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Feelers out for main street funding

Rate payers could face a rate rise next year to fund the estimated \$4 million main street redevelopment project, with Gundagai Shire Council notifying the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of their intention to apply for a Special Rate Variation for 2014/15.

"Special variations are a means of providing additional funding to councils to deliver services and infrastructure that the community has requested and the council is unable to fund within its existing revenue," said Director of Engineering, Phil McMurray.

"The reasons why an individual council may require a special variation are wide and varied, but in Council's case the special variation is tied to a

particular project, being the main street redevelopment project."

Local councils that are seeking special variations to general income are required to submit applications to IPART for review and assessment.

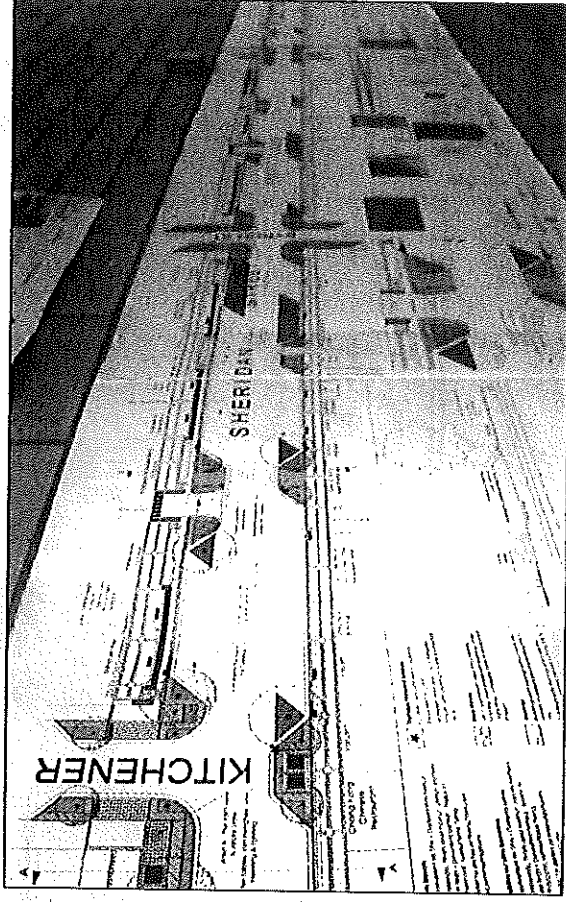
The long awaited upgrade of the main street will reflect the unique character and stories associated with Gundagai with key features including a low brick wall which will run up the majority of the northern side of the street to overcome the steep gradient, using a Gundagai slate cladding finish in parts with a decorative painted finish suitable as a background for etchings. Other points of interest include seating to represent the 1852 flood heroes Yarri and Jacky, signage and historical

markers taking the form of the town's historical bridges in recycled timber, story stones placed in the pavement and art components based on local themes such as the Dog on the Tuckerbox, the great flood and the town's connectivity with the river.

Public exhibition and community consultation of the proposed project must be undertaken, and will be presented to Council in the form of a report prior to the application for the special rate rise being submitted to IPART before February 24, 2014.

Mr McMurray said should Council be successful in its application, and a project budget is established, the project could be commenced from July 2014.

More photos page 7



Fifteen years in the making, current Gundagai Shire councillors are keen to see these main street redevelopment plans come to fruition during their term.

A gift for the givers

While the Gundagai Men's Shed have a reputation for frequently giving to others, it was their turn to be on the receiving end for a change when Mayor Abb McAlister stopped by to donate some work shirts to the guys on behalf of Gundagai Shire Council last Friday.

During a morning tea held a few months ago where the men hosted GSC General Manager, Mike Brady, along with Abb and Cr Peter Batey, Mike asked the men if the shire council could be of any assistance to the group who have become well known for their generous involvement through many facets of the community including schools and community groups. Through the conversation it was decided that some fluorescent work shirts would not go astray, and it was with great pleasure that Abb delivered the shirts, complete with embroidered logo, last week.

Gundagai Shire Council is happy to be able to supply the Men's Shed members with these shirts," Abb said.

"This is a group who are always giving through many local initiatives, and these shirts are only a little thing compared to

what the men do for our community."

On behalf of the Men's Shed, Wayne Miggins thanked Abb and the shire council for the donation, saying

the group were "stoked" with their new attire.

"During that morning tea, the council said they'd deliver for us and they have," Wayne said.



Standing out in their new fluoro work shirts are members of the Gundagai Men's Shed with Mayor Abb McAlister. Pictured (from left) are John Kershaw, Ken Wheeler, Tom Brooke, Abb, Wayne Miggins, Dale Eather, Allan Brien, Phil Simpson (front) Glenn Thomson and Craig Belt.

"The shirts are great and we are very appreciative."

It was also decided last Friday that the brightly decorated Christmas trees which

are currently adorning main street shop windows, made by the men and decorated by local school children, will be auctioned off by Abb at

the annual Christmas

the men will hold their Christmas party on December 19. Proceeds from the auction will go to the eight schools involved. After an extremely busy year in the shed, 2014.

