

Benalla Rural City Council

# Council Meeting

## Agenda

Date: Wednesday 25 June 2025

Time: 6pm

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

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# Agenda

<b>Chair</b>	Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)	
<b>Councillors</b>	Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)	
	Councillor David Blore	
	Councillor Peter Davis	
	Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne	
	Councillor Jillian Merkel	
<b>In attendance</b>	Councillor Nathan Tolliday	
	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	General Manager Corporate
	Jane Archbold	Manager Community
	Cathy Fitzpatrick	Manager Finance
	Courtney Naughton	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
	Tom Arnold	Community and Recreation Coordinator
	Jess Pendergast	Governance Coordinator

## Opening and Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair will open the meeting and recite 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

### **Recommendation:**

**That the apology/ies be accepted.**

## Statement of Commitment

The Councillors will recite 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.*

## Governance Matters

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

## Question Time and Public Submissions

Any person wishing to participate in Question Time or Public Submissions in accordance with Rule 7.2 and 7.3 of the *Governance Rules 2020* should contact the Council by emailing [council@benalla.vic.gov.au](mailto:council@benalla.vic.gov.au) or telephoning the Governance Coordinator Jess Pendergast on (03) 5760 2600.

## Recording of Council Meetings

In accordance with Rule 6.4 of the *Governance Rules 2020* the Council Meeting will be livestreamed via the Council's website and an audio recording will be made of the proceedings and made available for public access, with the exception of matters identified as confidential items in the agenda.

Members of the public can watch the live broadcast of the meeting at [www.benalla.vic.gov.au](http://www.benalla.vic.gov.au)

## Behaviour at Meetings

Members of the public present at a meeting must remain silent during the proceedings other than when specifically invited to address the Committee.

The Chair may remove a person from a meeting for interjecting or gesticulating offensively after being asked to desist, and the chair may cause the removal of any object or material that is deemed by the Chair to be objectionable or disrespectful.

The Chair may call a break in a meeting for either a short time, or to resume another day if the behaviour at the Council table or in the gallery is significantly disrupting the Meeting.



## Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

In accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*, a Councillor must declare any Conflict of Interest pursuant to Section 130 of the Act in any items on this Agenda.

At the time indicated in the agenda, a Councillor with a conflict of interest in an item on that agenda must indicate they have a conflict of interest by clearly stating:

- the item for which they have a conflict of interest;
- whether their conflict of interest is general or material; and
- the circumstances that give rise to the conflict of interest.

Immediately prior to the consideration of the item in which they have a conflict of interest, a Councillor must indicate to the Meeting the existence of the conflict of interest and leave the Meeting.

## Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes have been circulated to Councillors and posted on the Council website [www.benalla.vic.gov.au](http://www.benalla.vic.gov.au) pending confirmation at this meeting.

### **Recommendation:**

**That the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 28 May 2025 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.**

## 1. Public Question Time

The Council's *Governance Rules 2020* provide the opportunity for members of the public to lodge written questions of broad interest to the Council and the community.

Questions of the Council will not be allowed during any period when the Council has resolved to close the meeting in respect of a matter under section 66 (1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

A question may be on any matter except if it:

- is considered malicious, defamatory, indecent, abusive, offensive, irrelevant, trivial, or objectionable in language or substance;
- relates to confidential information as defined under the Act;
- relates to the personal hardship of any resident or ratepayer; or
- relates to any other matter which the Council considers would prejudice the Council or any person.

No more than two questions will be accepted from any person at any one meeting. All questions and answers must be as brief as possible, and no discussion may be allowed other than by Councillors for the purposes of clarification.

Like questions may be grouped together and a single answer provided. The Chair may nominate a Councillor, the Chief Executive Officer or another member of Council staff to respond to a question.

### **Recommendation:**

**That the question(s) and answer(s) be noted.**

## **2. Petitions**

### **2.1 Council to establish an LGBTIQA+ Sub-Committee of the Social Inclusion Action Group**

A petition containing 12 signatories has been received requesting the Council establish an LGBTIQA+ Sub-committee of the Social Inclusion Action Group.

Refer **Appendix 1**.

