

Mayor's speech

2024–25 Budget adoption

Special Meeting, 20 June 2024



Today, I'm delighted to stand before you to speak to Sunshine Coast Council's 2024-25 Budget – my first as our region's Mayor.

This is a Budget that first and foremost shows we are listening to our community.

It will continue to prepare the region for a bright future while providing a renewed focus on supporting people now.

I'm proud to say that the Budget – the first for this term of Council – includes benefits for everyone.

Community is at the heart of every decision and every inclusion.

We have put our residents first by enhancing public spaces, parks and infrastructure for all - shaping a healthier, happier and more connected region.

We are delivering the high service standards our residents and visitors deserve while ensuring financial responsibility.

We're improving transport, roads and pathways to ensure smoother travel and building first-class sport and community hubs.

Our \$283 million Capital Works program is also creating local jobs and bolstering local industries.

We're encouraging people to shop local, study here and unite for exciting events that will bring us together and help businesses thrive.

Supporting our community

Our residents will be supported thanks to increased pensioner concessions, initiatives for housing and family violence prevention as well as programs that will boost our health and wellbeing.

We've also adjusted rate charges to maintain fairness despite the State's property valuation increases.

Our environment is also front and centre. We are dedicated to protecting our natural habitats, rejuvenating ecosystems and restoring coastal areas.

This Council wanted to deliver a Budget that contains benefits for all residents no matter where they live – from the north to the south, east to west, and everywhere in between.

So, what can you expect and look forward to?

Well, there will be new footpaths, cycleways and road upgrades.

We have also allocated more funds for Council's vast outdoor operations, which care for almost 1100 hectares of parklands and reserves – equivalent to almost 1500 football fields.

This is in response to what our residents told us was important to them.

We will make our outdoor spaces more beautiful by reducing wait times for trees to be trimmed and grass to be mowed. This, of course, will help us catch up on the backlog created by the extended wet weather we have all experienced.

There is also a greater investment in improving Council roads by identifying and fixing potholes more swiftly.

And we have significantly increased our investment in sealing gravel roads, this year allocating \$8 million, up from \$5 million last financial year.

These are all examples of our Council listening and delivering for those we serve.

Our hinterland will be further supported, including our historic centres of Maleny, Eumundi and Nambour, which are fortunate to have such passionate and engaged communities.

They will receive much-needed funds to enhance streetscapes and facilities, which I'm sure will delight residents, visitors and businesses.

Key Budget investments include:

- \$391 million to develop a strong community,
- \$289 million to maintain and enhance our environment and liveability,
- \$37 million to build our resilient economy, and
- \$140 million to deliver service excellence.

We will invest \$29 million in improving roads and almost \$20 million in park, turf and landscape maintenance.

There's \$13.2 million for libraries, as well as \$4 million for grants and developing partnerships with those making a difference in our community.

Creating healthier communities

Sport and recreation will also benefit with \$18 million allocated this financial year to the new Honey Farm Sports Precinct and \$7.4 million to upgrade the Kawana Waters Regional Aquatic Centre.

Another \$1.5 million will rebuild the Caloundra City Churches Soccer Clubhouse and fields.

Moffat Beach will get \$3.9 million in Council's Budget to support a seawall stabilisation with major remediation work to begin mid-next year.

Caloundra will receive a huge boost, receiving more than \$27 million to finalise construction of a new district library and community heart that will revitalise its CBD.

More than \$9 million will be invested in the upgrade of the Nambour waste precinct at Bli Bli to sustainably manage our region's future waste.

This includes a new Resource Recovery Centre, landfill improvements and planning for a renewable energy facility.

\$2.9 million will go to Maleny to advance the Maple Street streetscape project, while \$960,000 will be spent on the picturesque town's Mountain View lookout parking area.

In September, Coolum Beach residents will see work begin on the upgrade to Lions and Norrie Job Park thanks to a \$1.6 million allocation.

\$775,000 will deliver a welcoming arrival hub at the Maroochy Bushland Botanic Garden in Tanawha, making this attraction even more beautiful and a must-see if you have not already visited.

