equates to \$84,287 per employee.
Development and Planning permanent staff cost will be \$3,516,000 with 28 full time staff or \$125,571 per employee.
Community and Cultural Services permanent staff cost will be \$1,394,000 with 11 full time staff or \$126,727 per employee.
Can we ask why there is such a vast difference between the staff who are out in the weather most days and those who work inside and in comfort?

Yours sincerely



Roger Day
Secretary - Residents and Ratepayers Association.

SHSG May 2025 submission

Swan Hill Sustainability Group (SHSG) Inc.
Caring for the Earth, Connecting the Community

Swan Hill Rural City Council 2025-2029 Budget Submission

Thank you for opportunity to comment on the draft budget. SHSG welcomes continuing to collaborate and work with Council to determine and align on priorities and leverage funding for our municipality.

For the benefit of new Councillors who may not know Swan Hill Sustainability Group, formerly Sustainable Living in the Mallee, is a Swan Hill based, grass-roots, not-for-profit community organisation, established in 2008. SHSG has engaged with environmental issues including the energy transition over the last seventeen years through advocacy and action. We have led projects, participated in consultations, hosted community forums and meetings and engaged and partnered with Authorities and Governments. While the group was previously linked to Council, in 2011 we incorporated and are now managed by a committee. We hold a biannual River Peoples Forum, manage the local Murray Mallee Landcare Facilitator role and have a current Landcare funded Swan Hill Urban Riverfront Enhancement Project (Murray and Little Murray).

We have recently launched our Strategic Direction 2025-2030 document.

SHSG would like to highlight several areas in the draft budget, particularly as many of these important areas are present in the Council Plans and Strategies, as well as State Government policies and plans, but many of which are without an action or budget suitable to be able to deliver them, even in part. Much of this work is urgent. We have attempted to make suggested dollar figures for some.

1. Climate, Electrification, Emissions and Equity:

- SHSG strongly request that the emissions measuring project (\$15K) and carbon offsets grants (\$20K) are reinstated in the budget. SHSG requested a project like this in our submission last year and we were very pleased to see it in the draft, then very disappointed it was removed.
- Set up an advisory committee to work on developing a **Safe Climate/Emissions Strategy**, including an audit/stocktake of opportunities and risks/impediments and determine priorities both for Council and the wider community. This could look at what has been done in the region for renewables and what still needs to be done. It could include any opportunities in the low voltage networks across the region for storage opportunities, solar curtailment, understanding and promoting the new Federal assistance for households and businesses, current rating and community benefit schemes from large scale renewable energy projects and could even develop case studies on local household and business projects that have reduced emissions and power costs for our community.
(suggest allocating \$50K)

SHSG May 2025 submission

- The council has significant obligations under the Local Government Act in relation to emissions reduction and climate change. We do not believe Council is currently meeting these obligations to the level required or expected. The proposed emissions project would show leadership and cohesion with other Councils in Australia and overseas who are acting to reduce emissions and prevent catastrophic climate change. This is a worldwide effort. Many hands make light work, and we need to play our part regardless of how small our contribution may be.
- Increasingly Local Government will be required to include emissions levels in Service Performance Reports under Community Amenity and Environmental Standards.
- It does not go unnoticed that at the April meeting the Mayor vacated the chair and moved a motion to accept the draft budget with removal of the very modest emissions project and grants program (\$35K). During the motion and debate the Mayor made claims about the science of climate change which could be considered misleading to the Council and the public. These comments also defy the current scientific consensus. How can Council resolve to fulfil their responsibilities while having to debate whether climate change exists?
- SHSG is of the opinion that while Council continues to have budget surplus it should not have to divert funds from climate and emissions projects to fund planting trees. There is something incongruent about this.
- Climate Change has been a priority area within the current Council Plan and will likely be a focus of the new 2025-2029 Council Plan. As such the budget should reflect that focus with adequate funding for various climate and emissions reduction initiatives.
- Carbon Emissions come largely from the energy sector and SHSG's strategic direction for climate action is through development of renewable energy sources and electrification.
- SHSG would have liked to work collaboratively on Council's proposed Advocacy Document on Renewable Energy which to date has not been delivered through the last Council Plan.
- Urban tree planting in the region, whilst important, will not have a significant impact on arresting carbon emissions.
- Emissions and Equity. Suggest including in 2025-26 Council budget to develop a scheme to provide rebates for upgrading home energy efficiency for its ratepayers. Things like insulating/sealing/ electrifying / solar/ batteries as many other Councils are already doing.
- Council should seek Federal funding (eg Community Energy Upgrades Fund) for supporting Council's electrification and emissions reduction. Mildura Rural City has received \$2.5 million recently under this grant.
- consider retrofit of Council buildings for energy efficiency, starting with the 8 highest energy use buildings in 23/24: Robinvale Rec Centre; community centre Nyah; Performing Arts Centre, Town Hall; Robinvale Community Centre; Swan Hill outdoor pool; Swan Hill Leisure Centre; Swan Hill Library.
- begin the process of building an electric vehicle fleet.
(suggest \$500K)

SHSG May 2025 submission

2. Livability: Greening, Cooling and Shade

- Local Government is not just "Roads, Rates and Rubbish" and Council has considerable obligations to improve liveability. It is livability that retains and attracts people to choose to live in our municipality or visit and recreate in it.
 - Council improving livability has major economic benefits. Planting trees to improve livability in towns and improve health and wellbeing is not controversial.
 - The new rule to follow is '3-30-300', that is, people should be able to see 3 trees from their house; have 30% tree canopy; and be 300m maximum from a green space. Would the residents of Swan Hill Rural City meet that rule?
 - SHSG acknowledge that the tree planting budget has been increasing in recent years, but this has been from a low base. The allocated budget for the Coolit project is excellent, as previously mentioned, but must be followed with recurrent funding. It also should benefit all towns in the municipality.
 - The current draft budget proposes a welcome \$35K of increased spending on tree planting. Unfortunately, this came at the expense of a proposed Emissions Accounting Tool for Council. Given the Council is operating in another surplus, we see no need to redirect funding from emissions measuring to tree planting. The Council is in the financial position to fund both concurrently.
 - We request Council use the planning scheme and other mechanisms to increase urban tree canopy and protect existing tree assets eg. creation of a Significant Tree Register.
- (Suggest \$20K)
- Budget allocation to increasing tree canopy through strategic planting should be increased.
 - As recommended in the Small Towns Future Development Plan (2023), one way to improve attractiveness and livability is to provide greening, cooling and shade by tree planting. Specifically, the following should be funded in this budget:
 - Nyah -plant along MVH and service road to reduce bare bitumen.
 - Manangatang- Wattle St.
 - Ultima - avenue planting in Green St.
 - Lake Boga - planting in Marraboer St, Lalbert St and Station St.
 - As recommended in the Robinvale Riverfront Masterplan 2023, funding for Robin St Avenue of trees, Shade structures, Seating and trees.
 - Funding for more native gardens, seating, public artwork and information boards for historical and nature interpretation for Swan Hill, Nyah, Boundary Bend and Robinvale River Walks and other towns eg. Lake Boga, Ultima and Manangatang.

3. Acting upon the Economic Development Strategy 2024-2030:

- In our feedback on the recent Economic Development Strategy we applauded that it has a focus on investment and resource in sustainability and the acknowledgement that renewable energy generation has a great potential to bring benefits to Northwest Victoria, with high penetration already in Swan Hill.
- The strategy noted that current solar energy figures are impressive and show the potential for future projects which could ensure long term energy security for our communities. We would encourage more work with the community to develop

pg. 3

SHSG May 2025 submission

such projects and to assist households in utilizing their solar production more efficiently with the Council assisting its ratepayers to install household and local business batteries.

- SHSG supports the action to “Advocate and prepare for renewable energy transition”. This work could begin with the setting up of a committee to develop a report which informs, guides and assists the community to prepare for this transition.

We would like to see where in the draft budget this work is funded.

4. Roadside Weeds and Pest Management Program:

- We are unable to see any budget increase that will adequately do this work. Landcare Groups are struggling. Species like box thorn and wheel cactus are becoming widespread and must be tackled urgently. Working with other partners, Council could achieve greater success. Councils Roadside Weeds and Pest Management Program is fully externally funded. Funds for this program could be increased from Rates.
(suggest allocating \$50K each year ongoing)

7. Rivers, Water Quality, Urban Riverfronts:

- Our towns on the river must reduce urban stormwater contamination run-off into waterways. Urban stormwater management is a major role for Council as a regulator and duty holder.
- We welcome the very significant increased funding for Drainage under the ‘Capital Works up to 2029’ up to \$1.8M.
- We support upgrades and creation of environmentally sound solutions to Swan Hill drainage challenges. Ideas like wetlands and water sensitive design should be prioritised.
- Funding to maintain and improve the Milloo St wetlands in Swan Hill.
- Funding to develop new plans for infrastructure that ensures all stormwater run-off is as clean as possible before entering the river eg. new wetlands in southern part of Swan Hill.

(suggest \$1M)

- Robinvale Urban Riverfront Masterplan 2023 contains many environment recommendations eg. weed and pest management, revegetation, track stabilisation, erosion control, cultural site protection. These should be prioritised and scheduled in the budget.
- Little Murray urban riverfront project should have recurrent funding to provide for implementation.

(suggest \$100K/yr)

- Expand the Environment unit at Council with more staff and budget to allow for work on areas such as improving health of our rivers, lakes and natural areas.

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SHSG May 2025 submission

6. Food security:

- SHSG requests funding food security initiatives such as Mildura's "Food Next Door" project. We would welcome a discussion about Council supporting a project like this in Swan Hill and Robinvale.
- Supporting gardening clubs and community gardens.

7. Waste and Circular Economy:

- SHSG congratulates Council on the excellent work in this area, particularly the recent opening of the Ultima Compost Facility for FOGO processing.
- We Council to continue to excel in this area by:
 - partnering with local, state and federal governments and community groups.
 - adequately funding programs.
 - focusing on public education campaigns eg. to accompany the roll-out of new bin system and promote reduce, reuse, recycle principles.
 - leading by example.
- Councils' role in regulation, compliance and enforcement eg. Littering and illegal dumping, is a big responsibility and should be adequately funded to ensure the health and safety of people and the environment. (EPA)

8. Active Transport:

- We are unable to see where the Active Transport Strategy 2014/34 is reflected in the budget.
(suggest \$100K)

9. Environment and Sustainability Unit

- request Council allocate required funds to expand the Environment and Sustainability Unit at Council to enable an increase in EFT staff and provide a budget to allow for work on areas of need, such as those above eg. food security, biodiversity, climate strategy, climate adaptation and improving health of rivers and lakes.

END.

2.2 Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29

Directorate: Corporate Services
File Number: S29-24-03
Purpose: For Decision

Council Plan Strategy Addressed

4. Leadership - We will ensure accountable leadership, advocacy and transparent decision making.

4.1 Excellent management and administration

4.1.3 Sound, sustainable:

- Financial management • Excellence in service delivery • Strategic planning

Current Strategic Documents

Revenue and Rating Plan

Declarations of Interest

Council Officers affirm that no general or material conflicts need to be declared in relation to the subject of this report.

Summary

The Revenue and Rating Plan is pivotal to support the four-year Council Plan and associated annual budgets for the same period. It considers all revenue sources available to Council to fund the Council Plan.

Discussion

It is a requirement of Council, under section 93 of the Local Government Act 2020, to adopt a Revenue and Rating Plan. The Plan is required to be adopted by 30 June after a general election for a period of at least the next 4 financial years.

The purpose of the Plan is to determine the most appropriate and affordable revenue and rating approach, which in conjunction with other income sources, will adequately finance the objectives in the Council Plan.

The Plan details the decisions made by Council in relation to rating options available to it under the Local Government Act 2020 to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of rates across property owners. It will also set out the principles for fee and charge setting and include other revenue items to ensure Council's commitment to responsible financial management is achieved, while at the same time continuing to provide high quality, services to the community.

The Plan identifies each source of revenue to be included in the annual budget and the rationale that underpins those revenue sources. The Revenue and Rating Plan

considers rates generated revenue, service charges, grants, fees and charges, statutory fees and any entrepreneurial activities. It provides some description of taxation principles, reference to rate capping, equitable division of the rating burden, a description of differential rating, use of property valuations, and the collection and administration of rates and charges.