#### **Recommendation:**

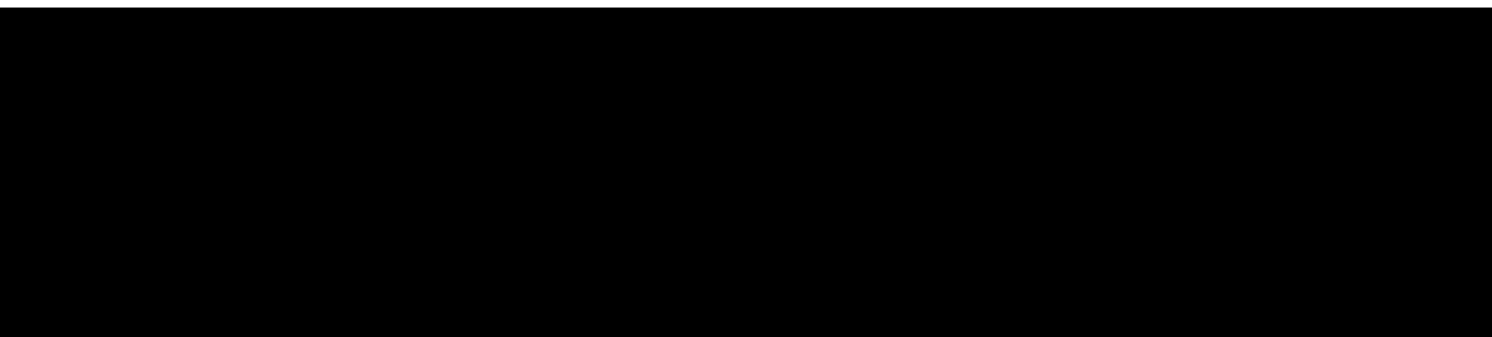
- 1. That the petition be received.**
- 2. That a report be presented to the Finance and Planning Committee on 23 July 2025.**

Thursday, May 29, 2025



## Petition to Benalla Shire Council: LGBTIQA+ Sub-Committee

We, residents and ratepayers of the Benalla Shire, hereby respectfully request that the Council establish an LGBTIQA+ Sub-Committee of the Social Inclusion Action Group.



This petition has been signed by 12 signatories. The names and signatures have been redacted with Section 7.3.10 of the *Governance Rules 2020 (2025 Revision)*.



## Record of Committees

### 3.1 Recommendations from Finance and Planning Committee

The recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meetings held on Wednesday 4 June, Wednesday 11 June and Wednesday 18 June 2025 are attached as **Appendix 1**.

#### **Recommendation:**

**That the recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee meetings held on Wednesday 4 June, Wednesday 11 June and Wednesday 18 June 2025 be adopted.**

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Benalla Rural City Council

# Recommendations From the Finance and Planning Committee

Business

1. Draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* – Hearing of Submissions

The report presented submissions received on the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*.

It is noted that the following persons addressed the council in support of their submissions:

- Raelene Stratton
- Regina Laity-Plex
- Jenny Monger
- Benalla Business Network – Joel Spencer.

**Cr Gunaratne / Cr Tolliday:**

**That an extension of three minutes be given to Raelene Stratton.**

**Carried**

**Cr Gunaratne / Cr Tolliday:**

**That an extension of three minutes be given to Regina Laity-Plex.**

**Carried**

It is noted that Councillor Nathan Tolliday declared a material conflict of interest regarding the *Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* submission from Benalla Business Network and Councillor Nathan Tolliday left the meeting at 6.29pm.

**Cr Blore / Cr Merkel:**

**That the submissions be received.**

**Carried**

Councillor Nathan Tolliday returned to the meeting at 6.43pm.



## **2. Proposed *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget* – Hearing of Submissions**

The report presented submissions received on the proposed *2025/26 Budget*.

It is noted that the CEO read a statement on behalf of John Wood regarding his submission.

It is noted that the following person addressed the council in support of their submissions:

- Hamish McPherson from Waminda Community House.

**Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:**

**That an extension of three minutes be given to Hamish McPherson.**

**Carried**

**Cr Gunaratne / Cr Blore:**

**That the submissions be received.**

**Carried**

## **3. Draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* – Hearing of Submissions**

The report presented submissions received on the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029*.

