

Benalla Rural City Council

Council Meeting

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 23 April 2025

Venue: Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room)
13 Mair Street, Benalla



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Minutes

Chair	Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)	
Councillors	Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)	
	Councillor David Blore	
	Councillor Peter Davis	
	Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne	
	Councillor Jillian Merkel	
	Councillor Nathan Tolliday	
In attendance	Robert Barber	Acting Chief Executive Officer
	Nilesh Singh	Interim General Manager Corporate
	Tom Arnold	Acting Manager Community
	Courtney Naughton	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
	Jess Pendergast	Governance Coordinator

Governance Matters

The Council Meeting was conducted in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Benalla Rural City Council Governance Rules 2020*.

Recording of Council Meetings

In accordance with Rule 6.4 of the *Governance Rules 2020* the Council Meeting was livestreamed via the Council's website and an audio recording was made of the proceedings.

Opening and Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair opened the meeting at 6pm and recited the following Acknowledgement of Country.

We, the Benalla Rural City Council, acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to Elders from other communities who may be here today.

Apologies

No apologies were submitted to the meeting.



Statement of Commitment

The Councillors recited the following Statement of Commitment:

I declare,

that as a Councillor of Benalla Rural City

I will undertake on every occasion

to carry out my duties in the best interests of the community

and that my conduct shall maintain the standards of our Model Councillor Code of Conduct

so that I may faithfully represent

and uphold the trust placed in the Council

by the people of Benalla and District.

Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

See item 4.7.

Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were circulated to Councillors and posted on the Council website www.benalla.vic.gov.au pending confirmation at the meeting.

Cr Davis / Cr Blore:

That the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 19 March 2025 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Carried

1. Public Question Time

It is recorded that Rodney Firmer tabled a question regarding the *Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project*.

When does the Council anticipate the Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre will be completed?

The Acting Chief Executive Officer answered that the *Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project* completion date is dependent on the location of the facility being confirmed and a design for the facility being finalised.

Cr Merkel / Cr King

That the question and answer be noted.

Carried

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. King', is written over the word 'Carried'.

2. Petitions

No petitions were submitted to the meeting.

Record of Committees

3.1 Recommendations from Finance and Planning Committee

The recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 9 April 2025 were presented.

Cr King / Cr Tolliday:

That the recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 9 April 2025 be adopted.

Carried

3.2 Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees

The record of Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees were presented.

3 March 2025	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee
4 March 2025	Benalla Art Gallery Redevelopment Project Control Group
5 March 2025	Communications Advisory Committee
11 March 2025	Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Committee
12 March 2025	Assembly of Councillors – Business Review
17 March 2025	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee
18 March 2025	Benalla Art Gallery Redevelopment Project Control Group
18 March 2025	Benalla Festival Advisory Committee
27 March 2025	Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee
31 March 2025	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee

Cr Blore / Cr Gunaratne:

That the report be noted.

Carried



Officer Reports

4.1 2024/2025 Major Event Funding Program

The report presented funding applications for the 2024/25 Major Event Funding Program.

Cr King / Cr Gunaratne:

That \$445 from the 2024/25 Major Event Funding program be allocated to the Benalla Heritage Network.

Carried

4.2 Draft *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025-2029* Update

The report presented a progress report on the development of the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025-2029*.

Cr Blore / Cr Davis:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.3 Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund Levy

The report considered the Victorian Government's proposed Emergency Services Volunteers Fund levy.

Cr Gunaratne / Cr King:

That standing orders be suspended to allow for discussion on item 4.3 Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund Levy.

Carried

Standing orders were suspended at 6.25pm.

Cr Davis / Cr King:

That standing orders resume.

Carried

Standing orders resumed at 6.27pm.



Cr Tolliday / Cr Merkel:

That the Council:

- 1. Endorse Rural Councils Victoria's proposed amendments to the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Bill:**
 - a. Recalculate the levy formula so rural communities are not disproportionately footing the bill for emergency services across Victoria.**
 - b. Guarantee that funds taken from rural communities are returned to those same local areas through direct emergency services funding.**
 - c. Designate the State Revenue Office as the responsible authority to collect the levy (not councils).**
- 2. That a *Benalla Rural City Council Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Levy Advocacy Strategy* be developed and implemented.**

Councillor David Blore and Councillor Justin King moved to make an amendment to the motion.

Cr Blore / Cr King:

- 2. That a *Benalla Rural City Council Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Levy Advocacy Strategy* be developed and implemented, including, written representation to Victorian State Government Treasurer and upper house crossbench MP and the members of the upper and lower house of Parliament covering Benalla Rural City.**

Councillor Nathan Tolliday and Councillor Jillian Merkel agreed to the amendment.

