

I have made two submissions to Council objecting to the extent of the rate rise and particularly for a 7-year period.

After reviewing the latest documents and discussing with many people, attending public meetings and reviewing comments in the press and social media I am still of the same opinion.

I have been concerned that Council appear to have ears to the unknown who supposedly support their ideas and appear to ignore most submissions that strongly objected. I am yet to see any confirmation that Council have received support from the residents for their proposals from the people I have meet, reviewing written submissions, online forms, at public meetings or the Councils own telephone polling during the SRV consultation period and recently with the Nelson Bay Implementation Plan.

Many submissions in the first round noted the 7-year period was too long, yet no proposals were presented by Council for a shorter period. They elected to apply for a 7.5% increase, yet no justification has been given that I have seen to support 7.5%, rather than the 6.5 or 8.5%. It would appear than the vast majority chose to have only the standard 2.5% increase, so it is difficult to understand the 7.5% figure having a true business case, but rather a mid-range point that doesn't please anybody and a figure Council believe that they can get away with.

I agree that the general public would like to see improvements but at a sensible pace and within a manageable budget. The list of SRV projects reads like a typical politician's pork barrelling election promise, something for everybody. I believe that the general public are willing to pay extra for a few well selected projects in a shorter time period and once Council have proven that they are capable then another round of SRV projects would be warmly received if economic conditions are favourable. With the recent grants and promises from both sides of government ahead of the for coming NSW election, I question if any increase is now justified and cannot be funded through existing channels.

I do not believe that this current term of council has the right to commit a tax on the ratepayers not only for the next election cycle but well into the following term. In reality it is actually worse as the proposed implementation plan will take at least 10 years and the loans may extend through to 20 years.

I welcome the Business Case Cost Benefit Analysis: Town Centre Revitalisation Projects - Port Stephens Council (Morrison Low report) in principle. It was unfortunate that it was only released one week prior to the closing date of the Council's last run of advertising and the public didn't get a chance to properly study the report. I have many concerns about the general nature of the report, and it appears to be a minimum analysis to try and justify raising an excessive amount from ratepayers. The section for Nelson Bay there has no breakdown of how the \$15m will be distributed between the three projects, Public Domain Plan, Apex Park Masterplan and new car parking facilities. I don't know what type or location of carparking is proposed, one central location will have a very different cost benefit ratio than a carpark located at the extreme edges of the town. Having said this I do believe that there is a positive benefit to revitalisation of the town centres. It is how Council choose to fund it that is the main concern, but this should be after a full detailed business case which clearly explains what is proposed and lists the alternatives, this certainly is not the case in the Morrison report. It is interesting that it is not a main document that has been listed on the IPART web site but hidden in a list of Hyperlink-to-Council, does this suggest that Council don't place any value in the report and this is just another example of a waste of ratepayers money.

The other projects listed within the SRV are all worthy when Council can afford to implement them through external funding which the Council has been successful in obtaining over the last 12 months or from the annual depreciation or development S96 funds.

All projects must comply with the Council's goal P1.1 Support sustainable business development and E2 Environmental sustainability.

Although I may be able to afford the proposed 7.5% over 7 years, I have serious concerns that many businesses will have trouble with the proposed increase, particularly as they are paying at a higher rate now and into the future as a result of the previous levy imposed on them. Businesses hopefully will see an increase in their business to offset the increases, however the renters and working poor will find it very difficult. Pensioners may receive some extra assistance, but I remain concerned about the others in the community on a lower income.

I cannot support the concept of such a high percentage increase for seven years, if a SRV is to be approved I believe it should be for a lower percentage and for a shorter period.

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]