No submitters addressed the council on their submissions.

**Cr Tolliday / Cr Merkel:**

**That the submissions be received.**

**Carried**

## **4. Urgent Business**

No urgent business was submitted to the meeting.

## Recommendations from Finance and Planning Committee Meeting – 11 June 2025

### Business

#### 1. Building and Planning Approvals – April 2025

The report details planning permit applications and building approvals for April 2025.

**Cr Hearn / Cr Tolliday:**  
**That the report be noted.**

**Carried**

#### 2. 2024/2025 Quick Response Grants

The report presents funding applications for 2024/25 Quick Response Grants.

**Cr Blore / Cr Gunaratne:**  
**That \$500 grants from the 2024/2025 Quick Response Grant program be awarded to the Benalla Yarn Bombers Incorporated, Benalla Swimming Club Incorporated and U3A Benalla.**

**Carried**

#### 3. Urgent Business

No urgent business was submitted to the meeting.

### Closure of Meeting

The Committee meeting closed at 6.10pm.

### Business

#### 1. Draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* – Consideration of Submissions

It is noted that Cr Tolliday declared a material conflict of interest on the item as he is the President of the Benalla Business Network. Cr Tolliday left the meeting at 6.03pm.

The report presented submissions received on the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*.

The *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on Wednesday 25 June 2025.

**Cr King / Cr Hearn:**

**That submissions on the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* be received.**

**Carried**

Cr Nathan Tolliday returned to the meeting at 6.07pm.

#### 2. Proposed *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget* – Consideration of Submissions

The report considered submissions received on the proposed *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget*.

The *2025/26 Budget* will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on 25 June 2025.

**Cr King / Cr Gunaratne:**

**That submissions on the proposed *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget* be received.**

**Carried**

### **3. Draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 – Consideration of Submissions**

The report considered submissions received on the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029*.

The *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* will be considered for adoption at the Council meeting on 25 June 2025.

**Cr Blore / Cr Tolliday:**

**That submissions on the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* be received.**

**Carried**

### **4. Urgent Business**

No urgent business was submitted to the meeting.

Recommendations of the Finance and  
Planning Committee meeting held on  
Wednesday 18 June 2025

### 3.2 Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees

Under Council's *Governance Rules 2020* the Chief Executive Officer is required to provide a written record of the Assemblies of Councillors at a scheduled Council Meeting.

The record of Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees are attached as **Appendix 1**.

Copies of the Minutes from the following meetings have been provided to councillors under separate cover.

#### May 2025

<b>Wednesday 7 May</b>	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
<b>Thursday 8 May</b>	Benalla Indoor Recreations Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee
<b>Thursday 8 May</b>	Assembly of Councillors – Draft Council Plan 2025-2029
<b>Monday 12 May</b>	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee
<b>Tuesday 20 May</b>	Audit and Risk Committee
<b>Wednesday 21 May</b>	Assembly of Councillors – Councillor Inductions – Conflict of Interest Workshop
<b>Wednesday 21 May</b>	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
<b>Monday 26 May</b>	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee

#### Recommendation:

**That the report be noted.**

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## Record of Assemblies of Councillors, Advisory and External Committees

May 2025

**Assembly of Councillors – Business Review**

6pm Wednesday 7 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room) 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

**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

<b>In attendance</b>	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	General Manager Corporate
	Adrian Gasperoni	Manager Assets and Infrastructure
	Courtney Naughton	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
	Nathan Gasperoni	Environment and Sustainability Coordinator

**Apologies:** Nil**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Cr King declared a material conflict of interest on item 3.**Items discussed:**

1. Presentation: Gliding Club of Victoria
2. Draft *Benalla Rural City Council Climate and Environment Strategy 2025-2030*
3. *Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Update*
4. Draft *Benalla Landfill and Resource Recovery Centre Masterplan*

**Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre (BIRC) Redevelopment Project Steering Committee**

Midday Thursday 8 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room), 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