Consultation

The Plan has been publicly advertised via Council social media and Council's website, with a Let's Talk – Have your say page prepared to conduct a survey regarding the Revenue and Rating Plan along with the ability to accept comments that respondents wish Council to consider.

Submissions to the Draft Revenue and Rating Plan were accepted from 06 May to 22 May 2025. 8 Submissions were received. Six of the responses were via the Let's Talk platform and two submissions were submitted via letter to the CEO.

Submissions were provided to Council for review and consideration at the Council Briefing held on 27 May 2025.

Financial Implications

The Plan encompasses all streams of revenue available to Council. It effectively supports implementation of the Council Plan and budget for a four-year period

Social Implications

The Plan provides relevant information to Council's customers regarding the rationale behind the imposition of rates, charges and fees.

Economic Implications

The Plan enables financing of the four key results of Liveability, Prosperity, Harmony and Leadership as outlined in the current Council Plan.

Environmental Implications

Aids in support of Council's environmental based programs to be funded via funding raised in the Annual Budget.

Risk Management Implications

The policy mitigates the risk of rapidly altered annual general rate fluctuations due to volatile property valuation shifts.

- Attachments:**
1. Draft Revenue Rating Plan 2529 Final [2.2.1 - 42 pages]
 2. Revenue and Rating Plan 25-29 community Survey redacted [2.2.2 - 8 pages]
 3. RRP Let Talk Summary [2.2.3 - 1 page]
 4. Summer Fruit Sub redacted [2.2.4 - 1 page]
 5. VFF Submission redacted [2.2.5 - 3 pages]

Options

1. Adopt the Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29 as presented.
2. Adopt the Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29 with amendments.

Recommendation/s

That Council:

1. Adopt the Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29 as presented.

CM 2025/71 Motion

MOVED Cr Thornton

Having considered submissions, that Council adopts the Revenue and Rating Plan 25-29, with the following change - a 90% differential for all farming categories, (rather than the 80% for the Dryland category as currently drafted). This “harmonised” differential for all farming categories, will not significantly burden any other category more than the current draft, instead sharing some of the rate relief currently enjoyed by dryland farmers with 2017 extra properties in the irrigated farming category. This improves overall fairness and simplification - two of the important principles we must consider as a Council."

SECONDED Cr Rogers

The Motion was put and LOST 1 / 5

CM 2025/72 Motion

MOVED Cr McPhee

That Council:

1. Adopt the Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29 as presented.

SECONDED Cr Broad

The Motion was put and CARRIED 5 / 1



Draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025 -29



Draft Swan Hill Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025 – 29

Amendment Register

Issue	Date	Details	By
0.1	11 Apr 2025	First draft	AEC Group
0.2	1 May 2025	Second draft	AEC Group
0.3	27 May 2025	Final Draft	SHRCC

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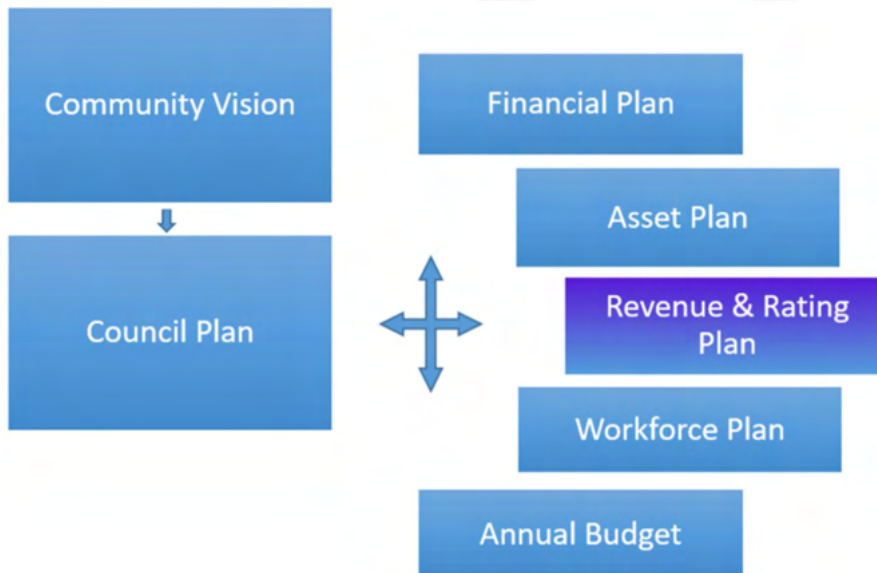
1 Purpose

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires each council to prepare a Revenue and Rating Plan to cover a minimum period of four years following each Council election. The Revenue and Rating Plan establishes the revenue raising framework within which the Council proposes to work.

The purpose of the Revenue and Rating Plan is to determine the most appropriate and affordable revenue and rating approach for Swan Hill Rural City Council which in conjunction with other income sources will adequately finance the objectives in the current Council Plan.

This plan is an important part of Council's integrated planning framework, all of which is created to help Council achieve its current vision of "a prosperous and healthy community enjoying quality facilities and services".

Strategies outlined in this plan align with the objectives contained in the Council Plan and will feed into our budgeting and long-term financial planning documents, as well as other strategic planning documents under our Council's strategic planning framework.



This plan will explain how Council calculates the revenue needed to fund its activities, and how the funding burden will be apportioned between ratepayers and other users of Council facilities and services.

In particular, this plan will set out decisions that Council has made in relation to rating options available to it under the *Local Government Act 2020* to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of rates across property owners. It will also set out principles that are used in decision making for other revenue sources such as fees and charges.

It is also important to note that this plan does not set revenue targets for Council, it outlines the strategic framework and decisions that inform how Council will go about calculating and collecting its revenue.

2 Introduction

2.1 Context

An understanding of a local government area's socio-economic profile is an important consideration in development of the Revenue and Rating Plan. The profile informs drivers of population and economic growth which, in turn, determines the growth in service demand and the revenue streams (particularly general rate revenue and annual charges for waste services), as well as the level of demand for infrastructure/services.

The presence of vulnerable community groups is a major concern to the Council, including retirees with higher reliance on social services, and underscores the importance of considering people vulnerable to the cost of living (including rates and charges set by Council).

Despite Swan Hill's lower unemployment rate and improving capacity to manage cost-of-living shocks, the region's higher disadvantage score compared to the Victoria average suggests that affordability concerns persist. However, Swan Hill region has lower mortgage stress and lower rental stress, indicating that Swan Hill community is somewhat resilient to cost-of-living shocks caused by housing affordability. Swan Hill also records a lower and decreasing degree of reliance on social service payments, and a lower proportion of residents who require assistance with core activities, indicating a smaller and decreasing cohort of particularly vulnerable community groups compared to our peer regions.

In developing the Revenue and Rating Plan, Council has considered policy settings to assist vulnerable ratepayers experiencing financial hardship – see later section in this plan.

Swan Hill has a robust economy with a Gross Regional Product (GRP) over \$1.9 billion, underpinned by Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industries (29.2% of Industry Value Added (IVA)), Health Care and Social Assistance (9.1%), and Wholesale Trade (7.9%). Economic growth has been moderate over the decade to 2022-23, with an average annual growth of 1.6% in Swan Hill, higher than in our comparison regions (1.2%). In the five years to 2022-23, GRP growth at 2.4% per annum in Swan Hill outpaced both our comparison regions and the State of Victoria.

Overall visitation to Swan Hill is expected to increase in line with growth in visitation to the State at 4.3% per annum from 2023-24 to 2028-29. Growth is expected in all visitor markets with the strongest growth expected in day trip visitors (5.3%), followed by international visitors (4.3%) and domestic overnight visitors (3.9%).

A challenge to the sustainability of Council's revenue base is the Victorian State Government population projection for Swan Hill, which is projected to decline by over 500 people to reach a population of 20,670 residents by 2041. Council's plan is to grow the population and strengthen the prosperity of our local economy, through sustainable growth, and in doing so achieve a sustainable revenue base for the Council to continue to fund the services and infrastructure that the community requires.

Council continues with its work to produce an accurate population figure for the Municipality as it does not believe that the ABS statistics are a true reflection of the municipality's population base. A study into the Robinvale population concluded the actual figure is in excess of 8000 people compared to the official figure from the ABS.

Council is considering undertaking a similar exercise for Swan Hill as it appears that its population has also been significantly underestimated.

It is the Council's belief that its population will continue to increase not decline.

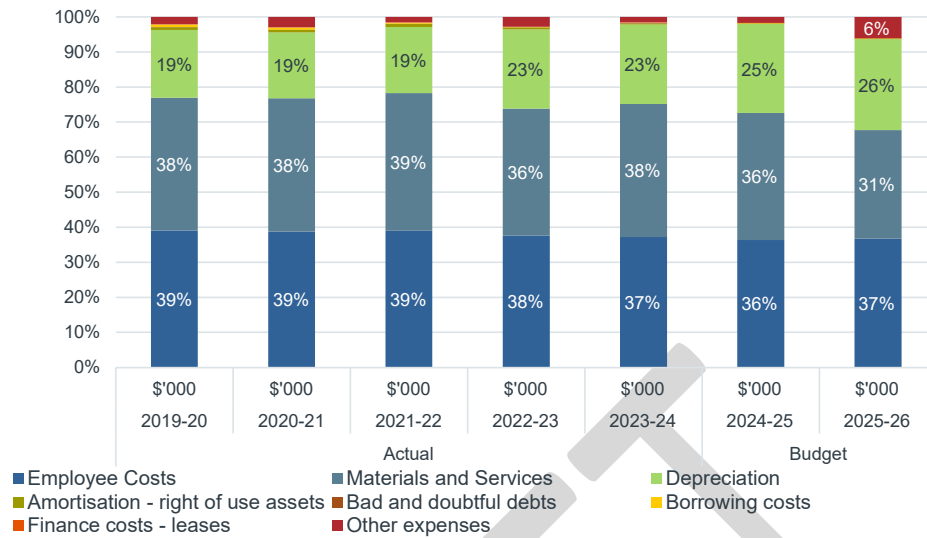
2.2 Council Expenditure on Services

Council provides a range of services in infrastructure to the community, outlined in the current Community Vision and Council Plan (incorporating our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan). The services provided deliver on the following four strategic objectives:

Strategic Objective	Description
Liveability	We will be a health, connected and growing community supported by a range of infrastructure and services
Prosperity	We will continue to build and strengthen a prosperous local economy, through sustainable growth and education. We will focus on creating jobs and wealth through adding value to existing strengths in all areas of our economy
Harmony	We will be a welcoming community for all, recognised by our maturity and respect for each other
Leadership	We will ensure accountable leadership, advocacy and transparent decision making

Council has identified major initiatives and service performance outcome indicators in the Annual Budget, as well as reporting on the performance of services in the Annual Report. Expenditure against each service area, contributing to the strategic objectives, is outlined in the Annual Budget. Historical expenditure and the budget for 2024-25 and 2025-26, are summarised in the table below.

			Actual			Budget	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Employee Costs	19,053	20,083	20,468	20,570	22,512	21,723	22,660
Materials and Services	18,486	19,710	20,614	19,821	22,997	21,625	19,070
Depreciation	9,420	9,756	9,911	12,400	13,723	15,161	15,995
Depreciation - right of use assets	367	406	424	277	176	134	126
Bad and doubtful debts	50	6	70	45	116	1	1
Borrowing costs	342	322	163	70	64	58	57
Finance costs - leases	32	27	24	14	14	22	23
Other expenses	1,035	1,539	820	1,533	960	1,018	3,724
Total Expenses	48,785	51,849	52,494	54,730	60,562	59,742	61,656



The three largest expense lines account for 94% of the total expenses reported. They are employee costs (37% of 2025-26 budget), materials and services (31% of 2025-26 budget) and depreciation (26% of 2025-26 budget). When analysing expense trends from 2019-20 to 2025-26, the biggest increases have been from these largest expense lines. Employee costs have increased annually by 4.3% from 2019-20 to 2023-24, materials and services by 5.6% and depreciation by 9.8%.

Total expenses have increased by 5.6% annually over this period, which compared to the constrained increase in revenue received (historical average increase of 3.1%) is not a sustainable trend. As outlined below, the two greatest revenue sources, being rate revenue and the Financial Assistance Grants, has been constrained by the State and Federal Governments with the increases being below the actual increase in cost of services provided. This unsustainable trend, if not corrected, places a risk to the continuation of levels of service that Council can continue to provide.

