



Tenterfield Shire Council
2022 Community Engagement Report
Integrated Planning & Reporting Documents & Proposed Special Rates
Variation
First Round - January 2022 (Reported Previously)
Second Round April – May 2022
Third Round August – September 2022

Executive Summary

Tenterfield Shire Council's Community Engagement Strategy provides the framework to **Inform and Consult**. Following our Community Engagement Report which outlined the Community engagement to develop the Community Strategic Plan in January, this report outlines the next two rounds this communication and engagement to include Council's Integrated Planning & Reporting Documents (IP&R) and Proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV).

Council has made a commitment to the community to keep it informed with balanced, accurate and relevant information on decisions, plans and strategies, to facilitate two-way communication between Council and the community. At this level, Council sought feedback to identify important community issues and perspectives that can influence and assist decision making. Informing is a prerequisite for consultation.

In the second Round of community consultation we were able to provide information regarding our IP&R documents that were partly informed by the Community Consultation and feedback received in the first round of engagement in January 2022. These documents included;

- TSC Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032
- TSC Delivery Program 2022-2026
- TSC Operational Plan 2022-2023
- TSC Long Term Financial Plan 2022-2032
- TSC Statement of Revenue Policy & Fee's & Charges 2022-2023
- TSC Asset Management Strategy 2022-2032
- TSC Workforce Management Strategy 2021-2025
- TSC Community Engagement Strategy

Council also started the conversation around the possibility of Council applying for a Special Rate Variation (SRV) for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years and differing scenarios. The Long Term Financial Plan put forward 3 scenarios, a) Current Model, b) Current Model and SRV implemented over 2 years and c) Current Model and SRV implemented over 3 years.

Initial discussions with the community identified that participants do not want to see service levels reduced and, in some cases, want to see service levels increased. The three scenarios set out in the Long Term Financial Plan were used to drive community discussion to ensure the community fully understood the impacts of SRV values and service level impacts.

In the second round of Community Consultation which took place in April and May 2022. A series of face-to-face sessions were held across the shire to allow residents to communicate directly with Councillors and staff. Following these meetings, Council resolved (Res No. 156/22) to commence further Community Consultation – Special Rate Variation 2023/24 and 2024/25. The third round as per the feedback received from round two, specifically focused on information around the Proposed Special Rate Variation.

Later in this report you can see the methods of direct engagement used as well as detailed submissions from individuals and groups. The bi-annual Customer Satisfaction Survey was also included as Council took the opportunity to have SRV related questions included, and is impacted by the current conversation based on the wider consultation process.

The submissions and engagement generally objected to a Special Rates Variation but also put forward that if there were to be a rate rise that the service level priorities should be;

- Maintenance and improvement of roads and transport infrastructure,
- Strong leadership (good communication, financial management and advocacy),
- Council operations being run transparently, efficiently and sustainably,
- Stormwater and Drainage infrastructure, and
- Waste management

It should be noted that it became apparent that there was a core group of residents that engaged with the consultation process both in the community meetings, and through submissions. Which indicated the above service level priorities, however the analysis of the Tenterfield Community Satisfaction Survey 2022 which was taken across the whole shire, age and gender weighted revealed that the top-rated services/facilities for satisfaction were:

- School of Arts Theatre/Cinema
- School of Arts Museum
- Library Services
- Cemeteries
- Parks and playgrounds
- Livestock saleyards

And the lowest rated:

Overall condition of the road network and planning and development.

This information also came through strongly in the initial community engagement which informed the Community Strategic Plan, and mirrored the desire of the community to have both well maintained roads and infrastructure and services that support social cohesion.

The detailed and extensive information provided to Council for their consideration of the Proposed Special Rate Variation, and will be included in any application made to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

Methods of Engagement

Tenterfield Shire Council's Community Engagement Strategy matrix was employed to plan and execute its engagement and information communications in the following ways:

Community Consultation Meetings January 2022

Community engagement in January 2022 does not form part of this report as it was previously provided.

Community Consultation Meetings April 2022

Sign In sheets were provided however these did not capture all participants the Tenterfield PM meeting which only has 42 people, was observed to be closer to 100 people excluding staff. The Tenterfield AM breakfast meeting was primarily for business and working people, as had been suggested by the community, the expectation was that the turnout would be higher and therefore the ratio of staff to attendees reflected this expectation.

Promoted through TSC Website, Your Local News, Facebook (via Mayor) Flyers distributed throughout the shire, Council App, All Progress Associations and Hall Committees.