<b>Chair:</b>	Adrian Gasperoni	Manager Assets and Infrastructure
<b>Committee:</b>	Cr Bernie Hearn	Councillor Representative
	Cr Peter Davis	Councillor Representative
	Wally Armstrong	Benalla Basketball Association
	Noel Baumgarten	Community Member
	David Booth	Community Infrastructure and Place, Sport and Recreation Victoria
	David Huxtable	Basketball Victoria
	Tom O'Connor	Basketball Victoria
	Terry Nowland	BIRC Committee of Management
	Simone Sammon	Community Member
	Jenny Sloan	Community Infrastructure and Place, Sport and Recreation Victoria
<b>In attendance:</b>	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Tom Arnold	Community Development and Recreation Coordinator
	Dean Steegstra	Open Space Coordinator
	Laura Benson	Browns Project Solutions
	Bree Glass	Administration Officer

**Apologies:** Wally Armstrong and Simone Sammon.

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Project Opportunities
2. Project Design and Community Consultation
3. Key decisions and milestones
4. Information Sharing
5. Actions



**Assembly of Councillors – Draft Council Plan 2025-2029**

6pm Thursday 8 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room) 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

<b>Chair</b>	Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)	
<b>Councillors</b>	Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)	
	Councillor David Blore	
	Councillor Peter Davis	
	Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne	
	Councillor Jillian Merkel	
	Councillor Nathan Tolliday	
<b>In attendance</b>	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	
	Jane Archbold	Manager Community

**Apologies:** Nil

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Draft Council Plan 2025-2029

**Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee**

5.30pm Monday 12 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room) 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

<b>Chair</b>	Raelene Stratton	Community Representative
<b>Committee</b>	Cr Jillian Merkel	Councillor Representative
	Cr Nathan Tolliday	Councillor Representative
	Ian Gonzaga	Community Representative
	Alex Ross	Community Representative
	Joyce Clarke	Community Representative
	Lauren Bruce	Community Representative
<b>In attendance</b>	Courtney Naughton	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
	Eric Nash	Director Benalla Art Gallery
	Alison Angus	Visitor Economy Coordinator
	Sara Bowie	Administration Officer

**Apologies:** Lauren Bruce

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Review of 2025 Festival
2. General Business

**Audit and Risk Committee Meeting**

5pm Tuesday 20 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room), 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

**Chair** Mr Cameron Gray

**Committee** Councillor Peter Davis  
Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne  
Mr Stephen Paterson  
Ms Rita Ruyters  
Mr Wilson Tang

**In attendance** Peter Keane Chief Executive Officer  
Robert Barber General Manager Corporate  
Cathy Fitzpatrick Manager Finance  
Janine McMaster Manager People and Performance  
Kate Parker Corporate Risk Coordinator

**Internal Auditors** Brad Ead AFS Auditors

**External Auditors** Jason Gilbert Crowe

**Apologies:** Nil

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Meeting with Auditors
2. *Benalla Rural City Council Audit Strategy Memorandum For The Financial Year Ending 30 June 2025*
3. Internal Audit Program
4. Risk Management Update
5. Procurement Process Exemptions
6. Proposed 2025/26 Budget
7. Local Government Performance Reporting Framework – Report of Operations For Half Year Ending 31 December 2024
8. Reports From Regulatory and Integrity Agencies
9. Audit and Risk Committee Compliance Management Items
10. General Business

**Assembly of Councillors – Councillors Induction – Conflicts of Interest Workshop**

Midday Wednesday 21 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room) 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

**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** Peter Keane Chief Executive Officer  
Mark Hayes q Maddocks Lawyers  
Jess Pendergast Governance Coordinator

**Apologies:** Cr Nathan Tolliday

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Conflict of Interest Workshop

**Assembly of Councillors – Business Review**

6pm Wednesday 21 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room) 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

<b>Chair</b>	Councillor Nathan Tolliday	
<b>Councillors</b>	Councillor Bernie Hearn (Mayor)	
	Councillor Justin King (Deputy Mayor)	
	Councillor David Blore	
	Councillor Peter Davis	
	Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne	
	Councillor Jillian Merkel	
<b>In attendance</b>	Peter Keane	Chief Executive Officer
	Robert Barber	General Manager Corporate

**Apologies:** Nil

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Presentation: Benalla Art Gallery Foundation
2. Council Emergency Management Responsibilities
3. Draft *Councillor Internal Resolution Policy*

**Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee**

5.30pm Monday 26 May 2025, Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room) 13 Mair Street, Benalla.