2.3 Revenue Sources to Fund Council Services

Council generates revenue from various sources to fund the provision of services and facilities to the community, outlined in the current Community Vision and Council Plan (incorporating our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan), as well as detailed costing in the Annual Budget.

Rates and garbage charges are the most significant revenue source for Council and make up approximately 47% of annual income.

The nature of fees and charges generally depends on whether they relate to statutory or discretionary services. Some of these, such as statutory planning fees are set by State Government statute and are commonly known as regulatory fees. In these cases, councils usually have no control over service pricing. However, in relation to other services, Council has the ability to set a fee or charge and will set that fee based on the principles outlined in this Revenue and Rating Plan.

The introduction of rate capping under the Victorian Government's Fair Go Rates System (FGRS) has brought a renewed focus to Council's long-term financial sustainability. The FGRS continues to restrict Council's ability to raise revenue above the rate cap unless application is made to the Essential Services Commission for a variation. Maintaining service delivery levels and investing in community assets remain key priorities for Council, however Council's capacity to deliver on both priorities is at risk due to the current constraints of the FGRS.

Council revenue can also be adversely affected by changes to funding from other levels of government. Some grants are tied to the delivery of Council services, whilst many are tied directly to the delivery of new community assets, such as roads or buildings. It is important for Council to be clear about what grants it intends to apply for, and the obligations that grants create in the delivery of services or infrastructure into the future.

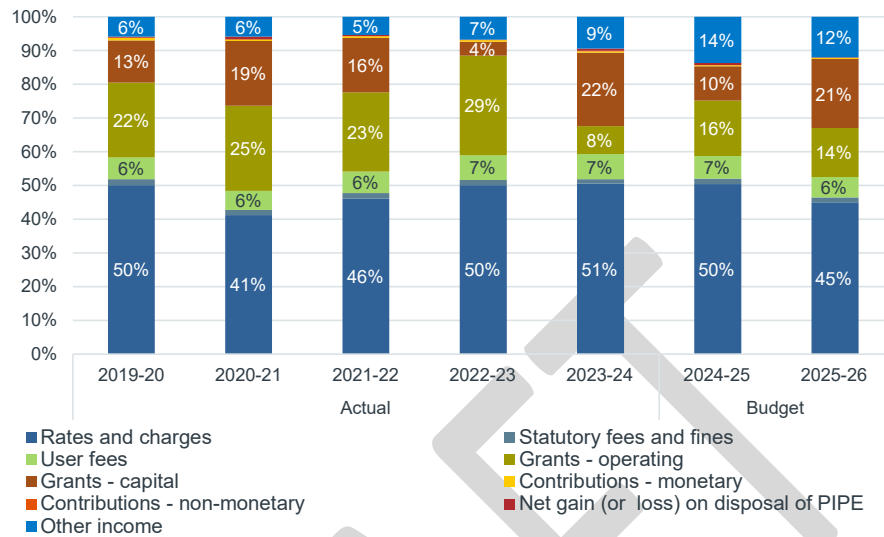
The following revenue streams are reported in the Comprehensive Income Statement:

- **Rates and charges** – Property-based charges, including general rates, garbage charges, special marketing rates, and payments in lieu of rates.
- **Statutory fees and fines** – Fees and fines regulated by legislation, such as infringement fines, building and planning fees, animal registration, and health registration fees.
- **User fees** – Charges for the use of facilities and services, including sales, facility hire and leasing, aged and health services, and livestock exchange fees.
- **Grants – Operating** – Funding from various government levels, which may be tied to specific projects or services or untied, such as the financial assistance grant.
- **Grants – Capital** – Government funding for acquiring, constructing, or renewing assets.
- **Contributions – Monetary** – Primarily developer contributions received for future infrastructure projects.
- **Contributions – Non-Monetary** – Assets gifted to the Council.
- **Net gain (or loss) on Disposal of PIPE** – The financial difference between the sale price and the written-down value of sold assets.
- **Other income** – This includes interest, reimbursements, land sales and the revenue from volunteer services.

The following table and figure present the historical and budgeted revenue for Council.

	2019-20	2020-21	Actual			Budget	
	\$'000	\$'000	2021-22 \$'000	2022-23 \$'000	2023-24 \$'000	2024-25 \$'000	2025-26 \$'000
Rates and charges	28,246	29,200	30,101	30,809	32,267	33,307	34,500
Statutory fees and fines	984	1,106	1,077	955	834	1,070	1,140
User fees	3,643	4,002	4,156	4,497	4,723	4,392	4,668
Grants - operating	12,502	17,927	15,307	18,142	5,294	10,873	11,099
Grants - capital	7,048	13,588	10,542	2,520	13,896	6,751	15,740
Contributions - monetary	377	342	295	337	261	200	263
Contributions - non-monetary	44	10	39	33	114	-	-
Net gain (or loss) on disposal of PIPE	191	554	211	60	434	408	99

Other income	3,348	4,199	3,563	4,176	6,027	9,095	9,248
Total Revenue	56,383	70,928	65,291	61,529	63,850	66,096	76,757



3 Assessment of the Historical Rating System

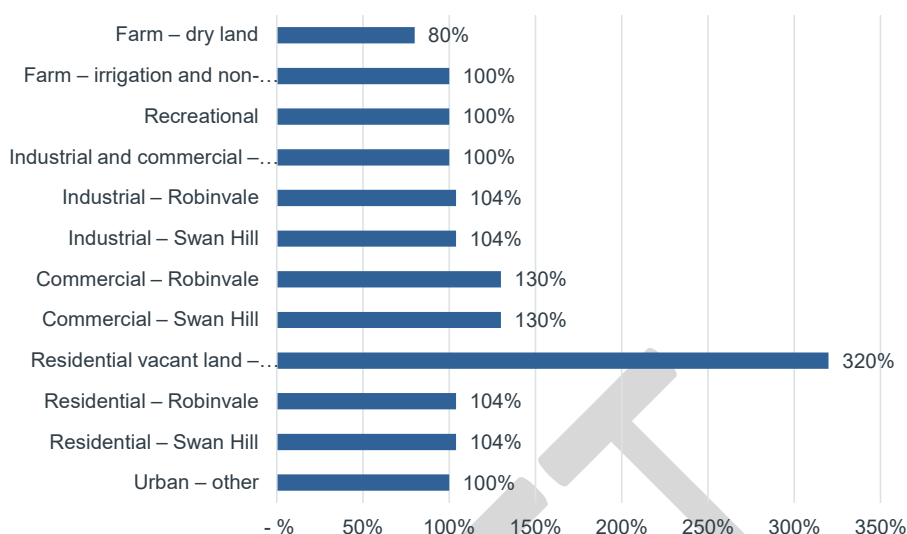
3.1 Differential Rate Categories

Within the constraints of the Local Government Act, Council has historically differentiated the rate burden upon ratepayers by creating categories and setting the different rate in the dollar that is applied to the land valuation. The differentiation of the rate categories is applied to achieve a fairer outcome in line with generally accepted rating principles (see below the assessment against the rating principles).

It is important to note that Council does not set the land valuations that are used to calculate individual assessments. Council is responsible for setting a fair burden on the rate categories as a whole – land valuations are determined each year by the Valuer-General Victoria.

The rating differentials, as outlined in the table and figure below, have been in place for the duration of the previous Revenue and Rating Plan (2021-22 to 2024-25).

Differential Rate Category	Differential
Urban – other	100%
Residential – Swan Hill	104%
Residential – Robinvale	104%
Residential vacant land – Swan Hill and Robinvale	320%
Commercial – Swan Hill	130%
Commercial – Robinvale	130%
Industrial – Swan Hill	104%
Industrial – Robinvale	104%
Industrial and commercial – other	100%
Recreational	100%
Farm – irrigation and non-irrigation	100%
Farm – dry land	80%



The total yield from general rates in the 2024-25 budget and the average rate for each category is outlined below. The residential land categories collectively provides 43.9% of the total general rate, with dryland and irrigated farmland providing 19.55% and 26.54%, respectively (46.1% combined). Business land provides 9.89% and recreation land provides less than 1%.

Category	Number of Assessments	Revenue \$'000	Contribution	Average Rate
Urban – other	2,645	3,492	12.29%	\$1,320
Residential – Swan Hill	4,631	7,924	27.88%	\$1,711
Residential – Robinvale	788	944	3.32%	\$1,198
Residential vacant land – Swan Hill and Robinvale	54	134	0.47%	\$2,481
Commercial – Swan Hill	403	1,677	5.90%	\$4,161
Commercial – Robinvale	89	125	0.44%	\$1,404
Industrial – Swan Hill	241	589	2.07%	\$2,444
Industrial – Robinvale	50	73	0.26%	\$1,460
Industrial and commercial – other	112	347	1.22%	\$3,098
Recreational	8	17	0.06%	\$2,125
Farming – irrigation and non-irrigation	2,017	7,544	26.54%	\$3,740
Farming – dry land	1,220	5,558	19.55%	\$4,556
Total	12,258	28,424		

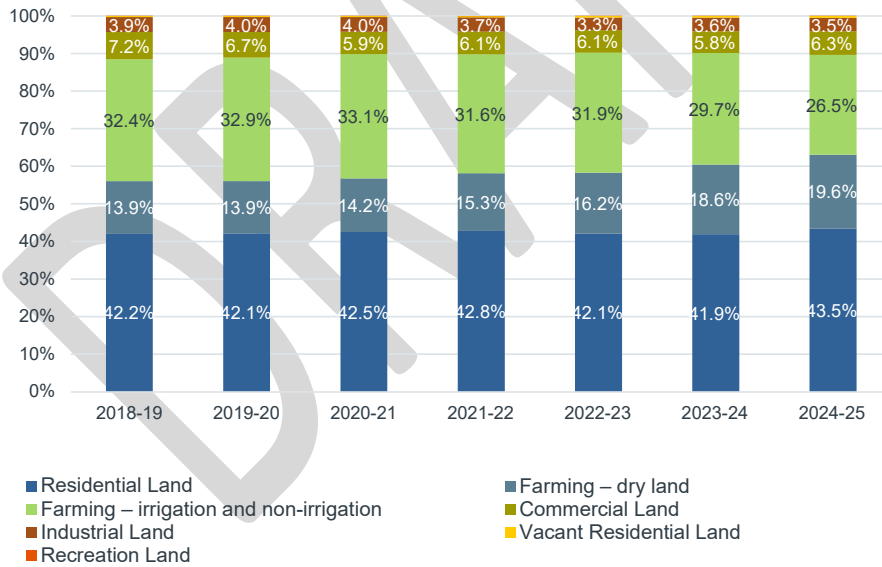
In the 2024-25 budget, the number of residential land assessments increased by 28 (or 0.35%), compared with no increases for farmland properties and the business properties decreased by 1. The table below compares the number of assessments for each rating category over the last five years.

Category	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Five Year Change	Five Year Change %
Urban – other	2,581	2,590	2,601	2,638	2,645	64	2.48%
Residential – Swan Hill	4,550	4,611	4,626	4,618	4,631	81	1.78%
Residential – Robinvale	761	770	776	782	788	27	3.55%

Category	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Five Year Change	Five Year Change %
Residential vacant land – Swan Hill and Robinvale	44	41	37	52	54	10	22.73%
Commercial – Swan Hill	408	407	405	404	403	-5	-1.23%
Commercial – Robinvale	90	90	90	89	89	-1	-1.11%
Industrial – Swan Hill	236	240	241	242	241	5	2.12%
Industrial – Robinvale	50	49	49	50	50	0	0.00%
Industrial and commercial – other	107	107	107	111	112	5	4.67%
Recreational	8	8	8	8	8	0	0.00%
Farming – irrigation and non-irrigation	2,003	2,002	2,005	2,018	2,017	14	0.70%
Farming – dry land	1,206	1,208	1,215	1,219	1,220	14	1.16%
Total	12,044	12,123	12,160	12,231	12,258	214	1.78%

Between 2018-19 and 2024-25, the residential general rate burden (i.e. the proportion of total rates paid) increased from 42.5% to 44.0%. The farmland general rate burden decreased slightly from 46.3% in 2020-21 to 46.1% in 2024-25. The business general rate burden has slightly reduced from 11.1% to 9.9% over the seven year period.

The figure below outlines the changes in the rate burden contributed by each rate category from 2018-19 to 2024-25.



3.2 Assessment of the Historical Rate Settings

Council engaged an independent party (AEC Group) to assess the historical rating system against the generally accepted rating principles. The table below summarises the outcomes of the assessment.

