

# 2020-21 Mayors Budget Speech

Conducted by Mayor Matt Burnett, Tuesday, 7 July 2020 at 9am  
Gladstone Entertainment Convention Centre, 56 Goondoon Street, Gladstone

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Good morning my fellow Councillors, Council officers, ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to present Gladstone Regional Council's 2020/21 Budget and associated Operational Plan, the first of the new Council term.

The theme of this year's budget is Our Community. Our Future.

This year's Operational Plan and Budget reflect Council's focus on helping the community and economy recover from the COVID-19 health emergency.

It is centred around engaged communities, a healthy environment, outstanding customer service, smart asset management, operational excellence and economic resilience leading to growth.

While uncertainty remains regarding the long-term impacts of COVID-19, Gladstone Regional Council is delivering a budget that ensures key projects are continued and new projects are brought forward to support continued employment opportunities.

Council partners with both the State and Federal Governments, community groups, industry and other economic partners to ensure we are well positioned to deliver the best outcomes for our community now and into the future.

By fostering these partnerships, Council can continue to deliver extra services and facilities to the region, while reducing the burden of rates and charges on ratepayers.

Council has been working closely with our Recovery Committees and we understand the impacts COVID-19 has had on our economy and our community, and I am pleased to announce that:

- Council will be freezing rates for the 2020/21 financial year.

This means all ratepayers in Rural, Residential, Commercial and Light Industrial land categories (Rating Categories 1-16 inclusive) will not pay more in general rates than they did last year.

In order to give effect to the rates freeze, those properties that would have otherwise received an increase due to the implementation of the rate cap, will

receive a COVID-19 concession to reduce their effective general rate to be equivalent to the 2019/20 general rate levy.

The amount of this concession will vary between individual properties, but the net impact will be the same for all receiving this concession. The total value of this concession is \$657,000 and applies to almost 4000 (3949) properties.

- Further, in recognition of the unique needs of pensioners and to encourage our pensioners to continue to be independent and live in their own home, we offer eligible pensioners a remission of 50 per cent off the differential general rate to a maximum of \$300, which has been increased from last year.
- In addition, the State Government also offers a pensioner concession to a maximum of \$200.
- When looking at the average residential ratepayer in the Gladstone Region, in line with the decision to freeze rates and charges, there is a decrease in the general rate of 1 per cent, and the overall decrease to the average ratepayer across all services is 0.5 per cent.

Other Budget highlights include:

- \$15 million of financial assistance from both the State and Federal Governments – this will provide much-needed stimulus and allow for the acceleration of shovel-ready projects

From that \$15m, Council is receiving \$8.2m from the Federal Government's Financial Assistance Grant (including indexation), \$5.2m from the Queensland Government's COVID Works for Queensland program, and \$1.6m through the Federal Government's accelerated Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program.

- I am also pleased to announce that for an eighth consecutive year Council will have no new borrowings.

This budget will ensure key projects continue and new projects are brought on to boost employment

opportunities and minimise the funding costs for our ratepayers.

Council's \$64.8m Capital Works program includes State and Federal Government contributions of \$27.2m, reflecting our effective strategy of seeking specific funding for capital project expenditure.

The 2020/21 capital expenditure will include:

- \$15.3m on Community Assets and Facilities
- \$11.6m on upgrades to wastewater (sewerage) infrastructure
- \$9.6m on Roads Projects
- \$6.2m on upgrades to water supply infrastructure
- \$4.5m on Parks Projects
- \$3.1m on bridge upgrades, renewals and replacements
- \$2.4m on footpath and cycle upgrades.

During these uncertain times, Council is focused on building and maintaining our capital assets to support the standard of living in the Gladstone Region and seeking opportunities to partner with our community, industry and other tiers of government to ensure that the region remains a great place to live, work and play.

Some key capital projects to be undertaken this financial year include:

- \$3.2m for Benaraby Landfill Cell Development
- \$2.3m for building and electrical improvements at the Tondoon Botanic Gardens
- \$1.55m for gravel road resheeting - this is in addition to the \$3.2m Council will spend on our annual gravel road maintenance program in 2020/21
- \$1.4m for bridge replacements at Gorge Road and John Clifford Way at Lowmead
- \$730,000 for the Goondoon Street footpath renewal
- \$690,000 for the Agnes Street carpark at Agnes Water
- \$200,000 for safety improvements for Turkey Beach Road.