<b>Chair</b>	Raelene Stratton	Community Representative
<b>Committee</b>	Cr Jillian Merkel	Councillor Representative
	Cr Nathan Tolliday	Councillor Representative
	Ian Gonzaga	Community Representative
	Alex Ross	Community Representative
	Joyce Clarke	Community Representative
	Lauren Bruce	Community Representative
<b>In attendance</b>	Eric Nash	Director Benalla Art Gallery
	Alison Angus	Visitor Economy Coordinator
	Sara Bowie	Administration Officer

**Apologies:** Cr Nathan Tolliday, Cr Jillian Merkel and Lauren Bruce

**Conflicts of Interest disclosed:** Nil

**Items discussed:**

1. Sponsorship Discussion
2. Marketing Plan Review
3. Visit Victoria – Events funding
4. Festival Currency Data
5. General Business



## Officer Reports

### 4.1 Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029

Ref: 154527366-214

Courtney Naughton – Manager Economic Development and Sustainability  
Alison Angus – Visitor Economy Coordinator

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#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents for consideration and adoption the *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*.

#### BACKGROUND

The Finance and Planning Committee at its meeting on 9 April 2025, acting under its delegated authority of the Council, resolved:

*That the draft Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029 be placed on public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days.*

Public notice of the draft *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* was given on the Council's website on 10 April 2025 and in the Benalla Ensign on Wednesday 16 April 2025.

Feedback was also sought via the Council's website and promoted on social media. An Industry feedback session was held at the Benalla Cinema on Monday 5 May 2025. The session was facilitated by Tourism North East with 30 industry members in attendance.

The submission period closed at 5pm Thursday 15 May 2025. At the close of the submission period eight submissions were received.

In accordance with the Council's *Governance Rules 2020*, submitters were invited to address the Finance and Planning Committee meeting on 4 June 2025 in support of their submissions.

Jenny Monger, Regina Laity-Plex, Raelene Stratton and Joel Spencer spoke in support of their submissions.

Submissions were considered by the Council at the Finance and Planning Committee meeting on 18 June 2025.

#### DISCUSSION

Following the consideration of submissions, Councillor and Council staff input, the following major changes were made to the *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029*:

- Minor formatting changes to the overall document.
- Addition of omissions arising from the public consultation feedback period. Including references to the ceramic mural, Benalla Costume and Kelly Museum, Swanpool cinema, Benalla Gardens and Lake precinct.
- Inclusion of Benalla Racing Club, Equestrian Centre and Visting Sports Tournaments.

- Wording changes around the Benalla Business Network and the Tourism Industry. Council to have a more supportive position of Benalla Business Network and its operations.
- Separation of the Migrant Camp from the Aviation Precinct. Noting they still complement each other but offer a separate tourism offering.
- Amalgamation of Commercial Hotel and Shed to more generic CBD precinct.
- Added accessibility/CALD to accessibility section connecting with the market - accessible tourism. Further investigate opportunities to invest in accessible infrastructure. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Visitors (CALD visitors).
- Changes to the Vision for the document.

The *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* is attached as **Appendix 1**.

### ***COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025***

#### **Community**

- A connected, involved and inclusive community.

#### **Livability**

- Vibrant public spaces and places.

#### **Economy**

- Flourishing tourism.

#### **Leadership**

- *Good governance.*
- *Engaged and informed community.*

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The *2023/24 Budget* allocated \$50,000 to the development of a Destination Management Plan.

Actions arising from the *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* will be accommodated within existing budget allocations. Where additional funding is required, external funding opportunities will be explored.

### **GENDER EQUALITY ACT**

Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* the Council is required to undertake a gender impact assessment when developing or reviewing any policy, program or service that has a direct and significant impact on the public.

A gender equity assessment found the plan has an overall neutral gender impact.