Rating Principle	Standard for Assessment	Assessment	Meets Principle (Yes/No)
Equity	A rate system is generally equitable where it adequately applies user pays approach (users who benefit pay for the service), assessment of capacity to pay, provides incentives where supported by a public interest assessment and there is a sound balance between horizontal and vertical equity.	Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The differentiation of residential, urban, business, farmland (dryland), farmland (irrigated) and recreational properties into separate categories generally results in ratepayers contributing in alignment with capacity to pay. Application of the CIV within the categories applies vertical equity within the categories, resulting in wealthier landowners contributing more to fund public goods and services. Higher CIV land values tend to apply to properties with closer access and consumption of public goods and services (urban properties have a higher valuation per m2 than rural properties). Pensioner rebates provided assists equity with capacity to pay. Waivers, concession and rebates are provided to assist those who have less capacity to pay. The council's Hardship Policy provides financial relief to those needing special consideration. 	Yes
Horizontal equity	Ratepayers in a similar situation should contribute similar amounts.		
Vertical equity	Ratepayers who are better off should pay more than those worse off.	<p>Considerations for Improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may be considered that the CIV land value of properties in Swan Hill and Robinvale is influenced by access to public services and infrastructure and therefore negates the need for a higher differential (currently a 4% premium) for properties in Swan Hill and Robinvale due to provision of stormwater infrastructure. 	
Efficiency	The rating system does not distort decision making in the local economy (e.g., buying and selling decisions).	Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current rating system is consistent with other local government authorities and does not appear to be distorting the buying and selling decisions within the local economy. There is no evidence that the higher differential for vacant land is impacting the decision of investors to develop land. <p>Consideration for improvement Nil</p>	Yes
Simplicity	The current rating system is simple and easy to explain and administer and can be easily understood by ratepayers.	Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current rating system is simple and easy to explain and administer and can be easily understood by ratepayers. <p>Consideration for improvement Nil</p>	Yes
Sustainability	Council decisions should generate reliable revenues on an ongoing basis, including rating decisions that are durable over time. A sustainable mix of user	Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The constraint of the State Government enforced threshold on the increase in the annual general rate is not sustainable. Previous thresholds have not adequately 	No

Rating Principle	Standard for Assessment	Assessment	Meets Principle (Yes/No)
	charges and rates revenue is essential to fund the vast variety of services that Council provides to the community.	<p>provided to actual increase in local government costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a mix of user charges and rates across the various services provided by SHRCC, with fees required where reasonable to fund the provision of services that are individually consumed. <p>Consideration for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council should review annually the services funded through user charges and fees to identify where the general rate is subsidising the service, and determine whether fees and charges should be increased to minimise the use of general rates to subsidise services where individuals can make a decision whether to pay for the service or not. 	
Fairness	Rating system should be applied consistently in line with Council's policies and procedures and consideration for different circumstances is applied allowing reasonable response to affected ratepayers.	<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current rating system is effective. The current rating system has policies and procedures that can be followed consistently and has considered the effect on ratepayers through the differentiated rates and the hardship policy. <p>Consideration for improvement</p> <p>Nil</p>	Yes

4 Forward Plan for Rates and Charges

Council will continue with the established framework for funding the majority of services through two key elements:

- **General Rates** – Collecting the general rate from all rateable properties (excluding properties that the Local Government Act declares as exempt).
- **Service Charges** - A 'user pays' component for council services to reflect benefits provided by Council to ratepayers who receive a specific service which can be funded by a service charge (e.g. waste management).

General rates are generally used by Council to fund public services and goods. Service charges are used where a service can be tied to individual consumers of the service. Setting the service charge at full cost recovery ensures that the service is funded only by consumers that benefit (or the benefits is made available) without subsidising the service from ratepayers that may not benefit from the service.

Council makes a further distinction when applying general rates by applying rating differentials based on the purpose for which the property is used. That is, whether the property is used for residential, commercial/industrial, or farming purposes. This distinction is based on the consideration of the Council of what amount of the total rate burden should be set for different property categories and ensure that the rate burden is a fair and equitable contribution. The share of the rate burden for each rate category is adopted each year in the Annual Budget, after substantial consideration, including engagement with the community.

The table below presents the rates and charges determined to be collected in the 2025-26 budget.

Rates and Charges	Amount \$'000
General Rates	29,349
Waste Management Charge	4,326
Special Marketing Rate	405
Rates agreements - Electricity Industry Act	332
Supplementary Rates and Rate Adjustments	127
Rates abandonments and other adjustments	(39)
Total Rates and Charges	34,500

4.1 Rating Objectives

Swan Hill Rural City Council has adopted the following rating objectives that will guide the annual adoption of the rating system (outlined in the Annual Budget), including the share of the rate burden across ratepayers.

Objective 1 – Sustainability

The adopted annual increase in rates will be sufficient to fund the public services and infrastructure, as outlined in the Annual Budget, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. Within legislative constraints set by the State Government, Council will set the rating system with the aim to protect the long term sustainability of the Council.

Objective 2 – Equity

Council will set the rate burden differentially for different categories of ratepayers to ensure that ratepayers that have capacity to pay contribute more than those that do not, and ratepayers that are in a similar situation contribute similar amounts.

Objective 3 – Fairness

Council will adopt a rating system that is guided by fair policies and procedures, considering different circumstances and, through community engagement, considering the views and preferred choices of the community.

Objective 4 – Efficiency

In setting the rate burden across ratepayers, Council will avoid, where possible, distorting the buying and selling decisions within the local economy.

Objective 5 – Simplicity

Council will endeavour to maintain a simple rating system that can be well understood by ratepayers and efficient to administer.

Objective 6 – Stability

Rates and charges will not usually change dramatically from one year to next. While Council does not determine the valuation of individual assessments, and therefore fluctuations due to the valuation of individual properties will always occur, Council will avoid where possible dramatically changing the rating system from one year to the next.

4.2 Differential Rate Categories

The Swan Hill Rural City Council rating structure will comprise of five differential rates (general, vacant residential land, commercial and industrial, dryland farming and irrigation district farmland). These rates continue to be structured in accordance with the requirements of Section 161 'Differential Rates' of the Local Government Act 1989, and the Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating 2013.

Council does not intend to levy a municipal charge. A municipal charge is a fixed set component of the general rate declared on all properties.

Council intends to rely on a variable component (the ad valorem) to calculate all the individual property assessments, using a differentiated rate in the dollar for each category created.

The formula for calculating the general rate for properties will be:

- Land Valuation x Rate in the Dollar (Differential Rate Type)

The land valuation used will be the capital improved value (CIV) as provided annually by the Valuer-General Victoria. Individual property owners that believe the valuation is too high (or too low), and therefore contributing an unfair amount of the general rate, should lodge an objection, which will be considered and assessed by the valuer.

The rate in the dollar is differentiated for each rating category - included in the Council's Annual Budget – placed on public exhibition as a Draft each year prior to adoption by Council.

The Financial Plan also outlines the Council's expected future increases for the total general rate. Planning for future rate increases is an essential component of the long-term financial

planning process and plays a significant role in funding both additional service delivery and the increasing costs related to providing Council services.

Council is aware of the balance between rate revenue (as an important income source) and community sensitivity to rate increases. With the introduction of the State Government's Fair Go Rates System (FGRS), all rate increases are capped to a rate declared by the Minister for Local Government, which is announced in December for the following financial year.

Council currently utilises a service charge to fully recover the cost of Council's waste services and provide for future landfill rehabilitation costs. The garbage service charge is not capped under the Fair Go Rates System.

Impact of Land Valuations

In setting the rate category differentials for the 2025-26 Budget, as well as future planned rate settings, the Council considered the impact of the land valuations as provided by the Valuer-General Victoria that will take effect from 1 July 2025.

The impact of the revised land valuations on the rating categories is summarised below:

- Valuation of residential properties in total increased more compared to other rate categories, resulting in a higher rate burden on residential properties if rate settings left unchanged.
- There was an increase in the total land valuations for both dryland farmland and farmland in the irrigation zone, however the increase in dryland was significantly less. Overall, farmland contribution to the rate burden would decrease due to the land valuations, if the rate settings were not changed.
- There was only a minimal increase in the total land valuations for commercial and industrial categories, resulting in a reduction in the contribution from business and industrial categories if the rate settings were not change.

Planned Rate Category Differentials – 2025-26 to 2028-29

The Council has adopted a change to the rating category differentials for the 2025-26 Annual Budget. The changes are outlined in the below table.

While the Council considers and adopted the differentials each year, there is no intention in adopting the 2025-26 Annual Budget that further changes will be necessary (other than a staged introduction of the increase to the rating differential for industrial properties).

The changes made will provide the following improvements:

- A more simple rating system, reducing the categories from 10 to 5 categories. Noting that the Industrial categories will remain until 2027-28 to enable a staged increase in the differential.
- Removes the 4% premium applied to residential properties in Swan Hill and Robinvale – determined that the CIV land valuations will be higher due to increase services and access to stormwater infrastructure.
- Commercial and industrial categories harmonised (staged over three years), enabling the land valuations alone to determine the different contribution from the individual ratepayers.

The definitions for each category are outlined in Appendix C.

Other options that Council considered in making changes to the rate settings, but determined not to include in the 2025-26 Annual Budget, included:

- Making no changes to the rate settings and letting the changes in land valuations alone to determine changes to individual rate assessments.
- Increasing commercial and industrial categories to 130%
- Decreasing the dryland farmland category to 75%
- Increasing the rate for vacant commercial and industrial land to 320%, the same as for vacant residential land.

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Planned Rating Differentials (2025-26 to 2028-29)

Differential Rate Category	2024-25 (Current)	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Change Impact
Urban – other	100%					Removed, moved to General (Residential and Recreational)
Residential – Swan Hill	104%					Removed, reduced to 100% and moved to General (Residential and Recreational)
Residential – Robinvale	104%					Removed, reduced to 100% and moved to General (Residential and Recreational)
Recreational	100%					Removed, moved to General (Residential and Recreational)
Residential vacant land – Swan Hill and Robinvale	320%	320%	320%	320%	320%	No Change
Commercial – Swan Hill	130%	130%	130%			Moved to new Commercial and Industrial category in 2027-28
Commercial – Robinvale	130%	130%	130%			Moved to new Commercial and Industrial category in 2027-28
Industrial – Swan Hill	104%	110%	120%			Increase to 110% in 2025-26, 120% in 2026-27 and 130% in 2027-28 and moved to new Commercial and Industrial category in 2027-28
Industrial – Robinvale	104%	110%	120%			Increase to 110% in 2025-26, 120% in 2026-27 and 130% in 2027-28 and moved to new Commercial and Industrial category in 2027-28
Industrial and commercial – other	100%	110%	120%			Increase to 110% in 2025-26, 120% in 2026-27 and 130% in 2027-28 and moved to new Commercial and Industrial category in 2027-28
Dryland Farmland	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	No Change
Irrigation District Farmland	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	No Change
General (Residential and Recreational)		100%	100%	100%	100%	New Category in 2027-28
Commercial and Industrial				130%	130%	New Category in 2027-28

4.3 Collection and Administration of Rates and Charges

Payment options

In accordance with section 167(1) of the Local Government Act 1989 ratepayers have the option of paying rates and charges by way of four instalments, or rates can be paid in full by 30 September. If electing to pay via the four instalments, payments are due on the prescribed dates below:

- 1st Instalment: 30 September
- 2nd Instalment: 30 November
- 3rd Instalment: 28 February
- 4th Instalment: 31 May

Council offers a range of payment options including:

- in person at Council Offices (cheques, money orders, EFTPOS, credit/debit cards and cash),
- online via Council's ratepayer portal, direct debit (on prescribed instalment due dates, monthly or fortnightly),
- BPAY,
- Australia Post (over the counter, over the phone via credit card and on the internet),
- By mail (cheques and money orders only), and
- Centrepay

Interest on arrears and overdue rates

Interest is charged on all overdue rates in accordance with Section 172 of the Local Government Act 1989. The interest rate applied is fixed under Section 2 of the Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983, which is determined by the Minister and published by notice in the Government Gazette.

Council may waive penalty interest charges where financial hardship is clearly evident.

Pensioner rebates

Holders of a Centrelink or Veteran Affairs Pension Concession card or a Veteran Affairs Gold card which stipulates TPI or War Widow may claim a rebate on their principal place of residence. Upon initial application, ongoing eligibility is maintained, unless rejected by Centrelink or the Department of Veteran Affairs during the annual verification procedure. Upon confirmation of an eligible pensioner concession status, the pensioner rebate is deducted from the rate account before payment is required by the ratepayer.