As I mentioned earlier, developing partnerships with

other levels of government is crucial in lowering the cost on ratepayers.

The Federal Government's Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program will deliver \$1.6m for road safety improvements in two locations:

- Dawson Highway between Far Street and Breslin Street &
- Blackmans Gap Road, Miriam Vale.

The Queensland Government's \$5.2m COVID Works for Queensland program will deliver projects this financial year, these include:

- Gladstone Aquatic Centre rejuvenation and upgrade
- Floor replacement at Boyne Tannum Community Centre and upgrades to the CastleTower community building
- Safety and building improvements at Gladstone Entertainment Convention Centre
- Upgrade to Cassy Lives Skate Park
- Playground replacement program across the region
- A second weighbridge at Benaraby Landfill
- Gladstone Waste Water Treatment Plant stormwater mitigation
- Pump station renewal.

As we continue to embrace our vision to Connect, Innovate and Diversify, funds have been allocated for three strategic projects across the Gladstone Region.

Work will proceed on the design stage of the Boyne Tannum Aquatic Recreation Centre, the development of the Gladstone Coal Exporters Sports Complex (Marley Brown Oval) and the Boyne Burnett Inland Rail Trail.

I am also happy to announce that the Philip Street Communities and Families Precinct – Council's signature project in partnership with the Federal Government, Salvation Army and the Gladstone Foundation – is under construction and will deliver a much-needed social services hub, retirement village and aged care facility for the Gladstone community. The precinct's first stage is due for completion by June 2021.

An Expression Of Interest window remains open until July 28 for retirement and aged care providers to build,

operate and maintain a facility within a portion of the overall site, so I would encourage those providers to submit an EOI via LG Tender Box if you haven't already done so.

It has never been more important for Council to focus on the economic development of the region as we work to navigate through the COVID-19-induced downturn.

Our focus on the economic development of our region is supported by dedicated in-house resources that are driving our Economic Recovery Group with key partners from throughout the region.

This is to ensure that all initiatives to support economic recovery are targeted to achieve maximum return.

Council has clear economic objectives to facilitate sustainable, financially and environmentally responsible initiatives that will advance economic development in the Gladstone Region, for the community.

Our Economic Development Specialist will continue to implement the Economic Development Strategy, collaborating with key business and industry leaders to attract and sustain investment in our region.

The continuation of our investment in the Infrastructure Incentive Program provides incentives by way of discounted levied charges for specifically eligible developments that will deliver economic development and growth outcomes that align with Council's Economic Development Strategy and Planning Scheme.

We will continue to invest in improving asset management practices, with a strong focus on engaging with stakeholders, building staff capability and identifying opportunities to reduce our cost to serve.

We are already starting to see the benefits of improved asset management, as we move to more proactive maintenance in the water and wastewater fields. For every maintenance activity that we can shift from reactive to planned, Council will reduce overall maintenance costs.

I'm also pleased to announce that water access charges and sewerage charges will not increase this financial year.

Water access and sewerage charges differ across the various schemes of Lake Awoonga, Miriam Vale/Bororen and Agnes Water/Seventeen Seventy.

However, in line with Council's commitment for the 2020/21 Budget these charges will be the same as levied for the previous financial year with respect to residential, commercial and light industrial Council customers.

Cleansing (refuse) charges have also been frozen this financial year, applying to all premises receiving a domestic waste and recycling charge.

Council's underlying waste service costs, excluding recycling, increased in line with CPI. The associated costs of waste disposal, transfer station operation and recycling component have had significant cost pressures applied during the past financial years.

Last year, Council adopted a three-year price path in its budget for the recovery of waste costs, however the second year of this price path implementation has been deferred, in line with the freezing of our rates and service charges.

Unfortunately, it has been necessary to pass through the cost of the commercial waste levy at our landfill, but all other increases have been deferred for the 2020/21 budget.

This means the refuse charges across the region will remain at \$345.50 per annum, for a standard 240 litre weekly waste service, and a 240L fortnightly recycling service.

Finally, I would like to congratulate all who helped prepare these vital planning documents which set out the work Council plans to deliver over the coming year.

I am confident that our Budget will renew, rebuild and maintain our cost-effective delivery of services to our region, while navigating our way beyond the impacts of COVID-19.

I look forward to working with my fellow Councillors and Council officers to serve the Gladstone Region community in 2020/21 and I commend this Budget to you all.

Thank you.

Matt Burnett  
Mayor Gladstone  
Regional Council