### **LEGISLATIVE AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

It is considered that the report is consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has been undertaken at the 'Consult' level on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to be used
Consult	We will provide information and consider feedback prior to making a decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Business and community workshop on the draft DMP.</li><li>▪ Feedback invited via the Council's website and social media channels.</li><li>▪ Public Notice in the <i>Benalla Ensign</i> and on the Council website.</li><li>▪ Draft DMP posted on Council's website.</li></ul>

## OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

## CONCLUSION

The *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* has been developed using a comprehensive deliberative engagement program. All stakeholders who participated in the process are thanked for their valuable contribution.

### Recommendation:

**That the *Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029* be adopted.**

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# Benalla

**BENALLA RURAL CITY**

**DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025 - 2029**

**DRAFT**







This Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan report was prepared by TRC Tourism.

## DISCLAIMER

Any representation, statement, opinion or advice expressed or implied in this document is made in good faith but on the basis that TRC Tourism Pty. Ltd., directors, employees and associated entities are not liable for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to taking or not taking action in respect of any representation, statement or advice referred to in this document.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

## IMAGE CREDIT

TRC Tourism, Allison Anderson

## COPYRIGHT

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## ACRONYMS

TERM	DEFINITION
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
DJSIR	Department of Jobs Skills Industry and Regions
DMP	Destination Management Plan
FTE	Full Time Equivalent jobs
IVS	International Visitor Survey
LGA	Local Government Authority
NVS	National Visitor Survey
PV	Parks Victoria
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
REDS	Regional Economic Development Strategy
TLaWC	Taungurung Land and Waters Council
TNE	Tourism North East
VEP	Visitor Economy Partnership
VIC	Visitor information centre
VV	Visit Victoria

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# Welcome to Benalla and surrounds

Welcome to Yorta Yorta, Taungurung and Bpangerang Country, where you can see the art in everything. Here, tourism isn't just about visiting, it's about transforming our community and economy for the better.

Through tourism, we're not just inviting people to enjoy our culture, nature and beauty, but also to foster a deeper connection with our region. Knowing our place means celebrating our unique identity and history and strengthening our sense of belonging. By attracting visitors and investments, we create jobs that empower our young people, build a sustainable future, and that benefits us all.

As tourism flourishes, so does our community. We're enhancing liveability with vibrant activities, upgraded facilities, and a diverse range of dining, shopping, and accommodation options. These mean more opportunities for everyone to enjoy Benalla's offerings, making it a destination where people want to live, work, and play.

With tourism, we're shaping Benalla and surrounds into a dynamic hub of creativity, culture, and opportunity, where you can see the art in everything.



# About this Plan

This is a plan for the development of tourism in Benalla and surrounds for five years from 2025 - 2029. It is designed to direct the efforts of government, industry and community in their decisions regarding tourism. It also ensures that investment is effective in delivering exceptional experiences for visitors as well as value for the Benalla community.

This Destination Management Plan (DMP) succeeds the Benalla Rural City Tourism and Events Strategy 2018-2022. It is designed to complement and be complemented by the Victorian High Country Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2033 at the regional level, Experience Victoria 2033 at the state level, and Thrive 2030 at the national level.

Accompanying this document is the destination assessment, which provides the context for the strategic direction of the plan. The assessment includes a detailed analysis of the strategic context, the visitor market, products and experiences, and an evaluation of the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

Building on the assessment, this plan draws on the aspirations of the Benalla and surrounds community and tourism industry to support strong advocacy to government. The DMP aims to harness the strengths of the region to enable growth of the destination, increase investment, leadership and economic and social benefit through visitation.

Whilst tourism in Benalla and surrounds employs only around 5.1 per cent of the workforce,<sup>1</sup> it is a valuable industry for the community as it provides entry-level jobs, opportunities for new businesses to start up, a platform to commercialise the significant creativity in the region, and increased liveability for the community. This plan recognises that for the region to be effective in

providing connected and seamless experiences, it must have a capable and empowered industry that is supported by an effective governance framework.

It is important to acknowledge that this plan has been developed at a time of cost-of-living pressures and budgetary restraint at a national and global level. Building the foundations for the region over the course of this plan and establishing the ability to be able to capture opportunities as they arise, as well as removing some barriers to growth, will provide the region with opportunities well into the future.