New applicants, after being granted a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), can apply for the rebate at any time throughout the rating year. Retrospective claims up to a maximum of one previous financial year can be approved by Council on verification of eligibility criteria, for periods prior to this claims need to be approved by the relevant government department.

Deferred payments

Under Section 170 of the Local Government Act 1989, Council may defer the payment of any rate or charge for an eligible ratepayer whose property is their sole place of residency, allowing ratepayers an extended period of time to make payments or alternatively to forestall payments on an indefinite basis until the ratepayer ceases to own or occupy the land in respect of which rates and charges are to be levied.

Deferral of rates and charges are available to all ratepayers who satisfy the eligibility criteria and have proven financial difficulties. Where Council approves an application for deferral of rates or charges, interest will continue to be levied on the outstanding balance of rates and charges.

Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to submit a Rates Financial Hardship Application which is available at the Council offices, on the Council website or can be posted upon request.

Rates Assistance Policy

It is acknowledged at the outset that various ratepayers may experience financial hardship for a whole range of issues and that meeting rate obligations constitutes just one element of a number of difficulties that may be faced. The purpose of the Rates Financial Hardship Policy is to provide options for ratepayers facing such situations to deal with the situation positively and reduce the strain imposed by financial hardship.

Ratepayers may elect to either negotiate a rate payment plan or apply for a rate deferral. Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to submit a Rates Financial Hardship Application form which is available at the Council offices, website or can be posted upon request.

Such applications are considered on an individual case basis under Council's Financial Hardship policy, and include a variety of assistance measures, including; agreed repayment plans, payment deferral, extension of interest free periods, interest penalty reductions or partial rates reduction.

Debt recovery

Council makes every effort to contact ratepayers at their correct address but it is the ratepayers' responsibility to properly advise Council of their contact details. The Local Government Act 1989 Section 230 and 231 requires both the vendor and buyer of property, or their agents (e.g. solicitors and or conveyancers), to notify Council, by way of a formal notice of disposition or acquisition of an interest in land, of the correct address.

In the event that an account becomes overdue, Council will issue an overdue reminder notice which will include accrued penalty interest. In the event that the account remains unpaid, Council may take legal action without further notice to recover the overdue amount. All fees and court costs incurred will be recoverable from the ratepayer.

If an amount payable by way of rates in respect to land has been in arrears for three years or more, Council may take action to sell the property in accordance with the Local Government Act 1989 Section 181.

Fire Services Property Levy

(From 1 July 2025, the Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL) will be replaced by the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF)).

In 2012 the Victorian State Government passed legislation requiring the Fire Services Property Levy to be collected from ratepayers. Previously this was collected through building and property insurance premiums. The Fire Services Property Levy helps fund the services provided by Fire Rescue Victoria and Country Fire Authority, and all levies collected by Council are passed through to the State Government.

The Fire Services Property Levy is based on two components, a fixed charge, and a variable charge which is linked to the Capital Improved Value of the property. This levy is not included in the rate cap and increases in the levy are at the discretion of the State Government.

5 Other Revenue Items

5.1 User fees and charges

User fees and charges are those that Council can identify individual properties that benefit from the delivery of services and use of community infrastructure, rather than public services and infrastructure (that is a “public benefit”) that is provided to the broader community.

Examples of user fees and charges include:

- After School and Vacation Care fees
- Leisure Centre, Gym, and Pool visitation and membership fees
- Parking fees
- Leases and facility hire fees
- Admission Fees (attractions, galleries and performances)
- Livestock Market Usage Charges
- Cropping Leases
- Commercial/Brokered Works

In setting fees and charges, Council must comply with the Competitive Neutrality Policy for significant business activities. That is, fees and charges for significant business activities must be set such that the Council price does not establish a competitive advantage when competing with the private sector.

In providing services to the community, Council must determine the extent of cost recovery for particular services consistent with the level of both individual and collective benefit that the services provide and in line with the community’s expectations. Services are provided on the basis of one of the following pricing methods:

- Market Price
- Full Cost Recovery Price
- Subsidised Price

Market pricing is where Council sets prices based on the benchmarked competitive prices of alternate suppliers. In general market price represents full cost recovery plus an allowance for profit. Market prices will be used when other providers exist in the given market, and Council needs to meet its obligations under the Competitive Neutrality Policy.

It should be noted that if a market price is lower than Council’s full cost price, then the market price would represent Council subsidising that service. If this situation exists, and there are other suppliers existing in the market at the same price, this may mean that Council is not the most efficient supplier in the marketplace. In this situation, Council will consider whether there is a community service obligation and whether Council should be providing this service.

Most fees and charges are used to fund services that enable consumers to decide whether to use the service or not and therefore setting fees and charges should achieve full cost recovery for providing the service. Council may decide in setting a price for a service to

subsidise the fees and charges through the use of general rate revenue or other sources such as Commonwealth and State funding grant programs. Full Council subsidy pricing and partial cost pricing should always be based on knowledge of the full cost of providing a service.

As per the Victorian Auditor General's Office report "Fees and Charges – Cost Recovery by Local Government" recommendations, council has developed a user fee pricing policy to help guide the fair and equitable setting of prices. The policy outlines the process for setting fee prices and includes principles such as:

- Both direct and indirect costs to be taken into account when setting prices;
- Accessibility, affordability and efficient delivery of services must be taken into account; and
- Competitive neutrality with commercial providers.

Council will develop a table of fees and charges as part of the adopted Annual Budget each year. Proposed pricing changes will be made available in the Draft Annual Budget for the community and stakeholders to provide feedback during the public exhibition and community engagement.

5.2 Statutory fees and fines

Statutory fees and fines are those which Council collects under the direction of Legislation or other government directives. The rates used for statutory fees and fines are generally advised by the state government department responsible for the corresponding services or legislation, and generally councils will have limited discretion in applying these fees.

Examples of statutory fees and fines include:

- Planning and subdivision fees
- Building and Inspection fees
- Infringements and fines
- Land Information Certificate fees

Penalty and fee units are used in Victoria's Acts and Regulations to describe the amount of a fine or a fee.

Penalty units

Penalty units are used to define the amount payable for fines for many offences. For example, the fine for selling a tobacco product to a person aged under 18 is four penalty units.

One penalty unit is currently \$197.59, from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

The rate for penalty units is indexed each financial year so that it is raised in line with inflation. Any change to the value of a penalty unit will happen on 1 July each year.

Fee units

Fee units are used to calculate the cost of a certificate, registration or licence that is set out in an Act or Regulation. For example, the cost of depositing a Will with the Supreme Court Registrar of probates is 1.6 fee units.

The value of one fee unit is currently \$16.33 (1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025). This value may increase at the beginning of a financial year, at the same time as penalty units.

The cost of fees and penalties is calculated by multiplying the number of units by the current value of the fee or unit. The exact cost may be rounded up or down.

5.3 Grants

Grant revenue represents income usually received from other levels of government. Some grants are singular and attached to the delivery of specific projects, whilst others can be of a recurrent nature and may or may not be linked to the delivery of projects.

Council will pro-actively advocate to other levels of government for grant funding support to deliver important infrastructure and service outcomes for the community. Council may use its own funds to leverage higher grant funding and maximise external funding opportunities.

When preparing its financial plan, Council considers its project proposal pipeline, advocacy priorities, upcoming grant program opportunities, and co-funding options to determine what grants to apply for. Council will only apply for and accept external funding if it is consistent with the Community Vision and does not lead to the distortion of Council Plan priorities.

Grant assumptions are then clearly detailed in Council's Budget document. A project is unlikely to proceed if the grant funding is not forthcoming. (Grants are developed via Council's Grants Application Policy CORP231).

5.4 Contributions

Contributions represent funds received by Council, usually from non-government sources, and are usually linked to projects.

Contributions can be made to Council in the form of either cash payments or asset handovers.

Examples of contributions include:

- Monies collected from developers under planning and development agreements
- Monies collected under developer contribution plans and infrastructure contribution plans
- Contributions from user groups towards upgrade of facilities
- Assets handed over to Council from developers at the completion of a subdivision, such as roads, drainage, and streetlights.

Contributions should always be linked to a planning or funding agreement. Council will not undertake any work on a contribution-funded project until a signed agreement outlining the contribution details is in place.

Contributions linked to developments can be received well before any Council expenditure occurs. In this situation, the funds will be identified and held separately for the specific works identified in the agreements.

5.5 Interest on investments

Council receives interest on funds managed as part of its investment portfolio, where funds are held in advance of expenditure, or for special purposes. The investment portfolio is

managed per Council's financial investment policy, which seeks to earn the best return on funds, within an acceptable level of risk.

5.6 Borrowings

Whilst not a source of income, borrowings can be an important cash management tool in appropriate circumstances. Loans can only be approved by Council resolution. The following financial sustainability principles must be adhered to with new borrowings:

- Borrowings must only be applied for where it can be proven that repayments can be met in the Financial Plan.
- Borrowings must not be used to fund ongoing operations.
- Borrowings are appropriate for funding large capital works where the benefits are provided to future generations.
- Council will maintain its debt at levels which are sustainable, with:
 - indebtedness <60% of rate and charges revenue, and
 - debt servicing cost <5% of total revenue (excluding capital revenue and any specific purpose reserve monies to pay out loan principal).

6 Community Engagement

6.1 Engagement Approach

Council has committed to engaging with the community through the following avenues:

- Let's Talk community engagement platform
- Social Media posts
- Media Release
- Survey
- Invitation for Written Submissions

6.2 Submissions Received

During the consultation period, eight residents provided submissions on the Revenue and Rating Plan.

Six submissions were received via the Let's Talk online community engagement platform, with a further two submissions received via letter to the Chief Executive Officer.

6.3 Survey Results

Included on the Let's Talk community engagement platform, was a brief survey the submitters were asked to complete. All six submitters completed the survey with the summary of results as follows:

Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say
4		2

Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say
4		2

How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?

Well informed	Neutral	Prefer not to say	Not well informed
1	3	1	1

How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?

Very Well	Neutral	Prefer not to say	Not Well
2	2	0	2

How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?

Supportive	Not Very Supportive	Not at all Supportive
4	1	1

How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?

Very Supportive	Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Neutral	Not at all supportive
1	3	1	0	1

Age Group

25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	Over 65
1	1	1	2	1

Which of the category best describes your residential status?

Residential Ratepayer	Farmland Rate Payer	Prefer not to answer
3	2	1

Which community is your property closest to?

Swan Hill	Lake Boga	Woorinen/Woorinen South	Nyah/Nyah West	Wood Wood
2	1	1	1	1

Appendix A – Rating and Legislation

The legislative framework set out in the *Local Government Act 1989* determines council's ability to develop a rating system. The framework provides significant flexibility for Council to tailor a system that suits its needs.

Section 155 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may declare the following rates and charges on rateable land:

- General rates under Section 158
- Municipal charges under Section 159
- Service rates and charges under Section 162
- Special rates and charges under Section 163

In raising Council rates, Council is required to primarily use the valuation of the rateable property to levy rates. Section 157 (1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides Council with three choices in terms of which valuation base to utilise. They are Site Valuation (SV), Capital Improved Valuation (CIV) and Net Annual Value (NAV).

Section 94(1) & (2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* states that Council must adopt a budget by 30 June each year (or at another time fixed by the Minister) to include:

- a) the total amount that the Council intends to raise by rates and charges;
- b) a statement as to whether the rates will be raised by the application of a uniform rate or a differential rate;
- c) a description of any fixed component of the rates, if applicable;
- d) if the Council proposes to declare a uniform rate, the matters specified in section 160 of the *Local Government Act 1989*;
- e) if the Council proposes to declare a differential rate for any land, the matters specified in section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*;

Section 94(3) of the *Local Government Act 2020* also prescribes that Council must ensure that, if applicable, the budget also contains a statement –

- a) that the Council intends to apply for a special order to increase the Council's average rate cap for the financial year or any other financial year; or
- b) that the Council has made an application to the Essential Services Commission (ESC) for a special order and is waiting for the outcome of the application; or
- c) that a special order has been made in respect of the Council and specifying the average rate cap that applies for the financial year or any other financial year.