Hinterland hubs are receiving a major boost with:

- more than \$3.3 million dedicated to the Eumundi Town Centre,
- \$1.8 million invested in the Nambour Administration Precinct, and
- \$700,000 provided for the Namba Place revitalisation project.

More than \$2 million will make a walk, ride or run even more enjoyable at Warana, thanks to a broad 1km pathway with new showers, seats and bike racks.

This is part of the Coastal Pathway, which is co-funded by the State Government.

Residents at Battery Hill, Caloundra will welcome \$1.6 million to upgrade the stormwater drainage system from Buderim Street to Coondibah Creek.

Council will invest \$17.5 million in the construction of the Caloundra Transport Corridor Upgrade, which will reduce congestion in that area.

\$5.8 million will progress what was considered "a missing link" - the Stringybark Road pedestrian and cyclist bridge at Sippy Downs.

Rates and charges

This Budget understands that many in our community have been impacted by the cost-of-living pressures affecting so many across our nation.

While Council is required, by law, to use the State Government's valuation figures to calculate the general rate, we have made adjustments to our rating scheme to mitigate the full impact of the valuation increase.

The majority of owner occupiers pay the Minimum General Rate.

This will rise by 5 per cent in 2024-25, which is an increase of \$1.36 per week to \$1,477.

Overall, total rates and charges, including waste and levies, for the majority of owner occupiers will increase by less than \$2 a week to \$2,053 per annum.

This has been balanced with the challenge of accommodating the rising costs of delivering infrastructure and services.

Support for pensioners

I am pleased to announce that all eligible pensioners will benefit from a 5 per cent increase in their rates concession, saving our pensioners \$4.6 million.

This is aimed at helping those in our community who are less able to increase their incomes to offset cost-of-living pressures.

A single pensioner on a full pension will now receive a \$304 concession per year, while a pensioner couple on a full pension will receive a \$238 concession.

Single and couple part pensioners will now receive \$152 and \$87 concessions, respectively.

And in good news for pensioners who have just purchased a home on the Sunshine Coast and are eligible for a pensioner rate concession, we have waived the three-year waiting period.

Housing and homelessness

Like many regions across Australia, the Sunshine Coast is experiencing housing affordability challenges and increased levels of homelessness.

Council recognises that this is a situation that is difficult to quickly rectify.

It is a crisis that requires more effort from all tiers of government, as well as the private sector and industry and community organisations.

We must work together, and all do what we can to help.

This Budget will continue to support the initiatives of Council's Sunshine Coast Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, launched last year.

This includes providing infrastructure charge rebates for eligible community organisations

and a reduced Development Application fee for not-for-profit development applicants.

It supports the continued preparation of a New Planning Scheme that will consider opportunities for more diverse housing types across the region.

We will jointly investigate affordable and social housing development opportunities, including funding and partnership models, using underutilised and suitable Council properties.

We are also providing new funding to employ a Public Safety Liaison Officer.

They will work in public spaces with people who are experiencing homelessness to enhance safety, connection and, when appropriate, help link them to support services.

How we are supporting the economy

This Budget will help forge a \$33 billion economy by supporting Council's newly refreshed Regional Economic Development Strategy.

The strategy is growing the number of jobs in high value industries, increasing exports of locally produced goods and elevating household incomes.

Council is working closely with small businesses as well as promoting the Sunshine Coast as an ideal location for starts-ups, scale-ups and investors.

Our successful Major Events strategy will deliver more than \$100 million in economic benefits.

Council's strong partnership with Visit Sunshine Coast will ensure the region continues to attract the visitors that are so vital to the prosperity of our tourism and hospitality businesses.

Enhancing our environment

Councillors, this Budget will help grow our region's reputation as a champion of the environment.

This, of course, is backed by our Sunshine Coast Biosphere, one of only five in Australia.

The Biosphere is a way of life – and it's not just about our environment.

Our Biosphere is about creating thriving communities and energising our local economy, while placing the highest value on our natural surroundings.