Council change tune on rate distribution

After a debate that lasted almost two hours, Gundagai Shire councillors voted to make a motion to withdraw a previous resolution in relation to how a special rate rise to pay for the proposed \$4 million main street redevelopment, will be distributed between rural, residential and business ratepayers.

At an extraordinary council meeting held on December 23, councillors voted 5-1 in the absence of Councillors Peter Gain and Ron Moses, in favour that each rating category be subject to a 14.3 per cent increase in line with the special rate variation application, with Deputy Mayor David Graham the only councillor to oppose the rescission motion.

During council's ordinary meeting on December 10, council unanimously resolved to apply to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) to seek a special rate variation of 14.3 per cent on top of a 2.3 per cent maximum rate peg increase for 2014/15, to finance a proposed \$3 million loan over 10 years to fund the new main street, with the \$1 million balance set to be funded by direct contributions across the Water, Sewer and TID funds. An extraordinary meeting was held two weeks later after Cr Mason Crane raised concerns about the way in which the rate rise was to be distributed across the three categories.

Under the resolution voted at the ordinary meeting, council flagged the increase per average assessment to be \$110 per annum for residential assessments (37 per cent increase), \$169 per annum for farmland (8 per cent increase) and \$209 per annum for business as-

sessments (30 per cent increase). These increases would see the categories sharing the increases on a 45:45:10 per cent of the total annual increase basis for residential, farmland and business respectively.

While Cr Crane said he was fully supportive of the 14.3 per cent increase, he put it to council that ratepayers should all contribute to the upgrade with an across the board increase.

"The justification behind the rate increases was that rural ratepayers get little value from the project compared to residential and business ratepayers," Cr Crane said. "My opinion of this is that this view is false and ideological."

"The argument that farmland ratepayers use the main street less than residential ratepayers is just not sound, and while some business holders along Sheridan Street will directly benefit from the project, many businesses will not."

"I believe the main street upgrade is one of only a few things council can do to stimulate business in the community and the business community should not be burdened by having to shoulder a greater proportion of the cost."

Cr Crane went on to state that the rate increases would have had an unfair impact on both residential and business ratepayers, and in particular residential ratepayers.

"Residential ratepayers of our shire are made up of many low and medium income earners, and their capacity to absorb a 37 per cent increase (of the 14.3 per cent additional rate) in rates is questionable," Cr Crane said.

"The aim of the main street upgrade is to make the street safe and

accessible to users and aesthetically pleasing. The hope is that this will increase usage of the street, by residents of the shire and more particularly tourists, growing businesses and new business opportunities, and at the same time upgrading aged and unsafe and un-compliant infrastructure. A vibrant main street with growing businesses will benefit the whole shire, and this will also lead to increased livability - again a positive to all residents of the shire - and will in turn make our shire more attractive to potential new ratepayers."

"If we can attract more new residents, both rural and urban, it will lead to us having more viable services such as hospitals, services, businesses and recreational opportunities. This is, in turn, likely to result in increased land values across the board."

"I am both a rural and residential ratepayer which gives me a good appreciation of the impacts of this special rate variation and believe farmland, residential and business ratepayers should all equally contribute to this infrastructure upgrade."

Cr Graham, a Gobarra long landholder, disagreed with Cr Crane's argument that residential ratepayers already pay for extra services not received by rural ratepayers (TID, water, sewer and waste).

"You're not comparing correctly," Cr Graham said.

"Rural landholders have got to pay to put the power on, pay for power to pump water and we've got the sewerage to keep up to speed every year. We pay for all that ourselves just because we have to do it. We're not sitting out there

having a free lunch. To say that townspeople are contributing more - I just don't buy it."

"There's a fair bit of resistance out there. I've had about 10 phone calls from rural ratepayers with some saying 'yes', the rise should be adopted across the board, while others have said it's not fair and that the greatest beneficiaries will be the ones in town."

"When you look at residential rates they are very low compared to neighbouring shires, but rural is closer to reality," he said.

Other arguments from councilors were that it would be impossible to predict exactly who will benefit the most from a main street upgrade, with the fairest option being an across the board increase.

"It's crystal ball stuff," said Cr Peter Batey. "We don't know if a new main street will be of more benefit to business."

Historically, Gundagai ratepayers have paid less in rates than neighbouring councils. Gundagai's average rate per assessment for 2011/12, fell well below neighbouring Tumut's \$601.42 at \$263.49 for residential. Business on average paid \$467.07 in Gundagai, compared to \$1635.32 in Tumut, while farmland came in nearest at \$1218.75 to Tumut's \$1550.70.

The 14.3 per cent increase across the board would result, on average per assessment, in a \$49 increase for residential, a \$115 increase for business, and an increase of \$338 for farmland.

Mayor Abb McAlister said while public consultation on the special rate variation is vitally important and will be undertaken in early February, this decision marks a starting point with a project that

has been a long time coming. "We've made a decision today but after community consultation it could change," Cr McAlister said.

"That input from the community is a big part of this and I'd like to think that if any resident is not happy, they'll come and express their views, and we really need to listen."

"We have waited far too long for this vitally important project and we want to see it done."