Date	Place	Signed In
Tuesday 5 April	Jennings Community Hall	11
	Sunnyside Community Hall	15
Wednesday 6 April	Bolivia Community Hall	17
	Torrington Community Hall	17
Thursday 7 April	Tenterfield 7.30am RSL	5
	Drake Community Hall	12
Friday 8 April	Mingoola Community Hall	14
	Tenterfield 4pm RSL	42
Saturday 9 April	Urbenville Community Hall	27
	Legume Community Hall	16
	Liston Community Hall	22
		Total 198 people signed in

Community Information Sessions September 2022

Using feedback gained by the previous round of community meetings Council asked the community to submit their questions to be answered first then the forum was opened for supplementary questions and two-way information. This allowed for everyone to ask their questions and for no single view to dominate.

Promoted through Facebook, Your Local News, Website, TSC App, Media Releases, Community Noticeboards, Digital Display, Newspaper advertising and Radio.

Date	Place	Signed In
Saturday 3 Sept	Tenterfield RSL	102
Saturday 24 Sept	Urbenville Community Hall	13
Saturday 24 Sept	Legume Community Hall	3

Monday 26 Sept	Mingoola Community Hall	19
Saturday 1 Oct	Urbenville Community Hall	26
		Total 163 people signed in

It is noted that people with an interest attended multiple sessions and although every effort was made to engage with the 7000 residents of the shire, feedback needs to be measured against the level of participation. Care should be taken that the feedback may not be representative of the majority of residents who chose not to participate.

Tenterfield Shire Council Website

Frequently Asked Questions page on website including a Rates Calculator and weekly Mayoral video, and promoted through Facebook, TSC App, Media Releases, Community Noticeboards, Digital Display, Newspaper advertising and Radio.

Media	Views to 12 October 2022
Website SRV & Frequently Asked Questions	486
Website SRV Rates Calculator	607
Mayoral Videos - Website	189
Facebook SRV posts	2859

Your Local News (proposed Special Rates Variation edition)

Information and FAQ's distributed to 4000 households throughout the shire.

Community Briefings & Appointments

30 – 90min Appointments with the Mayor, Councillors and Senior Staff to have one on one meetings with members of the community and small groups over an eight week period between 1 August and 30 September. Appointments were promoted through Facebook, TSC Website, TSC App, Media Releases, Community Noticeboards, Digital Display, Newspaper advertising and Radio.

17 Appointments were conducted.

Biannual Community Satisfaction Survey

Included questions related to the SRV. 300 people surveyed by Taverner Research Group.

SRV questions:

Council is considering an application to the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal for a Special Rate Variation of 43% in 2023/24, including rate peg, and a further 43% in 2024/25, again including rate peg. This represents a cumulative increase of 104.49%, to increase general rates income for the payment of roads and building maintenance costs from financial year 2023/24.

I now have a series of questions about this proposed increase.

- Council has kept me informed this year of the probable need for a Special Rate Variation?
- Council has explained that the money raised from a Special Rate Variation will be used for renewal of roads, buildings and other assets?
- I have been able to get information from Council about the possible impact of a Special Rate Variation on my property rates?

- I understand if Council isn't able to raise money through a Special Rates Variation then some services will be reduced or stopped?
- I support Council's application for a 104.49% Special Rate Variation to help it deliver existing services?

Feedback from the Engagement

Overwhelmingly the people who engaged with Council either through Community Engagement or Information Sessions or through submission were against a Special Rate Variation as the scenarios given. The feedback related to how Council were in a position of having to consider a SRV and concerns around the communities' capacity to pay, particularly pensioners.

Many agreed that the road and infrastructure network needs greater maintenance and renewal, however as demonstrated in the Customer Satisfaction Survey the community regards 'soft services' such as the Cinema, Museum, Library, Park, Playgrounds and Cemeteries very highly and do not want a reduction in these services.

Many cite the council's administration costs and would like to reduce staff further than the current 25% reduction, but do not want to see people out of work or leaving town for employment elsewhere, nor do the community fully understand the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework that Council must adhere to or other reporting regimes in place. Because of this disconnect, Council in the third series of engagement employed Information Sessions, and other Information channels as discussed to bridge the education gap. Current requests for services are still occurring at normal levels, however despite responding to this, complaints are increasing and any further staff reductions will impact further on service delivery and reporting as service delivery and staff are mutually dependent.

It is also worthy of mention that an organised group of residents and ratepayers incorporated under the name Our Shire Our Council Initiative (OSOCI). OSOCI delivered systematic and targeted statistics seeking to support their view, without context in many cases, via public forums, radio and newspaper interviews and their own social media platforms. This prolonged and sustained campaign forced Council to spend much of its focus on countering this narrative which diluted and distracted the broader issues under discussion.