This Budget showcases our commitment and contributions to all three elements with an emphasis on nurturing our natural surroundings.

Council's Environment Levy of \$82, paid by all ratepayers, will remain the same as last year.

The levy will be used to protect and enhance our precious environment, including native plants and animals, waterways and wetlands, and coastal areas.

It will also support the expansion and management of Council's conservation estate for a range of habitat preservation, catchment management and coastal rehabilitation projects.

Transport Levy and improving safety

Connecting our communities and encouraging travel behaviour change is also of great importance.

This will be a benefit from the proceeds of the Transport Levy, which remains the same as last year, at \$47 per property.

For the first time, Council is going to re-allocate an additional \$3.3 million of the \$7.3 million raised by the Levy to safety-related projects for those most at risk.

This is making your Transport Levy work harder for you.

Priority will be given to pedestrian safety around schools, retirement villages and medical facilities, aiding the young, elderly and those with mobility issues.

It's so important that these types of projects get underway sooner rather than later to help the more vulnerable people in our community.

The Transport Levy will also support Council's contribution to future public transport needs, with \$1.5 million – 20 per cent of what is raised – being invested into the Futures Fund this year.

In 2024-25, \$1 million of the almost \$25 million Futures Fund will be allocated to advance the State Government's business case for the Sunshine Coast Public Transport project.

It will also advance preparations to deliver the Direct Sunshine Coast Rail project, which will link Beerwah to Aura and Caloundra and eventually, we hope, to Maroochydore.

These long-awaited projects will provide more travel choices and reduce our dependence on cars.

Council will provide \$300,000 to investigate, in partnership with TransLink, a high-frequency, hop-on, hop-off bus service linking key coastal destinations.

We will keep looking for better ways to connect our communities.

Arts and Heritage Levy

The Arts and Heritage Levy will increase by \$2 to \$20 to raise more than \$3 million.

This will fund initiatives that develop and deliver projects as part of the Sunshine Coast Creative Arts Plan.

These will provide career pathways for local artists as well as programs to entice more people into the arts and expand audiences.

The funding will support the growth of Council's multi-arts Horizon Festival, which is a world-class cultural offering.

The Heritage Levy component underpins the Sunshine Coast Heritage Plan, which brings our regional history to life, conserves heritage assets and maintains our museums and heritage organisations.

Our golden opportunity as Games draw closer

This Budget will also help us create a legacy from the golden opportunity that is the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Games, which we are proudly co-hosting, may still be eight years away, but the benefits

will be arriving soon and will last long after the global event.

This financial year, we will invest \$7 million in the \$148 million Sunshine Coast Stadium expansion project.

This project is primarily funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments and includes a Council contribution of \$17 million over three financial years.

The expansion will deliver additional seating, taking the total fixed seating capacity to more than 10,500 people.

Early works will start later this year with construction planned to begin in 2025 – creating an estimated 650 jobs.

It is due for completion in 2027, for our community to enjoy well before the Games come to the Sunshine Coast.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Budget is not about money, it's about people.

It aims to improve the lives of all those in our special and wonderful communities.

We have prioritised the small things, the basics that we hope will make a big difference to the everyday lives of us all.

We have taken a thoughtful and balanced approach to address cost-of-living pressures.

We have also responded to the impressive growth within the region and commit to delivering the high level of services our community deserves.

Councillors, I congratulate and thank each of you, for your input and deliberations and for the difficult decisions we had to make, as we crafted this Budget together. We have been responsible.

I also want to acknowledge and thank our Acting CEO Debra Robinson, the Executive Leadership Team and our Finance experts for their thorough and extensive work in helping bring this Budget together for our consideration today.

And to all of our officers who helped us develop this document.

As we pledged when we took on our roles in this new Council, we have listened and put our community first. This is something of which we should all be proud.

Councillors, I commend our Council's 2024-25 Budget to the Chamber and to our community.

Mayor Rosanna Natoli
Sunshine Coast Council

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