Surveys regarding the main street redevelopment are expected to go out into the community this week, and can also be submitted through council's website at www.gundagai.nsw.gov.au, under the 'News' link.

Council encourages the community to complete the survey and to attend a public forum to be held on Tuesday, February 4 at 12 midday or on Wednesday, February 5 at 5:30pm at Council Chambers.

Surveys are to be returned by Friday, February 7 to either Council Office or the Gundagai Library or can be emailed to mail@gundagai.nsw.gov.au.

Gundagai Shire Council was one of 36 councils across NSW to have notified IPART of their intention to increase their general income above the rate peg in 2014/15.

Once received, the application will be assessed against guidelines published by the Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet. The assessment criteria includes demonstrating the need for and the purpose of the additional revenue, evidence of community consultation and an assessment of the impact on affected ratepayers.

Australian by choice

Inspirational and highly motivational is how Gundagai's 2014 Australia Day ambassador has been described by many.

She may be Canadian born but Catherine DeVrye is Australian by choice and will this year be Gundagai's special guest speaker for the annual Australia Day awards ceremony.

As one of the most sought after speakers in Australia today, Catherine is a former university lecturer, who has spoken at local and international conferences, is a best-selling author, columnist and frequent broadcaster, and has shared the platform with the prime ministers of three countries.

Abandoned as a baby in Canada, Catherine DeVrye was adopted by loving parents. When she was 21, they died of cancer, within a year of each other and as an only child, Catherine packed her bags for a three-month working holiday in Australia, arriving jobless and near penniless.

This holiday led to a life-long journey to find her place in the world, as she waited tables, taught school, worked on a mine site and later discovered her biological father who was an eight times Canadian champion rodeo cowboy.

As a past winner of the Australian Executive Woman of the Year Award, Catherine has held numerous roles as an executive with IBM in sales, marketing, communications and human resources.

She has a Master of Science degree and attended short courses at Harvard and the Mt Eliza Business School where she is a frequent lecturer; but believes the most important education is common sense.

A former board member of the NSW Police Service, Catherine was CEO of Young Achievement Australia and also worked for Ministers of Consumer Affairs, Education and Sport where she was involved in the establishment of the award winning Life. Be In It fit-

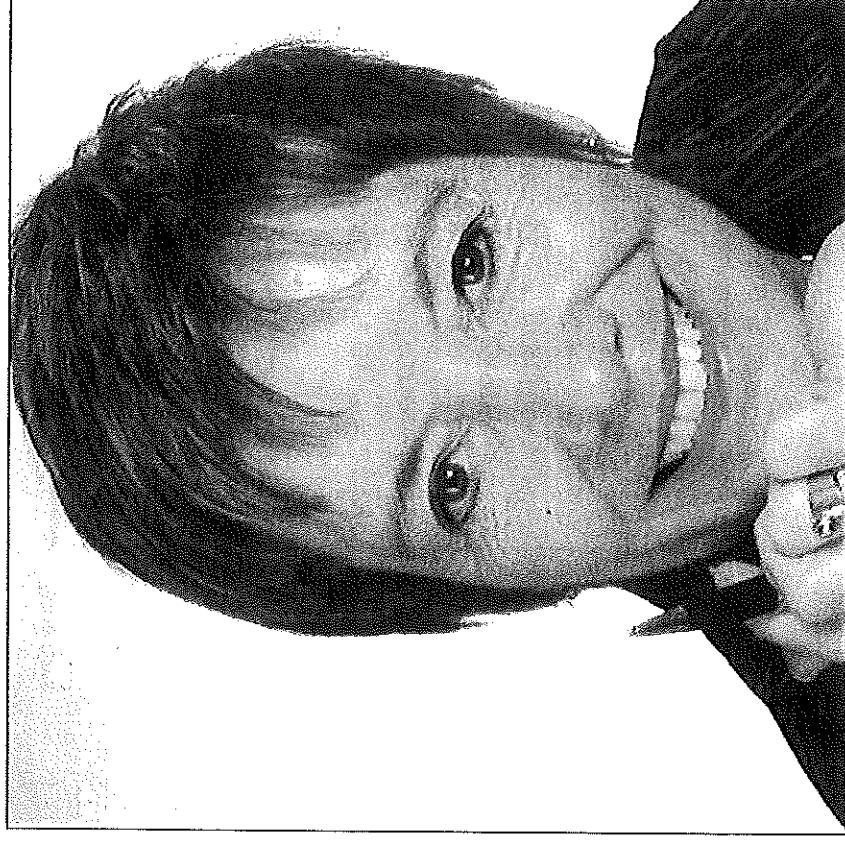
ness campaign.

Catherine was also the 1999 and 2010 Australian Keynote Speaker of the Year and is a best selling author of eight non-fiction books.

Now, one of the most sought after speakers in Australia today, she's still a keen sportswoman herself, and has cycled over the Andes, climbed 20,000 feet to the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro, trekked to Everest Base Camp and Timbuktu.

Yet, her most memorable moment was when, as a proud Aussie, she was humbled and honoured to carry the Olympic Torch on the day of the opening ceremonies of the Sydney 2000 Olympics...on behalf of her adopted country.

