



On Monday night 6 April 2020 the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes Council held a special meeting to acknowledge the economic and social impacts that the COVID19 virus is having on the local community.

Shire President, Cr John Nicholas stated “the purpose of the meeting was to identify measures where we can reduce financial burden our residents, while still continuing to stimulate the local economy”.

At the meeting, a Community Response Plan - including a 2020-21 budget framework – was adopted. Key measures and outcomes of the Plan included:

- 0% rate increase for the new financial year.
- 0% increase on fees and charges for the 2020-2021 financial year.
- Flexible rate payment plans for the 2020-21 financial year
- Removal of administration fees for payment plans entered into up until 31 December 2020
- Reduction in penalty interest charges for late payment of 2020-21 rates from 11% to 5.5% subject to a suitable payment plan being agreed
- Removal of administration fees for the 4 rate instalment option
- 50% reduction in interest charges for the 4 rate instalment option – 5.5% to 2.75%
- Waiver of all penalty interest for late payment of current rates from 1 April to 30 June 2020

“We will also refrain from actively pursuing unpaid rates that are not on the instalment option or a payment plan until 31 December 2020. This does not mean that these debts will be written off, but it does mean that people will have more time, and I hope less stress, around making their payments” said Cr Nicholas.

In seeking ways to actively support the local business community Councillors decided to:

- Refund the 2019-20 alfresco dining fees AND food premises registration/surveillance fees from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020
- Waive the 2020-21 alfresco dining fees AND food premises registration/surveillance fees
- Waive the Visitor Centre administration fee for cancelled bookings
- Discount Visitor Centre membership by 50% for the 2020-21 financial year
- Waive fees for extension of planning approvals and building permits to 30 June 2021
- Refund unused fees/charges for sporting clubs where activities cannot proceed

“These measures are not going to solve every problem we face as a community, however they are a starting point to help us move forward, knowing that even once the immediate health care issue abates we will face a longer economic and community recovery period” continued Cr Nicholas.

Other key outcomes of the meeting included:

- Development of a Hardship Policy aimed to enable fair, equitable, consistent and dignified support to ratepayers suffering hardship while treating all members of the community with respect and understanding in these difficult and potentially upsetting times.
- Extending Leisure Centre membership periods for the same period of time the facility is closed
- Refunding 50% of temporary caravan park licence fees – when linked to events – where those events were cancelled
- Shire grant funded community events to have access to their grant funding for expenditure incurred even if the event was cancelled

Cr Barbara Johnson, Deputy Shire President stated “it is encouraging to see that state government agencies are reviewing changes to regulatory tender thresholds to allow local governments to progress appropriate and identified capital projects swiftly. This is an important part of local economic stimulus.

We have also considered, and endorsed changes to relevant Council Policy that will allow the CEO to assess applications for holiday accommodation to be utilised for semi-permanent residential accommodation. These types of adjustments and changes give local accommodation providers a greater degree of flexibility in how to use their facilities.

The estimated cost of these initiatives is approximately \$322,000 with commensurate savings in operational expenditure to be identified in Council’s 2020-21 budget. At the same time Council is investigating the possibility of bringing forward capital projects that drive economic stimulus, job creation and community benefit with the funding of such projects to be determined in its 2020-21 budget.

We are consistently looking for ways in which to ease the burden COVID19 has placed on our community”.

- Ends -