Cr Tolliday / Cr Merkel:

That the Council:

- 1. Endorse Rural Councils Victoria's proposed amendments to the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Bill:**
 - d. Recalculate the levy formula so rural communities are not disproportionately footing the bill for emergency services across Victoria.**
 - e. Guarantee that funds taken from rural communities are returned to those same local areas through direct emergency services funding.**
 - f. Designate the State Revenue Office as the responsible authority to collect the levy (not councils).**
- 2. That a *Benalla Rural City Council Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Levy Advocacy Strategy* be developed and implemented, including, written representation to Victorian State Government Treasurer and upper house crossbench MP and the members of the upper and lower house of Parliament covering Benalla Rural City.**

Carried



4.4 Chief Executive Credit Card Report For The Quarter Ended 31 March 2025

The report detailed expenditure associated with the corporate credit card issued to the Chief Executive Officer for the quarter ended 31 March 2025.

Cr Davis / Cr King:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.5 Councillors' Expenses Report For The Quarter Ended 31 March 2025

The report detailed expenditure associated with Councillors' mobile phone usage, attendance at professional development courses, conferences and seminars, and reimbursement of expenses incurred.

Cr King / Cr Tolliday:

That the report be noted.

Carried

4.6 Mayor and Councillors' Attendance At Conferences and Events

The Mayor and Councillors attendance at meetings and events during the period from 3 March 2025 to 13 April 2025 were presented.

It is noted that Councillor Tolliday attended the Benalla Street Art Festival on 12 April 2025.

Cr King / Cr Tolliday:

That the report be noted.

Carried

It is noted that Councillor Justin King declared a material conflict of interest in the following item in relation to the *Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project*.

4.7 Council Actions Pending

Councillor Justin King left the meeting at 6.38pm

Council Actions Pending were presented.

Cr Merkel / Cr Davis

That the report be noted.

Carried

Councillor Justin King returned to the meeting at 6.40pm.

5. Reports by Councillors

Mayor Councillor Bernie Hearn reported on her attendance at:

- Opening of the Women on Farms Gathering 2025 at the Benalla Visitor Information Centre on Friday 14 March 2025.
- Molyullah Fish n' Chips Community Catchup on Friday 14 March 2025.
- Benalla Street Art Festival from 10 April to 13 April 2025.
- Official Opening of the Benalla Police Station on Friday 11 April 2025.
- Official Announcement of grant funding to Midland Freight from the Forestry Transition Fund on Wednesday 23 April 2025.

Deputy Mayor Councillor Justin King reported on his attendance at:

- Molyullah Fish n' Chips Community Catchup on Friday 14 March 2025.
- Swanpool Community Spirit BBQ on Friday 14 March 2025.
- Benalla Street Art Festival from 10 April to 13 April 2025.

Councillor David Blore reported on his attendance at:

- Devenish Easter Market on Sunday 6 April 2025.
- Official Opening of Benalla 7-Eleven on Saturday 26 March 2025.
- Molyullah Easter Sports held at Molyullah Recreation Reserve on Monday 21 April 2025.

Councillor Peter Davis reported on:

- Opening of the Benalla Police Station on Friday 11 April 2025.

Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne reported on his attendance at:

- Sinhala and Tamil New Year Celebration held in Wangaratta on Saturday 12 April 2025.
- Molyullah Easter Sports held at Molyullah Recreation Reserve on Monday 21 April 2025.

Councillor Jillian Merkel reported on her attendance at:

- Benalla Street Art Festival from 10 April to 13 April 2025.
- Molyullah Easter Sports held at Molyullah Recreation Reserve on Monday 21 April 2025.

Councillor Nathan Tolliday reported on his attendance at:

- Benalla Street Art Festival from 10 April to 13 April 2025.
- Devenish Easter Market on Sunday 6 April 2025.

Cr King / Cr Blore:

That the reports be noted.



Carried

6. Notices of Motion

No notices of motion were submitted to the meeting.

7. Notices of Rescission Motion

No notices of rescission motion were submitted to the meeting.

8. Urgent Business

No urgent business was submitted to the meeting.

Confidential Business

It was proposed that the following items be considered in confidential business pursuant to the *Local Government Act 2020* as they contain personal information or private commercial information that would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about a person, their personal affairs or expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking if released:

9.1 Audit and Risk Committee Appointment of Independent Members

9.2 Confidential Reports by Councillors

9.3 Confidential Council Actions Pending

Cr Blore / Cr Davis:

That the meeting be closed to the public for the consideration of the confidential business item noted above pursuant to Sections 3(1) and Section 66(2)(a) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Carried

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'B' and 'D' intertwined, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

10. Reopening of the meeting to the public

Cr Davis / Cr Gunaratne:

That the meeting be reopened to the public.

Carried

Closure of the meeting

The Council Meeting closed at 6.59pm.

The minutes were confirmed on the twenty eighth day of May 2025.

Signed: _____


Mayor Cr Bernie Hearn