An Australia Day ambassador for many years now Catherine is set to motivate the Gundagai crowds at the annual awards ceremony in Carberry Park on January 26. Breakfast will commence at 8am and the awards ceremony will begin at 9am.



Author and motivational speaker, Catherine DeVrye, is Gundagai's Australia Day ambassador.

The Gundagai Independent

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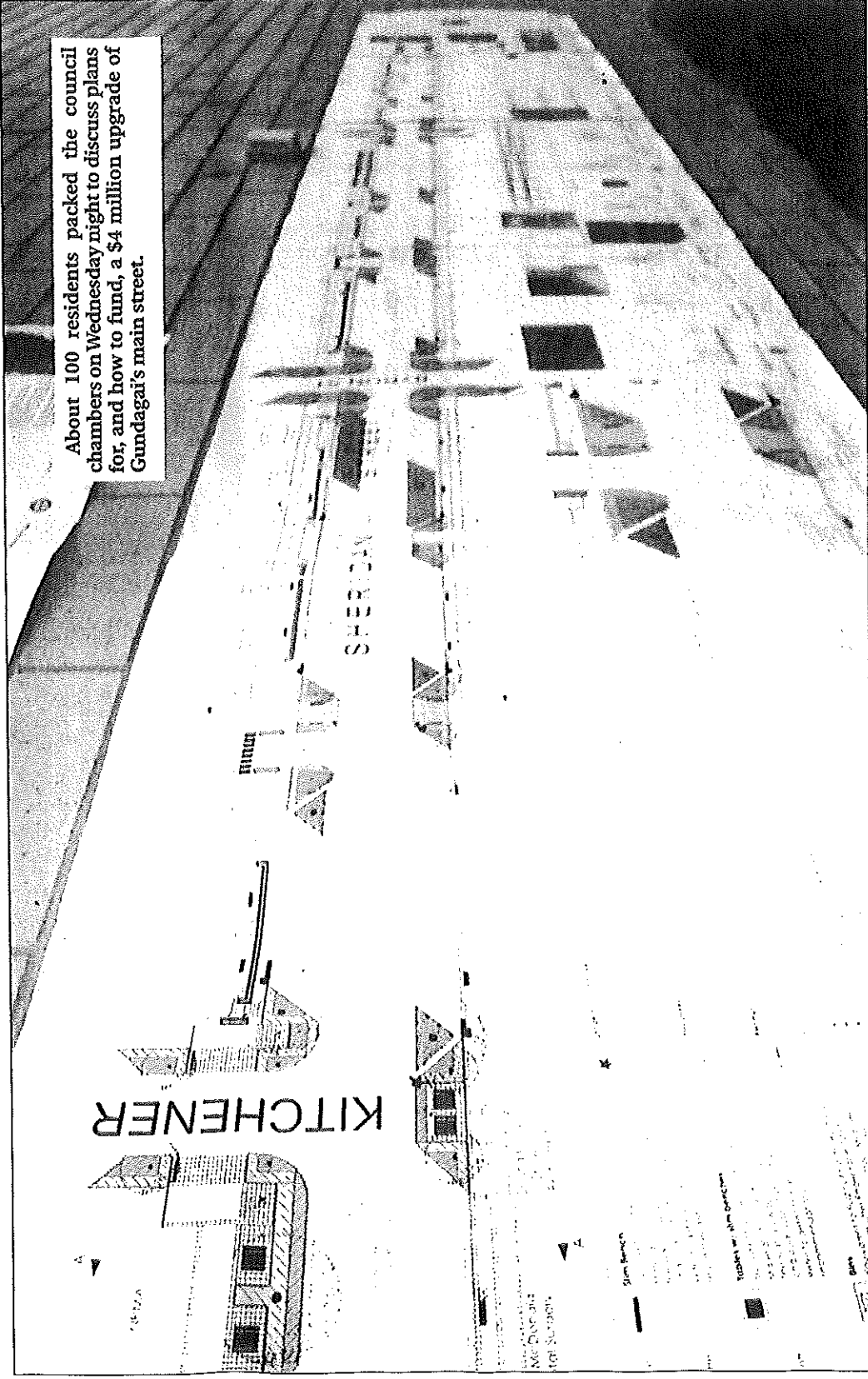
New main street wanted, but debate about who will pay

After two well-attended public forums this week regarding the 14.3 per cent Special Rate Variation (SRV) needed to fund a proposed \$3 million loan as part of the \$4 million Main Street Redevelopment, community members sent a clear message to Gundagai Shire Council – the majority are in favour of a new main street but not under the current funding proposal.

At council's ordinary December meeting, councillors resolved to finance the loan through an increase per assessment at \$110 per annum for residential (37 per cent increase), \$169 per annum for farmland (8 per cent increase) and \$209 per annum for business (30 per cent increase), effectively seeing the rating categories sharing the increase on a 45:45:10 per cent of the total annual increase for residential, farmland and business respectively.

Two weeks later after an extraordinary council meeting was called, council resolved to withdraw the original motion in relation to how the rating categories shared the increases and instead voted that ratepayers contribute to the upgrade with the 14.3 per cent increase shared equally across the board which would result, on average per assessment, in a \$49 increase for residential, a \$115 increase for business, and an increase of \$338 for farmland.