## Consultation

This plan has been developed in conversation with communities, industry, Local Government, and other interested parties.

Consultation has included:

- One-on-one meetings with interested parties and identified stakeholders
- LGA meeting and briefings
- Industry and community workshop
- Online community survey
- Site visits across the region

A full description of the outcomes of the consultation is included in the Destination Assessment.

## Plan review

It is recommended that this plan be reviewed in 2027 or at least once during its five-year period. This will ensure the projects and strategies are still relevant for building Benalla and surrounds' tourism most effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> [Benalla Economy Profile](#) | [Employment, Tourism](#) | [REMPPLAN](#)

# Destination management best practice

Tourism is a complex industry to manage because there are many touchpoints to the visitor experience. Public infrastructure and services need to be in harmony with private business to offer outstanding visitor experiences.

These need to be aligned with what visitors are seeking, what locals are wanting, and what is on offer in the broader visitor experience beyond the region. Understanding best practice in tourism management can help navigate some of these challenges and opportunities at a local scale. Below is a list of important elements of tourism management best practice that have informed the recommendations in this plan.

## Governance

Tourism governance is the decision making framework that joins all of the moving pieces of the tourism industry. While governance in itself will not deliver outstanding experiences, lessons from reviews of many of the nation's leading tourism regions show that it plays an important role in providing a seamless visitor experience and ensuring value flows to the community from the visitor economy.

## A regional focus

It is important to understand how a destination's offerings fit within the broader regional offering, and more importantly, to understand what makes a place special within it. Connecting and collaborating with nearby towns and experiences and being clear with regional and state tourism marketing agencies about what makes the place so unique, are central to effectively connecting with visitors. Tourism North East and Visit Victoria are vital in helping bring the broader region together.

## Stewardship and sustainability

Increasingly, councils and destination management organisations are seeking to act as stewards of their places, rather than just managing them. The difference is about caring for, and nurturing, place and people. Being environmentally sustainable in business and destination practice is important not only for the community, but also increasingly important to visitors.

## Indigenous ownership

Ensuring recognition of stories, land custodianship and Indigenous ownership of Indigenous tourism product and experiences is central to achieving long term sustainability as a community and a destination. Inviting Indigenous representation on boards of management and decision making is a key part of this process.

## Market alignment

Understanding the people who could be motivated to visit the destination – who they are, what gets them excited, what they are looking for in life and their travels – helps develop successful tourism experiences. Identifying the gaps between what people are seeking and what is on offer in the region can provide investment opportunities and create points of difference.

## Attracting investment

Working with regional and state agencies to attract investment into the tourism industry can provide opportunities to develop public and private infrastructure, products and experiences. If well designed, public infrastructure such as tracks and trails, major built infrastructure and experiences can encourage private investment in new products. Investment prospectuses can also be developed with the support of a business concierge service to assist potential investors in navigating complex approval and planning processes.





# Tourism in Benalla





# Regional context

Benalla Rural City is on Taungurung, Bpanggerang and Yorta Yorta Country. It is one of 7 LGAs and 4 Alpine resorts within the Tourism North East region, known as Victoria's High Country. Benalla and surrounds is a strategic location in the region for several reasons:

- Located just off the Hume Freeway where most of the traffic heading between Melbourne, NSW and Queensland travel.
- At the midpoint between Melbourne and the Victorian Alpine area.
- Central to attractions in the region, within easy reach of the Murray, South Australia, Rutherglen, Shepparton, Wangaratta, and the rest of Victoria's High Country.

Benalla and surrounds has significant opportunity to grow its tourism market share. In 2022, Victoria's High Country welcomed 5 million visitors, with approximately 2.5 million of these being overnight. In 2023, Benalla and surrounds attracted around 335,000 visitors, of whom 160,000 stayed 379,000 nights. Spending an estimated \$131 per night and \$100 per day trip, this equates to an estimated annual tourism spend of \$71 million in Benalla and surrounds each year.<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 shows the distribution of visitors across the region.

