



Council to seek extension of Special Rate Variation

15 February 2012

Queanbeyan City Council will next week submit an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) seeking a permanent extension of the application made by Council in 2010 for a Special Rate Variation to fund the CityCARE program of works.

Following extensive community consultation in late 2009 and early 2010 Council applied for an ongoing Special Rate Variation of 5.8% above and beyond the annual rate pegging percentage. The Minister gave approval for the Special Rate Variation but only for an initial period of three years, up until the end of the 2012-13 financial year. At the time of Council's application the authority for approval sat with the Minister for Local Government, however following the 2011 NSW election this authority was transferred to IPART.

"Throughout the consultation in late 2009 and early 2010 Council communicated very clearly that it would be applying for an ongoing Special Rate Variation and the majority of feedback from the community was supportive of this application," Queanbeyan Mayor, Cr Tim Overall said.

"Unfortunately the Minister only approved Council's application for an initial three-year period. If approval is not gained to extend the Special Rate Variation it means that, if Council agrees, it would have to undertake an extensive and expensive community consultation exercise again in 2013 to continue the CityCARE program.

"If the variation was to cease at the end of the 2012-13 financial year Queanbeyan residents would see a decrease in their general rates, but would also see a decrease in the standard of roads, footpaths and parks and sportsfields across Queanbeyan."

Council applied for the Special Rate Variation to fund urgent asset maintenance and renewal of the city's assets.

"A 10-year works program was developed to show the community exactly where the money raised will be spent," Cr Overall said. "During the first 18 months of the program Council has kept to that program and has completed works as scheduled. Each year this works program is extended by a further year and aligned to Council's Long Term Financial Plan.

"During its first three years the Special Rate Variation will raise upwards of \$3 million in total which will be spent on the maintenance and renewal of Council's roads, footpaths and parks and sportsfields."

In the first year of the program Council spent \$980,000 to repair 758 footpath, reseal 17 roads, stabilise another three roads and upgrade five parks and sportsfields.

“The first year of the CityCARE program was an outstanding success with some much-needed maintenance and renewal taking place around Queanbeyan,” Cr Overall said.

“Without funding from the Special Rate Variation this work would not have been able to be undertaken and Queanbeyan’s assets would have continued to deteriorate to a point where fixing them would have cost Council a lot more.”

In 2011-12 the CityCARE levy will raise \$1.011 million for Council to spend exclusively on the CityCARE program. The works program for 2011-2012 is as follows:

- Pavement rehabilitation of four sections of local roads - \$350,000
- Footpath repairs - \$196,760
- Bitumen resealing of around 10 local roads - \$165,000
- Replacement of equipment and soft fall at Cassinia Park - \$35,000
- Upgrade of water supply at the Queanbeyan Showground - \$45,000
- Replacement of soft fall and upgrade of equipment at Railway Park - \$45,000
- Upgrade of amenities at Blundell Park - \$75,000
- Erosion control, grass cover on banks of Halloran Drive - \$25,000
- Upgraded of lower amenities at Wright Park - \$75,000

“The average increase in residential rates to fund this program was about \$45 per year,” Cr Overall said. “To assist with this rate increase Council agreed to introduce an additional pensioner rebate of \$40 for eligible residents. This is on top of the regular pensioner rebate Council offers. In 2010-11 Council provided more than \$65,000 in pensioner rebates from the CityCARE levy.”

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