The extraordinary meeting came after Cr Mason Crane raised concerns about the original resolution, putting it to council that the fairest way to fund the proposal was to see ratepayers contribute with an across the board increase, rejecting the argument that rural ratepayers get little value from the project compared to residential



About 100 residents packed the council chambers on Wednesday night to discuss plans for, and how to fund, a \$4 million upgrade of Gundagai's main street.

idents with a new main street, it will lead to more visible services which in turn is likely to increase land values and that includes rural land values too.

"I've had to grapple with this and council has had to grapple with it and we're trying our best now to resolve it."

Aimed at gauging public opinion regarding the SRV, Tuesday's forum saw around 30 people attend, while the Wednesday forum packed the council chambers with around 100 residents in attendance.

Speaking at the forums,

Mayor Abb McAlister said while the main street committee has been in existence for the past 20 years, now is the time for Gundagai to finally make a decision regarding whether to go ahead with the project or not.

"I really think we owed it to that committee and all the hard work they've put in over the years to get to the stage we are now at," Cr McAlister said.

"Costing for the project was done and plans were adopted by council – until you do that it's hard to gauge interest and people don't want to listen too much."

"But now, at the end of the day, we need to know if you want it and if you do want it, how we are going to fund it."

"We are here as your elected members and we want to hear your thoughts so that we can then sit down and make informed and confident decisions about where we go from here."

For the project to go ahead, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) must approve the 14.3 per cent SRV, and as part of the submission to IPART council was required to engage in community consultation.

"So much emphasis is

placed on community opinion in IPART's view," Director of Corporate & Community Services Paul Luff told the forums.

"You guys drive the ultimate decision that council will make."

General consensus at both meetings was that while there was little objection to the redevelopment of the main street, exactly how much each rating category pays was cause for concern, with the majority of rural ratepayers feeling their contribution was disproportionate and unjust.

Continued page 2

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Man dies after accident at Tumorrana

A 34-year-old Coolac man has died following a single vehicle accident at Tumorrana on Monday.

At about 2:30pm, the man

was travelling north on the Three Ways Road when his vehicle rounded a sweeping right-hand bend and left the roadway. In an attempt to cor-

rect the vehicle, the driver crossed onto the wrong side of the road onto a grass verge, colliding with a rock. This caused the vehicle to spin 90

degrees before hitting a tree. The driver was located inside the vehicle by a work colleague and emergency services were alerted.

Ambulance attended a short time later and conveyed the driver to the Hume Highway where the SouthCare helicopter was waiting to transfer

him to Canberra Hospital in a serious condition.

He died in Canberra Base Hospital on Tuesday as a result of his injuries.

Chambers packed for main street meeting

From front page

"Farmers have gone through a lot of rough times over the past ten years, including eight years of drought, yet we're the people you are asking for the majority of the money, and we've suffered the most," one rural ratepayer said at Tuesday's meeting.

"I think we need to look at all funding opportunities and that you owe it to the people of Gundagai that we seek more money through grants."

Director of Engineering Phil McMurray said numerous grant applications to assist in the funding of the project had been submitted in the past, but were unsuccessful.

"It's certainly not a case of not having tried," Mr McMurray said.

"Over the past three years, the majority of regional development grants have gone to projects that can generate long-term sustainable jobs, and it's hard for us to compete with large population bases," he said, adding that council will still continue to apply for grant funding for the proposed redevelopment.

Upon criticism that GSC doesn't know "how to apply for grants properly", Mr McMurray pointed out that GSC has been successful in obtaining numerous grants in the past for a variety of other projects, most recently having secured government monies for the skate park, boat ramp, multipurpose courts and the redevelopment of the sale-

yards. While the state government does provide funding to communities like Gundagai that have been bypassed, Mr McMurray said the opportunity was missed by councillors in 1977 following the construction of the Sheahan Bridge.

When asked why more modern councils did not continue to lobby to obtain this funding, Cr McAlister said: "Over the years we've lobbied till we were blue in the face, but the government just will not entertain the idea."

One rural ratepayer at Wednesday's meeting said while he is in favour of the project: "I just don't want to see us landed with all the cost. We farmers have to wear this cost, we cannot pass it on."

"Who is using the main street the most? Who is going to benefit the most? I've got no problems with fixing up the main street, but it's got to

be fair. The benefits for us are not outweighing the cost."

Another rural ratepayer stated that the money would be better spent on the Gobaralong Bridge.

"What's the point of having a new main street if the bridge falls down and we can't even get to it?" he asked.

One resident, also a rural ratepayer, said she hardly saw Sheridan Street as "struggle street" and questioned why business owners were bearing the least of the burden in costing.

"Compared to other shires, residential and business rate payers are in a privileged position in Gundagai and I don't see why the rural ratepayer should pay more when their rates are already more in line with other shires," she said.

Another resident raised the scenario of what would happen should rural ratepayers face natural disasters out of their control over the next 10 years.

"What if there's another drought and farmers are locked into this rate increase?" she asked, with Cr McAlister calling it a "very valid question" and "one that we'll certainly take on board."