In 2019 the Victorian State Government conducted a Local Government Rating System Review. The Local Government Rating System Review Panel presented their final report and list of recommendations to the Victorian Government in March 2020. The Victorian Government subsequently published a response to the recommendations of the Panel's report.

On the 9 August 2022, the Local Government Legislative Amendment (Rating and Other Matters) Act 2022 received Royal Assent. The Act implements the first stage of the rating reforms by:

- Prescribing more flexible payment plans as a means for councils to recover unpaid rates and charges in addition to the four instalments for payment currently mandated
- Introducing the Minister for Local Government to set the capped interest rates for unpaid rates and charges
- Empowering the Minister for Local Government to issue Ministerial Guidelines for greater consistency in financial hardship policies across councils
- Expanding the criteria for councils to provide rate rebates and concessions for properties that provide a public benefit
- Repealing redundant service rates and charges powers
- Amending the power for councils to declare a service rate or charge to ensure that charges relate to waste management and essential services, and
- Ensuring the timely levying of council special rates and charges, to minimise delays between declaring special rates and charges schemes and the billing of ratepayers.

Municipal Charge

Under Section 159 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may declare a municipal charge to cover some of the administrative costs of the Council. The legislation is not definitive on what comprises administrative costs and does not require Council to specify what is covered by the charge.

The application of a municipal charge represents a choice to raise a portion of the rates by a flat fee for all properties, rather than sole use of a valuation method.

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, a council's total revenue from a municipal charge in a financial year must not exceed 20 per cent of the combined sum total of the Council's total revenue from the municipal charge and the revenue from general rates (total rates).

The municipal charge applies equally to all properties and is based upon the recovery of a fixed cost of providing administrative services irrespective of valuation. The same contribution amount per assessment to cover a portion of Councils' administrative costs can be seen as an equitable method of recovering these costs.

Council, currently, does not levy a municipal charge. This is primarily due to the number of lowly valued properties in smaller urbans where, if a municipal charge was levied, would far outweigh the general rate raised.

Special Charges Schemes

The Local Government Act 1989 recognises that councils sometimes need help to provide improved infrastructure for their local communities. Legislation allows councils to pass on the cost of capital infrastructure to the owner of a property that generally receives a unique benefit from the construction works. The technical explanation of a Special Charge comes from legislation (under the *Local Government Act 1989*) that allows councils to recover the cost of works from property owners who will gain special benefit from that work.

The purposes for which special rates and special charges may be used include road construction, kerb and channelling, footpath provision, drainage, and other improvement projects.

The special rate or special charges may be declared on the basis of any criteria specified by the council in the rate (Section 163 (2)). In accordance with Section 163 (3), Council must specify:

- a) the wards, groups, uses or areas for which the special rate or charge is declared; and
- b) the land in relation to which the special rate or special charge is declared;
- c) the manner in which the special rate or special charge will be assessed and levied; and
- d) details of the period for which the special rate or special charge remains in force.

The special rates and charges provisions are flexible and can be used to achieve a wide range of community objectives. The fundamental principle of special rates and charges is proof “special benefit” applies to those being levied. For example, landscaping and environmental improvement programs that benefit small or localised areas could be funded using special rates or charges.

Council currently has one special charge scheme in operation. Council declared, on 16 April 2019, a Special Rate for marketing and business development programs applicable to commercial, industrial and tourism and hospitality type properties. The declaration is for a seven-year period ending on 30 June 2026.

The three property types are charged different rates in the dollar, with associated minimum and maximum rate amounts applicable.

Service Rates and Charges

Section 162 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides Council with the opportunity to raise service rates and charges for any of the following services:

- a) The provision of a water supply;
- b) The collection and disposal of refuse;
- c) The provision of sewage services;
- d) Any other prescribed service.

Council currently applies a service charge for the collection and disposal of refuse on properties within the declared garbage service collection area where there is a habitable dwelling on the property. Council offers the choice between a 120 Litre service and a 240 Litre service. A 240 Litre recycling service is provided free of charge. An optional 240 Litre green waste service is also available in the Swan Hill residential area.

The amount of service charge is considered each year as part of the annual budget process.

Council's current objective of setting the service charge for waste at a level that fully recovers the cost of the waste services, including providing for Environment Protection Authority licensing requirements and the cost of rehabilitation of the Council's landfill sites once they reach the end of their useful life(s).

Minister's Good Practice Guidelines Relating to Service Rates and Charges

The 'Minister's Good Practice Guidelines Relating to Service Rates and Charges' has been prepared to guide Councils in the determination and declaration of Service Rates and charges under Section 162 of the Local Government Act 1989. The objective of the good practice guidelines is to ensure that Services Rates and Charges:

- are only used to recover the reasonable costs of providing a direct service to an occupancy;
- are calculated and declared in a fair and transparent manner; and
- subject to public engagement in accordance with a council's Community Engagement Policy.

Further work is planned to be undertaken to assess whether the current services funded by the garbage service charges comply with the guidelines.

Should Council elect not to have a waste service charge or it is found that the current charge does not comply with the minister's guidelines, this same amount would be required to be raised by way of an increased general rate – meaning that residents in higher valued properties would substantially pay for the waste service of lower valued properties, and increase rates on properties where no waste service currently exists.

Appendix B – Determining which Valuation Base to Use

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council has three options as to the valuation base it elects to use. They are:

- **Capital Improved Value (CIV)** – Value of land and improvements upon the land.
- **Site Value (SV)** – Value of land only.
- **Net Annual Value (NAV)** – Annual Rental valuation based on CIV.

For residential and farm properties, NAV is calculated at 5 per cent of the Capital Improved Value. For commercial and industrial properties, NAV is calculated as the greater of the estimated annual rental value or 5 per cent of the CIV.

Capital Improved Value (CIV)

Capital Improved Value is the most commonly used valuation base by local government with over 93% of Victorian councils applying this methodology. Based on the value of both land and all improvements on the land, it is generally easily understood by ratepayers as it equates to the market value of the property.

Section 161 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate if it uses the capital improved value system of valuing land.

Where a council does not utilise CIV, it may only apply limited differential rates in relation to farm land, urban farm land or residential use land.

Advantages of using Capital Improved Value (CIV)

- CIV includes all property improvements, and hence is often supported on the basis that it more closely reflects “capacity to pay”. The CIV rating method takes into account the full development value of the property, and hence better meets the equity criteria than Site Value and NAV.
- With the increased frequency of valuations (previously two year intervals, now annual intervals) the market values are more predictable and has reduced the level of objections resulting from valuations.
- The concept of the market value of property is more easily understood with CIV, than NAV or SV.
- Most councils in Victoria have now adopted CIV which makes it easier to compare relative movements in rates and valuations across councils.
- The use of CIV allows Council to apply differential rates which greatly adds to Council’s ability to equitably distribute the rating burden based on ability to afford council rates. CIV allows Council to apply higher rating differentials to the specified sectors that offset other sectors.

Disadvantages of using CIV

- The main disadvantage with CIV is the fact that rates are based on the total property value which may not necessarily reflect the income level of the property owner as with pensioners and low-income earners.

Site value (SV)

There are currently no Victorian councils that use this valuation base. With valuations based simply on the valuation of land and with only very limited ability to apply differential rates, the implementation of Site Value in a Swan Hill Rural City Council context would cause a shift in rate burden from the industrial/commercial sectors onto the residential and rural sectors, and would hinder Council's objective of a fair and equitable rating system.

There would be further rating movements away from modern townhouse style developments on relatively small land parcels to older established homes on quarter acre residential blocks. In many ways, it is difficult to see an equity argument being served by the implementation of site valuation in the Swan Hill Rural City Council.

Advantages of Site Value

- There is a perception that under site value, a uniform rate would promote development of land, particularly commercial and industrial developments. There is, however, little evidence to prove that this is the case.
- Scope for possible concessions for urban farmland and residential use land.

Disadvantages of using Site Value

- Under SV, there will be a significant shift from the industrial/commercial sector onto the residential and rural sectors of Council. The percentage increases in many cases would be in the extreme range.
- SV is a major burden on property owners that have large areas of land. Some of these owners may have much smaller/older dwellings compared to those who have smaller land areas but well developed dwellings – but will pay more in rates. A typical example is flats, units, or townhouses which will all pay low rates compared to traditional housing styles.
- The use of SV can place pressure on Council to give concessions to categories of landowners on whom the rating burden is seen to fall disproportionately (e.g. Farm land and residential use properties). Large landowners, such as farmers are disadvantaged by the use of site value.
- SV will reduce Council's rating flexibility and options to deal with any rating inequities due to the removal of the ability to levy differential rates.
- The community may have greater difficulty in understanding the SV valuation on their rate notices, as indicated by many inquiries from ratepayers on this issue handled by Council's customer service and property revenue staff each year.

Net annual value (NAV)

NAV, in concept, represents the annual rental value of a property. However, in practice, NAV is loosely linked to capital improved value for residential and farm properties. Valuers derive the NAV directly as 5 per cent of CIV.

In contrast to the treatment of residential and farm properties, NAV for commercial and industrial properties are assessed with regard to actual market rental. This differing treatment of commercial versus residential and farm properties has led to some suggestions that all properties should be valued on a rental basis.

Overall, the use of NAV is not largely supported. For residential and farm ratepayers, actual rental values pose some problems. The artificial rental estimate used may not represent actual market value, and means the base is the same as CIV but is harder to understand.

Recommended Valuation Base

In choosing a valuation base, councils must decide on whether they wish to adopt a differential rating system (different rates in the dollar for different property categories) or a uniform rating system (same rate in the dollar). If a council was to choose the former, under the *Local Government Act 1989* it must adopt either of the CIV or NAV methods of rating.

Swan Hill Rural City Council applies Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the fully developed value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land plus buildings and other improvements.

Differential rating allows (under the CIV method) Council to shift part of the rate burden from some groups of ratepayers to others, through different "rates in the dollar" for each class of property.

Section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989* outlines the requirements relating to differential rates, which include:

- a) If a Council declares a differential rate for any land, the Council must specify the objectives of the differential rate, which must be consistent with the equitable and efficient carrying out of the Council's functions and must include the following:
 - i) A definition of the types or classes of land which are subject to the rate and a statement of the reasons for the use and level of that rate.
 - ii) An identification of the type or classes of land which are subject to the rate in respect of the uses, geographic location (other than location on the basis of whether or not the land is within a specific ward in Council's district).
 - iii) Specify the characteristics of the land, which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

Once the Council has declared a differential rate for any land, the Council must:

- a) Specify the objectives of the differential rates;
- b) Specify the characteristics of the land which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

The purpose is to ensure that Council has a sound basis on which to develop the various charging features when determining its revenue strategies and ensure that these are consistent with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1989.

The general objectives of each of the differential rates are to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. There is no limit on the number or types of differential rates that can be levied, but the highest differential rate can be no more than four times the lowest differential rate.

Property Valuations

The *Valuation of Land Act 1960* is the principal legislation in determining property valuations. Under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*, the Victorian Valuer-General conducts property valuations on an annual basis. Swan Hill Rural City Council applies a Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the full development value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land including buildings and other improvements.

The value of land is always derived by the principal of valuing land for its highest and best use at the relevant time of valuation.

Council needs to be mindful of the impacts of revaluations on the various property types in implementing the differential rating strategy outlined in the previous section to ensure that rises and falls in council rates remain affordable and that rating 'shocks' are mitigated to some degree.

Supplementary Valuations

Supplementary valuations are carried out for a variety of reasons including rezoning, subdivisions, amalgamations, renovations, new constructions, extensions, occupancy changes and corrections. The Victorian Valuer-General is tasked with undertaking supplementary valuations and advises Council on a monthly basis of valuation and Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) changes.

Supplementary valuations bring the value of the affected property into line with the general valuation of other properties within the municipality. Objections to supplementary valuations can be lodged in accordance with Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*. Any objections must be lodged within two months of the issue of the supplementary rate notice.

Objections to property valuations

Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* provides that a property owner may lodge an objection against the valuation of a property or the Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) within two months of the issue of the original Rates and Valuation Charges Notice (Rates Notice), or within four months if the notice was not originally issued to the occupier of the land.

A property owner must lodge their objection to the valuation or the AVPCC via Councils website, which directs the property owner to the Victorian Valuer-General objection portal. Property owners also have the ability to object to the site valuations on receipt of their Land Tax Assessment. Property owners can appeal their land valuation within two months of receipt of their Council Rate Notice (via Council) or within two months of receipt of their Land Tax Assessment (via the State Revenue Office).

