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## Community Update

**Reference:** 101; 102; 103/6  
**Report Author:** Interim Administrator

I raised the possibility of Council seeking an additional 0.8% in rate income in the next financial year at the March meeting and authorise the General Manager to commence the process. The original cap of 1.2 % that IPART had advised meant that there would be a short fall of about \$4.85m over the 10 year life of Council's Longterm Financial Plan.

When the Council's draft Operation Plan and Budget for 2022/23 goes on public exhibition the decision taken at the last meeting means it will be advertised on two options 1.2% and 2%. If this action was not taken the potential short fall in income for next year's budget is \$425,000.

The decision to place on exhibition the two options has attracted some publicity and I raise the matter to simply inform that my decision to advertise a possible 2% rate increase simply maintains the integrity of the Longterm Financial Plan endorsed on many occasions by the suspended Council.

The bulky waste collection across the Shire is now complete, and from driving around it appears to have been very well used. I have asked the General Manager to report to Council on the estimated utilisation and amount collected. As the collection is to occur again next year and will be included in the next domestic waste contract, I would like to hear from residents about their experience and possible improvements. From my own observations the zones should be much smaller as there was too much rubbish standing on the kerb for too long - though in fairness the weather did not help.

Many regional Councils including Wingecarribee are facing significant operational challenges in terms of assessing and determining Development Applications. This has been a long standing issue in Wingecarribee Shire, with more applications received than determined over the past few years. Over one thousand (1000) Development Applications were made last year, and assessing these appropriately to meet community and customer expectations has been a challenge for staff.

Growth in application numbers, Covid impacts and competition across Government (at both local and state levels) for planning staff has made the current situation difficult, particularly for residents having to wait too long for smaller scale residential approvals. This is not a criticism of staff, with many working long hours to support the organisation, their colleagues and customer needs, but I recognise that we have reached a point where they need urgent assistance.

The General Manager and the Director Communities and Place are addressing this with a particular emphasis on increased resourcing.

Some of these changes have already been made – introduction of the new online Duty Planning system, securing assistance from the Department of Planning's Flying Squad, active recruitment for staff, appointment of specialist contractors and additional resources requested from neighbouring Councils.

More will be required to ensure that the core services of Development Assessment and Certification are properly supported over the next 6 months, so that the current backlog is addressed, the system

## AGENDA FOR THE ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Wednesday 20 April 2022

### INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE



re-set, processes improved and customer and community confidence restored. I will be requesting regular updates from senior staff on progress in this area and have asked that a status report be provided to the June Council meeting.

Business in Robertson have been impacted by the closure of Macquarie Pass. As part of the Small Business Month program, Service NSW were active in various forums which were open to all businesses and networks in the Highlands. More recently Council officers have been in contact with the Robertson Chamber of Commerce to organise for Service NSW to attend one of their meetings to discuss their individual needs.

I would also like to highlight the Potato Festival which will be held on Saturday 30 April and Sunday 1 May at the Robertson Showground. This Festival will bring all-things-potato to life from cultivation to culinary experiences. From making mash or moonshine, to artmaking and growing, cooking and competitions; there'll be opportunities to explore and celebrate the diversity and importance of this staple food which is the world's fourth largest food crop. A great initiative for the Town and I hop people across the Shire support them.

Council staff have been working with the Robertson community to develop the Robertson Place Plan and one of the issues that has been raised through that process is the impact of heavy vehicles on the Illawarra Highway. Not only the impacts on amenity and pedestrian safety within the Robertson village centre, but also the regular closing of Macquarie Pass as a result of heavy vehicles that restricts movement to and from the Southern Highlands. I will be asking the General Manager to raise these concerns with both Transport for NSW and our State Members to investigate whether restricting heavy vehicle usage on Macquarie Pass is an option to resolve these issues. In addition, my personal observation is that such a restriction would also assist Argyle Street, Moss Vale with Picton Road for use by heavy vehicles would appear to be a safer route.

With Anzac Day fast approaching it was pleasing to be advised that the Federal Government has approved a grant of \$61,000 under the Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants program to assist in the repair an upgrade of the Vietnam War Memorial and Cherry Tree Walk in Bowral.

On 18 March I attended the Illawarra Infrastructure and Investment Summit in Wollongong that was very well attended and included presentations from the Chair of Infrastructure Australia and a number of panel sessions involving politicians and key professionals. Business Illawarra is to be congratulated for the initiative.

On Wednesday 30 March together with the General Manager and Mr Park, I attended a meeting at Parliament House, Sydney with the Minister of Planning and Homes the Hon Anthony Roberts which was organised and also attended by the Member for Goulburn, the Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP. The purpose of the meeting was to brief Minister Roberts on the strategic planning challenges that confront Council, particularly in relation to the Southern Highland Innovation Precinct and implementation of the Housing Strategy and to seek financial assistance. Generally our representations aligned with the report on this matter adopted at the March meeting and we received good hearing.

It is opportune that the Coomungie/Chelsea Gardens overview report is on this agenda as it again highlights Council's failure (at both political and administrative level) to address issues strategically

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and I can assure residents this is now a priority and while the past cannot be recovered, lessons have been learnt.

I was fortunate to be invited by the Wingecarribee Reconciliation Group to its annual mirror flash at Gibbergunyah Reserve on Saturday 9 April 2022. The event was organised by Wingecarribee Reconciliation, we were welcomed with a smoking ceremony which has been a cultural practice of our First Nations People.

Viv May PSM

**Interim Administrator**