The Mayor took offence to one ratepayer's theory that the business rate is lower than rural because five out of the eight councillors own businesses.

"That is uncalled for and out of line," Cr McAlister said.

"I am a rural, residential and business ratepayer and I can tell you that none of that came into consideration when I made my decision."

One of the few people in attendance to oppose the redevelopment said: "I think the majority of the main street may not be pretty, but it is okay, and I'm not sure at this point in time if we can afford 'pretty'."

A number of residents asked why a decision needed to be made now and if the project could effectively be "put on the back burner" until council are successful in obtaining grant monies to fund the project.

"This has been in the pipeline for 30 odd years," said Cr Peter Batey, "and it's a matter of taking action now."

"Waiting for grant money is like saying, 'I want to build a house, but

'Who is using the main street the most? Who is going to benefit the most? I've got no problems with fixing up the main street, but it's got to be fair. The benefits for us are not outweighing the cost'

— Rural ratepayer

I'll wait till I win the lottery."

To aid in the finance of the upgrade, council resolved at its December meeting to seek assistance under the Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme (LIRS).

Under the LIRS, the state government has made \$30 million available for councils to deal with backlogs in infrastructure and if council is granted the three per cent subsidy on a \$3 million loan, it will generate \$500,000 toward meeting the interest commitments over the 10 year loan term, which Mr Luff said would go back to ratepayers.

"We have to do this now or we'll miss the LIRS deadline," Mr Luff said.

Asked why council could not fund the redevelopment on its own, Mr Luff said council simply does not have the cash at hand to fund the project.

"Many years ago, our forebears thought that if they could keep rates down, they were achieving something good for Gundagai but unfortunately it came back to bite them after the state government introduced rate pegging, in effect restricting us in our ability to meet our future demands."

When questioned over what some thought to be an excessive amount of money to spend on the upgrade, Mr McMurray, who has 20 years of experience as an engineer in local government and in particular streetscapes, said he has built "a lot shorter streets at a lot higher cost."

"The project was independently costed and I think it's a fairly modest price, yet still significant enough to make a statement," he said.

When asked about the presence of fuel tanks underneath the main street and what impact they would have during construction, Mr Mc-

Murray said council is aware of the presence of underground petrol storage tanks in Sheridan Street but doesn't foresee it to be a major issue during construction.

"If they are small and can be easily removed, we would probably re-determine them, but it will be determined on a case by case basis, and we will assess as we go."

"I've had quite a bit of experience in their removal and am well aware of the process."

The project would be completed over two financial years with Mr McMurray stating that there would be as smooth a construction phase as possible in consultation with main street businesses.

One self-confessed "blow in" at Tuesday's meeting who has lived in Gundagai for the best part of 20 years, congratulated council for trying to move forward with the project.

"This mob (council) has moved and moved well," he said.

"I think it's a great concept and that Phil has done a great job in sourcing the plans."

"I don't think we can put it off any longer, and I hope it all comes together and goes ahead, making Gundagai an even greater town to live in."

Cr Ron Moses said while supportive of the project, he does have reservations about the rural ratepayer's contribution.

"I think the rural rate is a little too high and something we need to look at," he said. "It's a genuine argument that can't be discarded."

"I think if we can tweak a balance we have a chance to get over the line with this project but it needs to be done properly and I'm uncomfortable with the current funding proposal."

Cr Crane, in his second term on council, said he's seen council work very hard to get the project to the stage it is now, and that now is the time to push forward.

"A big concern is that with our aging population and retirees moving to Gundagai, the main street is a danger to the elderly," he said.

"We need to have safe infrastructure and we need to get this done."

"I think this is the only way we can move forward without compromising our roads and other infrastructure such as the Gobaralong

Bridge."

Deputy Mayor David Graham said he was "100 per cent" behind the main street redevelopment, highlighting the importance of the community working together on the project.

"It's been on the agenda for 38 years and over that time it's been put off for one reason or another, with funding being the biggest problem," Cr Graham said.

"I really don't think this is a town versus country issue — we are a community that has always worked together and we need to work together on this project."

"In making our decision, where we stand today, we know that in ten years time we will at least be in the same position financially, if not better, plus we'll have a new main street."

"In local government, councils that have not borrowed for infrastructure are seen in a bad light compared to those that have."

Through a show of hands, just two people at Wednesday night's meeting voted in favour of the current funding proposal, while the majority ruled in favour of the initial proposal adopted by council at the December ordinary meeting.

In closing each meeting, Cr McAlister reminded those present that the forums were necessary to gauge public opinion that will now be taken back to council and once married with the survey results will form the basis of council's final decision.

"At this stage nothing is set in stone," he said. "We will now take all your thoughts and concerns on board at our next council meeting, which is a public meeting that I encourage people to attend."

"I feel our main street is badly in need of an upgrade. I'm committed, council is committed, and we need to feel that the town is committed as well."

"At the last public meeting council had regarding a special rate variation I remember three people turned up, so to see so many people come to the meetings this week is fantastic and it just goes to prove that this project has generated an enormous amount of interest."

The next ordinary council meeting will be held next Tuesday, February 11 at 2pm.