Appendix C – Rating Differential Category Definitions

General Rate (base rate)

Definition:

General land is any rateable land which does not have the characteristics of Vacant Residential Land, Industrial or Commercial Land or Farmland.

Objectives:

To ensure that Council has adequate funding to undertake its strategic, statutory, service provision and community services obligations and to ensure that the differential rate in the dollar declared for defined general rate land properties is fair and equitable, having regard to the cost and the level of benefits derived from provision of Council services.

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the land are all those not subject to those detailed in the abovementioned definition. The classification of the land will be determined by the occupation of that land for its best use and have reference to the planning scheme zoning.

Types and Classes:

Rateable land that is not defined as Vacant Residential Land, Industrial or Commercial Land or Farmland.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

100% of General Rate.

Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Swan Hill Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Swan Hill Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings/Properties:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the financial year.

Vacant Residential Land Rate

Definition:

Vacant Residential Land is any land which is;

- a) situated within the townships of Swan Hill or Robinvale, and,
- b) does not have a permanent dwelling erected.

Objectives:

To encourage the construction of domestic residences and help offset the additional infrastructure costs incurred to service residential land.

To discourage land banking and land pricing speculation.

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of vacant land. The classification of the land will be determined by the occupation of that land for its best use and have reference to the planning scheme zoning.

Types and Classes:

Vacant residential land within the townships of Swan Hill and Robinvale that does not have a permanent dwelling established on it five years after it was last zoned residential or three years after it was sold as a subdivided residential allotment.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

320% of the General Rate.

Use of Land:

Residential.

Geographic Location:

Swan Hill and Robinvale townships.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

All residential zones within the Swan Hill Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings/Properties:

Vacant land and land without a permanent dwelling.

Commercial Rate

Definition:

Commercial land is any land, which conducts business operations intended for exchange on the open market with the goal of earning profit.

Objectives:

This differential is set to recognise the higher level of service usage above the general rate category.

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of commercial land. The classification of the land will be determined by the occupation of that land for its best use and have reference to the planning scheme zoning.

Types and Classes:

Land used for commercial purpose.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

130% of the General Rate

Use of Land:

Commercial.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

Commercial 1 Zone, Commercial 2 Zone.

Types of Buildings/Properties:

Any building used for a commercial purpose, and vacant commercial business land.

Industrial Rate

Definition:

Industrial land is any land, which conducts business operations intended for exchange on the open market with the goal of earning profit.

Objectives:

This differential is set to recognise the higher level of service usage above the general rate category.

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of industrial land. The classification of the land will be determined by the occupation of that land for its best use and have reference to the planning scheme zoning.

Types and Classes:

Land used for industrial purpose.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

130% of the General Rate. Incremental increase over the four years of the Plan to reach 130%. 110% in 2025/26, 120% in 2026/27 and 130% in 2027/28.

Use of Land:

Industrial.

Geographic Location:

Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

Industrial 1 Zone.

Types of Buildings/Properties:

Any building used for an industrial purpose, and vacant industrial business land.

Dryland Farm Rate

Definition:

Any land which is:

- a) two or more hectares in area,
- b) used for primary production purposes,
- c) makes a profit, or has reasonable prospect of making a profit,
- d) does not have access to irrigation infrastructure, and,
- e) fits the description as per "Types and Classes" below.

Objectives:

This differential is to help reflect the increased difficulty in accessing the full range of Council services that Dryland farming properties face, the disproportionate increase in property values over the last number of years and the risk of seasonal income variations than that confronted by other property types.

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of farming land. The classification of the land will be determined by the occupation of that land for its best use and have reference to the planning scheme zoning.

Types and Classes:

Farmland as defined in the Valuation of Land Act 1960, used primarily for grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig-farming, poultry farming, fish farming, tree farming, bee keeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit growing or the growing of crops of any kind or for any combination of those activities, without access to irrigation infrastructure.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

80% of the General Rate.

Use of Land:

Land use primarily for grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig farming, poultry farming, fish farming, tree farming, bee keeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit growing or growing of crops of any kind.

Geographic Location:

Anywhere within the Swan Hill Rural City Council municipality.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

Farming.

Types of Buildings/Properties:

Any building used for farming purposes.

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Irrigation District Farmland Rate

Definition:

Any land which is:

- a) two or more hectares in area,
- b) used for primary production purposes,
- c) makes a profit, or has reasonable prospect of making a profit,
- d) has access to irrigation infrastructure, and,
- e) fits the description as per "Types and Classes" below

Objectives:

This differential is to assist in explaining the difference between Irrigation District Land and Dryland farming.

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of farming land. The classification of the land will be determined by the occupation of that land for its best use and have reference to the planning scheme zoning.

Types and Classes:

Farmland as defined in the Valuation of Land Act 1960, used primarily for grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig-farming, poultry farming, fish farming, tree farming, bee keeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit growing or the growing of crops of any kind or for any combination of those activities, with access to irrigation infrastructure.

Use of Rate:

The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:

100% of the General Rate.

Use of Land:

Land used primarily for grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig farming, poultry farming, fish farming, tree farming, bee keeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit growing or growing of crops of any kind.

Geographic Location:

Anywhere within the Irrigated District of the Swan Hill Rural City Council municipality.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

Farming.

Types of Buildings/Properties:

Any building used for farming purposes.

Let's talk

Revenue and Rating Plan 2025- 2029 Community Survey

May 07, 2025 - May 17, 2025

Project: Draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025 - 2029

Tool Type: Form

Activity ID: 226

Exported: May 21, 2025, 10:46 AM

Exported By:

Response No:
1

Contribution ID: 12159
Member ID:
Date Submitted: May 17, 2025, 03:52 PM

- Q1 Name**
Short Text Sarah
- Q2 Contact number**
Number
- Q3 Email**
Email
- Q4 Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Yes
- Q5 Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?**
Multi Choice Yes
- Q6 How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Neutral
- Q7 How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?**
Multi Choice Neutral
- Q8 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?**
Multi Choice
Not very supportive
- Q9 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?**
Multi Choice
Somewhat supportive
- Q10 Please select the category that includes your age**
Multi Choice 25-34
- Q11 Which of the category best describes your residential status?**
Multi Choice Farmland Ratepayer
- Q12 Which community is your property closest to?**
Multi Choice Nyah / Nyah West
- Q13 Please provide any other comments that you wish Council to consider in a revised Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029.**
Long Text
Our property is zoned as farming, but does not match any of the definitions of farm rate in these documents. Yet when we have enquired multiple times about subdivision we are either ignored or told that it is not possible to change zones. Even though our property is only 18 acres and on the outskirts of a township.

Response No:
2

Contribution ID: 12146
Member ID:
Date Submitted: May 16, 2025, 04:02 PM

- Q1 Name**
Short Text Matthew
- Q2 Contact number**
Number
- Q3 Email**
Email
- Q4 Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Prefer not to say
- Q5 Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?**
Multi Choice Prefer not to say
- Q6 How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Not well informed
- Q7 How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?**
Multi Choice Not well
- Q8 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?**
Multi Choice Supportive
- Q9 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?**
Multi Choice Supportive
- Q10 Please select the category that includes your age**
Multi Choice 45-54
- Q11 Which of the category best describes your residential status?**
Multi Choice Farmland Ratepayer
- Q12 Which community is your property closest to?**
Multi Choice Woorinen / Woorinen South
- Q13 Please provide any other comments that you wish Council to consider in a revised Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029.**
Long Text I want irrigation farmland rates to be lowered to the dry farmland rates

Response No:
3

Contribution ID: 12099
Member ID:
Date Submitted: May 14, 2025, 02:18 PM

- Q1 Name**
Short Text Marianna De Maio
- Q2 Contact number**
Number
- Q3 Email**
Email
- Q4 Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Prefer not to say
- Q5 Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?**
Multi Choice Prefer not to say
- Q6 How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Prefer not to say
- Q7 How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?**
Multi Choice Very well
- Q8 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?**
Multi Choice
Not at all supportive
- Q9 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?**
Multi Choice
Not at all supportive
- Q10 Please select the category that includes your age**
Multi Choice 55-64
- Q11 Which of the category best describes your residential status?**
Multi Choice Prefer not to answer
- Q12 Which community is your property closest to?**
Multi Choice Wood Wood
- Q13 Please provide any other comments that you wish Council to consider in a revised Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029.**
Long Text

Response No:
4

Contribution ID: 12015
Member ID:
Date Submitted: May 08, 2025, 12:02 PM

- Q1 Name**
Short Text Julia Craig
- Q2 Contact number**
Number
- Q3 Email**
Email
- Q4 Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Yes
- Q5 Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?**
Multi Choice Yes
- Q6 How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Neutral
- Q7 How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?**
Multi Choice Neutral
- Q8 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?**
Multi Choice Supportive
- Q9 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?**
Multi Choice Supportive
- Q10 Please select the category that includes your age**
Multi Choice 55-64
- Q11 Which of the category best describes your residential status?**
Multi Choice Residential Ratepayer
- Q12 Which community is your property closest to?**
Multi Choice Swan Hill
- Q13 Please provide any other comments that you wish Council to consider in a revised Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029.**
Long Text
Does the council know that Swan Hill resident home rates are more than some affluent suburbs in the cities? ratepayers will suffer having to pay such high rates.

Response No:
5

Contribution ID: 12011

Member ID:

Date Submitted: May 07, 2025, 09:47 PM

- Q1 Name**
Short Text Chris Jeffery
- Q2 Contact number**
Number
- Q3 Email**
Email
- Q4 Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Yes
- Q5 Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?**
Multi Choice Yes
- Q6 How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice Well informed
- Q7 How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?**
Multi Choice Very well
- Q8 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?**
Multi Choice Supportive
- Q9 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?**
Multi Choice Very supportive
- Q10 Please select the category that includes your age**
Multi Choice 35-44
- Q11 Which of the category best describes your residential status?**
Multi Choice Residential Ratepayer
- Q12 Which community is your property closest to?**
Multi Choice Swan Hill
- Q13 Please provide any other comments that you wish Council to consider in a revised Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029.**
Long Text
1. Does Council have a 'Style Guide' that reinforces the expected standard of their corporate documents eg. 2025-26 or 2025-2026, Tables & Figures referenced as 'Table 1 – with descriptive title.' These are not consistent and lacking in the document, making referencing them in feedback difficult.
2. Page 21 – 'The Fire Services Property Levy helps fund the services provided by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Country Fire Authority (CFA), and all levies collected by Council are passed through to the State Government.'
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) became Fire Rescue Victoria in 1 July 2020

3. 3.1 Differential Rate Categories – paragraph 2 states:

"...land valuations are determined each year by the Valuer-General Victoria. Disagreement with individual land valuations should be raised with the Valuer-General Victoria as Council has no involvement in setting the land valuations."

Page 34 - Supplementary Valuations last sentence states:

"Any objections must be lodged with Council within two months of the issue of the supplementary rate notice."

The process should be consistently stated in 3.1 for purpose of objecting to property valuation, and also reviewed against wording in 'Objections to property valuations'.

4. Page 18 'Planned Rating Differentials' table refers to Commercial and Industrial ratings moving to new 'Commercial and Industrial Category' in 2027-28. This Category is not listed in as a Category in this table or in 'Appendix C – Rating Differential Category Definitions.'

5. Tables similar to 'Total yield from general rates' on page 10 should be included for the proposed Revenue Rating Plan so Ratepayers can better understand changes between current and proposed rating strategies:

5.1. Application of rates identified in Appendix C – Rating Differential Category

5.2. Removal of 4% premium applied to residential properties in Swan Hill and Robinvale

5.3. Justification for staged implementation of Industrial & Commercial Rates across 2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28 rather than full implementation.

6. What impact has the 320% rate on Residential vacant land – Swan Hill and Robinvale since its inception on development on vacant residential land?

6.1. Has Council considered if this would have a positive impact on the smaller townships where land is available, serviced but remains vacant eg Lake Boga, Woorinen South, Nyah, Nyah West?

7. Page 4 - "Overall visitation to Swan Hill is to expected increase in line..."

Correction: "Overall visitation to Swan Hill is expected to increase in line..."