Out and about

With Marie Lindley

Just a reminder:

The Gundagai Pastoral and Agricultural Society 123rd Annual Show is to be held Friday and Saturday February 14 and 15.

The judging for Miss Tiny Tots, Junior Miss Showgirl and Master Showman will be held on the Saturday at the jockey enclosure at 1.00pm.

The age limit for Miss Tiny Tots is up to 6 years of age.

Miss Junior Showgirl up to 12 years.

Master Showman up to 12 years.

For more details phone (02)69442232.

If readers have information for this column I would appreciate it if you could contact me on email jmlindley@westnet.com.au

It was a triple celebration last Saturday when Tom Brooke, Wilva Brooke and Vicki

Somerville all celebrated their birthday on the same day. A family dinner was held at Lott's Family Hotel on Saturday evening.

Happy birthday to all. Lisa Peterson along with her little son William is visiting her parents John and Norma for a couple of weeks. Lisa now lives in Port Macquarie.

Carmel and Sara Matchett spent the long weekend in Sydney. They spent their time visiting Carmel's son Edward, his wife Jessica and their daughter Crystal, and Carmel's other son Bill, his wife Penny and their son Charlie. It was a great family catch-up.

It was wonderful to see Norma

Robinson Funerals

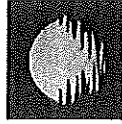


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Council reverts back to original scenario to fund new main street

Gundagai Shire Council has scrapped its decision to see ratepayers share the cost of funding a proposed \$3 million loan as part of the main street redevelopment, through an across the board 14.3 per cent increase, and resolved to instead finance the loan on a ratio of 45:45:10 per cent (of the total annual increase) for residential, farmland and business respectively, effectively reverting back to its original funding scenario which was voted for unanimously at its December ordinary council meeting.

The motion to withdraw the resolution made at an extraordinary council meeting in December to see the burden shared equally across the three rating categories, came after community consultation in the form of two public forums resulted in a heated uproar from rural ratepayers who claimed their contribution was disproportionate and unjust.

In making the decision at Tuesday's ordinary meeting, council took into consideration both the outcome of the two public meetings as well as the results of a survey sent out into the community in early January to give people sufficient time to consider the concept, before approaching the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) to seek the Special Rate Variation of 14.3 per cent over 10 years.

The increases equate, per average assessment, to be \$110 per annum for residential, \$209 per annum for business, and \$169 per annum for rural assessments.

With Cr Mike Kingwill absent from Tuesday's meeting, Cr Mason Crane was the only councillor to oppose the motion.

Cr Crane made a motion to amend the resolution that the 45:45:10 ratio apply to the en-

tire \$4 million cost, effectively including the \$1 million contribution from the TID, Water and Sewer funds, which was seconded by Cr Ron Magnone but ultimately defeated once put to the vote.

"I think that we have overlooked the impact that the TID has on our rates and that it should be looked at as part of the 45:45:10 ratio," Cr Crane said.

"At least that way we're taking into account the \$1 million already coming from the town."

Cr McAlister disagreed, saying that residents who contribute to these funds receive a service for it, whereas rural ratepayers have those costs to bear on their own.

Cr Crane continued to say that while the points made by rural ratepayers at the two forums were valid, if councillors had gone into the meetings with the original funding scenario, he believes

the outcome of public opinion would have been different.

"I think people should have been more aware of the TID, Water and Sewerage contribution," he said.

"I've spoken to other neighbouring councils and they don't have a TID fund, it's part of their general rates, so I don't think that we can say that we've already got cheap rates. I think everybody is going to feel an increase, and we really need to think carefully not to expose one sector to a higher rate than others."

"Any talk of rates will be sensitive to rural ratepayers who operate under some harsh circumstances, but I think we need to work out what is fair and just across the community. It's not easy."

"While I think it's fair to tweak our scenario a bit, it goes too far and doesn't fully take into account the contribution that TID, Water and Sewer make to the project – one quarter of the project is already coming out of the residential and business ratepayer."

Cr Crane applauded council's reasoning behind the special rate rise to potentially fund the main street proposal.

"We could throw all our money into the main street, but we're not that sort of council," he said. "We're not going to compromise our roads or our bridges."

Cr Peter Gain said it was important to recognise that while the majority of rural ratepayers rejected the 14.3 per cent increase across the board, the opposition was not toward council embarking on a main street upgrade, nor the fact that they were looking to borrow the money to fund it.

"It seems to me that they (rural ratepayers) were saying 'we're shouldering too much of the burden of repaying the loan,'" he said.

"I wasn't here for the extraordinary meeting in December, but I made it clear that I felt it was only fair for the burden to be shared across the board, and I believe it was unhealthy to look at it on the basis of 'what's in it for me?'"

"I am now quite prepared to move that we revert to the original apportionment."

"We are never going to be able to scientifically assess who pays

'We are never going to be able to scientifically assess who pays what, all we can do is what we see as being fair and equitable'

what, all we can do is what we see as being fair and equitable."

Upgrading the main street isn't going to attract more tourists or greater business, but what it will, should and must do is give the people of Gundagai a greater pride in their town and from that will grow a greater attraction to outsiders," Cr Gain said.