Response No:
6

Contribution ID: 12009
Member ID:
Date Submitted: May 07, 2025, 07:02 PM

- Q1 Name**
Short Text
Glenda Booth
- Q2 Contact number**
Number
- Q3 Email**
Email
- Q4 Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice
Yes
- Q5 Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?**
Multi Choice
Yes
- Q6 How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?**
Multi Choice
Neutral
- Q7 How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?**
Multi Choice
Not well
- Q8 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?**
Multi Choice
Supportive
- Q9 How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?**
Multi Choice
Supportive
- Q10 Please select the category that includes your age**
Multi Choice
Over 65
- Q11 Which of the category best describes your residential status?**
Multi Choice
Residential Ratepayer
- Q12 Which community is your property closest to?**
Multi Choice
Lake Boga
- Q13 Please provide any other comments that you wish Council to consider in a revised Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029.**
Long Text
Residential rates for properties on Lakeside Drive Lake Boga are too high. We don't get anything in particular for such high rates, just a view of the Lake.
The weeds grow, reeds grow in the Lake and all that happens is the council workers scoot along on the walking track mowing a few weeds that grow about 12 inches from the side of track.
Can't you beautify things a little, planting some small shady trees along the section from highway to number 45 Lakeside Drive on the lake side of Lakeside Drive road

Lets Talk - Submission replies

Have you read in full the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say
4		2

Have you read the draft Annual Budget 2025-2026?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say
4		2

How well informed are you of the proposed changes to the draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029?

Well informed	Neutral	Prefer not to say	Not well informed
1	3	1	1

How well do you understand the impact of the changes on your property?

Very Well	Neutral	Prefer not to say	Not Well	
2	2		2	

How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the Option to charge the same rate in the dollar to all residential properties and remove the 4% additional burden on Swan Hill and Robinvale residential properties?

Supportive	Not Very Supportive	Not at all Supportive
4	1	1

How supportive are you of Council proceeding with the option to charge the same rate in the dollar for industrial and commercial properties?

Very Supportive	Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Neutral	Not at all supportive
1	3	1		1

Age Group

25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	Over 65
1	1	1	2	1

Which of the category best describes your residential status?

Residential Ratepayer	Farmland Rate Payer	Prefer not to answer
3	2	1

Which community is your property closest to?

Swan Hill	Lake Boga	Woorinen/Woorinen South	Nyah/Nyah West	Wood Wood
2	1	1	1	1



Swan Hill Rural City Council
45 Splatt Street
SWAN HILL VIC 3585

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Council Rates Plan

On behalf of the Swan Hill Summer Fruit Development Association, we write to provide feedback on the Swan Hill Rural City Council's Revenue and Rating Plan. Following a review of the draft plan, we request that Council consider the introduction of a discount or concession on local government rates for irrigation-based farming properties within the municipality, as has been the case for the Dryland Farming category for the previous Rating and Revenue period.

Our Association represents a significant number of local growers who rely on irrigation to produce high value summer fruit crops, including peaches, nectarines, plums, and apricots. These operations contribute significantly to the local economy, providing employment opportunities (both local and harvest labour) and by stimulating local industries that supply our sector. We are a vital part of the Swan Hill region's agricultural identity.

Irrigation farming, however, comes with substantial and increasing costs—water prices, infrastructure maintenance, energy, labour and compliance obligations all place increasing financial pressure on growers. In recent years, these pressures have been exacerbated by variable climatic conditions, workforce shortages, and input cost volatility.

Many of our members feel the current rating system does not adequately reflect the scale of financial commitment and infrastructure investment required to maintain irrigated properties. Offering a rate discount to irrigation farmers would be a tangible way for Council to support the sustainability of one of its most valuable industries and acknowledge the role irrigated horticulture plays in keeping our local economy strong and resilient.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with Council representatives to further discuss this proposal and how it could be implemented in a fair and practical way. Reviewing the Principles with the current draft Plan, it may be worth simplifying the farming category, by joining irrigated farming and dryland into one category. Splitting the farming sector has the potential to create disharmony within one of Swan Hill's most critical industries.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Mathew Cutri



Manangatang Branch Victorian Farmers Federation

To: Bhan Pratap
Director Corporate Services
Swan Hill Rural City Council

Copy to: Scott Barber CEO, Mayor Stuart King & Councillors

Submission: Rating and Revenue Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to Council as it prepares its new Rating & Revenue Strategy.

As farmers growing crops on dry land, we are very concerned at the significant increase in dryland farming rates in comparison to other categories over the last seven years. The data below highlights the inequity of the share of the rate burden amongst the various categories.

Introduction

The 'Fair Go Rates' system introduced in 2016, capped the total annual revenue (from general rates, municipal charges and any other prescribed rates or charges), but not the individual rating categories.

In the decade before the introduction of this system in 2016, council rates were increasing by an average of 6 per cent each year. Since the introduction of the cap, the average rate cap between 2016-17 and 2024-25 is 2.3 per cent, limiting steep successive increases for Victorian rate payers.

Prior to the implementation of the 'Fair Go Rates' system, the Victorian Farmers Federation expressed concern about the potential for local government to disproportionately implement the cap, with some rating categories not getting the full benefit of the cap.

The data demonstrates that in particular, the Dryland Farming category been severely disadvantaged over the last 7 years compared to other categories by not getting similar benefit of the cap.

Data, 18/19 and 24/25**Table 1: Valuations \$'000**

Valuations \$'000	18/19	24/25	% increase 18/19 - 24/25
Residential SH	\$1,054,297.00	\$1,795,963.00	70.3
Commercial SH	\$202,380.00	\$304,124.00	50.3
Industrial SH	\$78,264.00	\$133,612.00	70.7
Farming			
Irrigation	\$1,276,955.00	\$1,778,299.00	39.3
Farming Dryland	\$642,730.00	\$1,637,806.00	154.8
Other	\$656,615.00	\$1,172,052.00	78.5
Total	\$3,911,241.00	\$6,821,856.00	74.4

Table 2: \$ raised by rates

\$ raised by rates	18/19	% paid per category 18/19	24/25	% paid per category 24/25	Increase/decrease per category 18/19 -24/25
Residential SH	\$6,655,000.00	28.7	\$7,924,000.00	27.9	-0.8
Commercial SH	\$1,622,000.00	7.0	\$1,677,000.00	5.9	-1.1
Industrial SH	\$498,000.00	2.1	\$589,000.00	2.1	-0.1
Farming Irrigation	\$7,463,000.00	32.2	\$7,544,000.00	26.5	-5.6
Farming Dryland	\$3,308,000.00	14.3	\$5,558,000.00	19.6	5.3
Other	\$3,652,000.00	15.7	\$5,132,000.00	18.1	2.3
Total	\$23,198,000.00	100	\$28,424,000.00	100	

Table 3: Number of assessments

Number of assessments	18/19	24/25	% increase 18/19 - 24/25
Residential SH	4506	4631	2.8
Commercial SH	397	403	1.5
Industrial SH	233	241	3.4
Farming Irrigation	2000	2017	0.9
Farming Dryland	1203	1220	1.4
Other	3613	3746	3.7
Total	11952	12258	2.6

Analysis of the data, 18/19 to 24/25

Although valuations for Residential SH increased by 70.3%, the percentage of total rates paid in that category decreased from 28.7% to 27.9% (-0.8%)

Although valuations for Commercial SH increased by 50.3%, the percentage of total rates paid in that category decreased from 7.0% to 5.9% (-1.1%)

Although valuations for Industrial SH increased by 70.7%, the percentage of total rates paid in that category remained the same at 2.1%

Although valuations for Farming Irrigation increased by 39.3%, the percentage of total rates paid in that category decreased from 32.2% to 26.5% (-5.6%)

Valuations for Farming Dryland had the largest increase, 154.8%, and the percentage of total rates paid in that category increased from 14.3% to 18.1% an increase of 5.3%

This data clearly shows that the Farming Dryland category has had the highest category increase of 5.3% and that the rate burden is progressively being shifted to this sector. Most dryland farmers receive more than 1 assessment notice, so the burden is shifted onto an even smaller number of farming businesses. For example, if the average number of assessments is 3, then the burden is shifted onto 407 farming families.

Suggested solutions to consider

1. Council to support the application of the 'pie model' to promote rating equity among land classes. Each land class would contribute a stable proportion (or slice) to the Council's total rate revenue 'pie'.
2. Council to consider the cost and level of benefits derived from the provision of Council services for each category when determining the percentage of total rate revenue contributed by each category

For example: Residential

The rate applying to residential improved land would be determined to ensure that it is fair and equitable, having regard to the cost and the level of benefits derived from the provision of Council services.

Council aims to raise approximately [TO BE DETERMINED] per cent of total rate revenue from each land category (based on the long-term average percentage contributed by this land category to total Council rates revenue).

Farm

The rate applying to farmland will be determined to ensure that it is fair and equitable, having regard to the cost and the level of benefits derived from the provision of Council services. In addition, the Council will have consideration to maintaining agriculture as a major industry in the municipality, to facilitating the longevity of the farm sector and achieve a balance between providing for municipal growth and retaining the important agricultural economic base.

Council aims to raise approximately [TO BE DETERMINED] per cent of total rate revenue from this land category (based on the long-term average percentage contributed by this land category to total Council rates revenue).

And so on for each category.

This strategy limits the increase/decrease for each category and takes into account the level of benefits that each category derives from Council services which is important given that there are different categories which receive vastly different levels of services.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document

Christine Plant, Victorian Farmers Federation Grains Councillor (North Mallee) and Manangatang Branch Treasurer

Brian Barry Jnr, Victorian Farmers Federation Manangatang Branch President

2.3 Councillor Representatives to External and Internal Committees

Directorate: Chief Executive Officer
File Number: S16-20-01
Purpose: For Decision

Council Plan Strategy Addressed

4. Leadership - We will ensure accountable leadership, advocacy and transparent decision making.

4.3 Bold leadership, strong partnerships and effective advocacy

4.3.1 Create meaningful partnerships across our communities

Current Strategic documents

No strategic documents applicable.

Declarations of Interest:

Council Officers affirm that no general or material conflicts need to be declared in relation to the subject of this report.

Summary

The purpose of the report is to consider the re-appointment of another Councillor to the Audit and Risk Committee and Lake Boga Inc.

Discussion

Council makes appointments to various external organisations and community groups. This assists Council in working closely with its community and taking part in a wide range of activities associated with the development of the municipality. These appointments were made at Council's Scheduled Meeting of Council in November 2024.

Cr Jennings and Cr Rogers were appointed as representatives to the Audit and Risk Committee however Cr Jennings, due to other commitments, has requested another Councillor take his position on this committee.

Cr Broad was also appointed as a representative to Lake Boga and District Association Inc and to Swan Hill Incorporated Board. However, these meetings are now scheduled at the same time, making it impossible to attend both meetings. Cr Broad has requested another Councillor to attend one of these meetings as the nominated representative.

Consultation

Council Briefing held on 27 May 2025.

Financial Implications

Travel and accommodation costs incurred by Councillors are reimbursed. These costs are budgeted for annually.

Social, Economic and Environmental Implications

Appointments to external organisations will assist Council in achieving its economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Risk Management Implications

Nil.

Attachments: Nil

Options

Some appointments are mandatory (e.g. Audit and Risk Committee) while others are optional.

Recommendation/s

That Council appoint Councillors to external organisations and internal committees as shown in the table below:

TOWN REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS		
Group Name	2024 Representative	Updated* 2025 Representative
Lake Boga and District Association Inc	Cr McPhee	From Cr Broad to Cr Rogers*
INTERNAL COMMITTEES		
Group Name	2024 Representative	2025 Representative
Audit and Risk Committee Meets quarterly	Cr King Cr Kelly (This position is for the period of January 2024 to the end of Councillor term 2024)	From Cr Jennings to Cr Broad* Cr Rogers (This position is for the period of this meeting to December 2025)

CM 2025/73 Motion

MOVED Cr Jennings

That Council appoint Councillors to external organisations and internal committees as shown in the table below:

TOWN REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS		
Group Name	2024 Representative	Updated* 2025 Representative
Lake Boga and District Association Inc	Cr McPhee	From Cr Broad to Cr Rogers*

INTERNAL COMMITTEES		
Group Name	2024 Representative	2025 Representative
Audit and Risk Committee Meets quarterly	Cr King Cr Kelly (This position is for the period of January 2024 to the end of Councillor term 2024)	<i>From Cr Jennings to Cr Broad*</i> Cr Rogers (This position is for the period of this meeting to December 2025)

SECONDED Cr Rogers

The Motion was put and CARRIED 6 / 0

3 Close of Meeting

There being no further business the Mayor, Cr King closed the meeting at 1:46 pm.