"This is a question of morale. Gundagai seems to me to have been stagnating for quite a number of years and I believe it's time that Gundagai got its self esteem back."

Cr Batey said the issue was one of more than just self pride, but that a main street redevelopment would see Gundagai "moving ahead."

"Look at June – it was a dull and dreary town – then after an upgrade it's suddenly 'whammo!' he said, "and the same thing happened with Tumut and Cootamundra."

"The apathy in Gundagai is extraordinary. The town doesn't seem to have any drive or energy of advancement that I can see at all."

"Everybody had an opportunity to commit to this, but who voted for what seems to me to be more of an indication, and not the majority."

"Council is putting \$500,000 toward the Gobaralong Bridge without going to the community for consultation, and I'll bet there would be a big percentage also saying 'But we don't use it' – now it's just the other way around."

"I think what will satisfy people the most is to go back to the original scenario."

Cr Ron Magnone said while he would vote with the majority, he still believed in the across the board increase.

"We spend \$878,323 a year on regional roads, \$653,701 on urban roads, and \$2,756,495 on rural roads, granted most of it is from grant funding, but you can't tell me that we're not

putting money into the rural community," Cr Magnone said.

He added that a new main street would not necessarily guarantee a windfall for business.

"Gundagai is not a touristy town, we are a transit town," he said. "We're half way between Sydney and Melbourne and while people may stop here overnight and might have breakfast somewhere before they leave the next morning, they don't stay long."

"I agree with Mason that we should be taking into account the contribution made by the TID, Water and Sewer funds, and I think it (the rate rise) should be straight across the board."

Out of 2464 surveys sent out into the community, council received 285 responses (11.6 per cent). Of those, 273 were property owners, 11 were not, and one declined to comment. No business owners responded to the survey.

When asked if the respondent was prepared to pay the 14.3 per cent increase over 10 years, 49 per cent were against the increase, 44 per cent were prepared to pay, 4 per cent were not applicable, and 2 per cent made no comment.

Fifty-three per cent of respondents found Sheridan Street to be in an 'unsatisfactory' condition, while 36 per cent found it 'satisfactory'. "The survey was very basic," said Director of Corporate & Community Services Paul Luff, "and can't be regarded as sound from a statistical perspective."

"It was an indication only and while a lot of weight can't be given to the results, it did help to gauge public opinion. "Some respondents gave quite emotional responses and some gave quite constructive answers."

Deputy Mayor David Graham said the message from the two well-attended public forums was made very apparent. "There was a clear mandate from those meetings as to what we

should do, and I think we should go back to the 45:45:10 ratio," Cr Graham said.

"It was a public forum and everyone had the opportunity to attend and to have their say."

"This is a monumental decision in terms of Gundagai's history, now let's get on with it, move forward and get the main street upgrade funded."

Mayor Abb McAlister agreed.

"We gave rural, residential and business rate payers all a chance to attend the two public meetings and the opportunity at the second meeting to vote for the preferred funding option," he said.

"While a lot of business owners were there, not a lot spoke, and in speaking to people since then, I found that most were happy to go back to the first scenario, feeling that the second scenario was a bit weighty for the rural ratepayer, so in my opinion we should go back to the original scenario, which is more fair and equitable."

"After all the years of previous councils and main street committees working to deliver a new main street, at the end of the day the decision is now on our shoulders and I think we've got big enough shoulders to handle it."

"We've come to a point where we need to go ahead now or leave it for another 20 years, and I'm confident that the decision we've made to go ahead will be justified."

Cr McAlister said that the chase for funding for the project will not be suppressed, but rather that council will continue to lobby even harder for grant monies.

Council will now submit their application to IPART for the Special Rate Variation, which will include the community's responses to the surveys, council's analysis of the survey results, correspondence received as well as a report detailing the outcome of the two public forums.

A decision by IPART is expected by May.

PLANNED POWER INTERRUPTION

> Improving your network

> What's happening?

We are conducting maintenance work to the network resulting in temporary interruptions to the power supply in some areas.

> Why?

Maintenance is necessary to improve and maintain the network and ensure a reliable and efficient electricity supply.

> Where?

Parts of Charlotte Street, Dodd Street and Camp Street, Gundagai as well as the surrounding areas of Burra, Reno, Muttama, Coolac, Petit Siding, Brungle, Brungle Creek, Darbalara, Gobaralong, Calderwood and Brawlin.

> When?

Saturday 22 February 2014 from 10.45pm to 4.45am Sunday 23 February 2014. (weather permitting). Essential Energy apologises for any inconvenience to customers.

> What do you need to do?

- To help protect sensitive electrical appliances, such as TVs, computers, microwave ovens and set-top boxes, switch off and unplug these appliances prior to the advertised time.
- Ensure you store enough water if you use electric pumping for your household water supply.
- Avoid opening your fridge or freezer. Deep frozen food will generally remain frozen for 24 hours if the door is left closed.
- Switch off hotplates, ovens and other small appliances in case you're not home when supply is restored.

For more information
call 13 20 80 or visit
essentialenergy.com.au