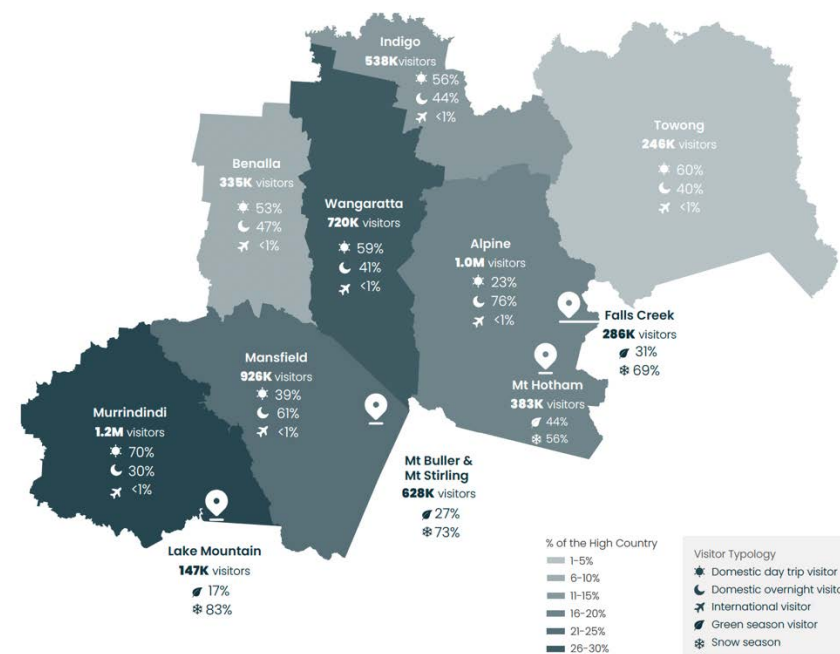
The size of the visitor market is projected to grow in Victoria over the life of this plan. Tourism Research Australia projects a growth in tourism spend in the state of 32 per cent to 2028, with projected increases of 67 per cent for domestic daytrip visitors and 29 per cent for domestic overnight visitors across the state.<sup>3</sup> If tourism in Benalla and surrounds can increase at these rates, this will equate to an increase to nearly 570,000 visitors per year, spending an estimated \$1.16 billion.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Tourism Research Australia Local Government Area Profiles – Benalla 2023

<sup>3</sup> Tourism Research Australia - Victoria's Tourism Forecasts 2023-2028

This plan aims to ensure investment in tourism is targeted and effective in maximising this potential value. Tourism in Benalla and surrounds is guided by the vision and values of Benalla Rural City Council. It also supports, and is supported by, the plans and brands of Victoria's High Country and Visit Victoria. Benalla and surrounds' tourism offerings are aligned with these, and as such, there is significant opportunity to leverage the work being done at regional and state level to increase the number of people and the value of visit to the region.

**Figure 1. Share of visitors in Victoria's High Country Region<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> Note figures are estimated based on 2023 domestic overnight and 2019 daytrip figures as more recent figures are not available.

<sup>5</sup> Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan 2023 - 2033



# Our distinctiveness

While there are many facets to the Benalla and surrounds experience, the region's strengths are firmly based in arts, culture and heritage. This is cleverly positioned, as it is an area that is not otherwise 'owned' within the High Country region but is deeply aligned with the broader Victorian brand.

Benalla's brand "See the art in everything" is well substantiated through the region's product offering with longstanding investments in arts, culture and heritage. This brand underpins the other product offerings in the region, adding a richness and depth to the overall regional experience.

This investment also makes economic sense. Arts and culture visitors have been shown to spend significantly more in regions they visit than other types of visitor, so there is a clear imperative to further consolidate and invest in this well-considered brand.

Tourism experiences are best when they are multi-layered, and that is what arts, culture and heritage can do best. Adding depth to experiences such as cycling or walking trails with stories of the past, art installations and cultural interpretation can elevate them from being 'just another trail' to something extraordinary. This can be as much the case for motorsports, golf or team sports. Overlaying stories, arts and culture, adds dimension and distinctiveness to experiences that could be otherwise had in other parts of the state, or country.

Benalla and surrounds' core experiences span three areas of art, culture and heritage, nature and outdoors, and sport. A full analysis of Benalla and surrounds' tourism product is in the Destination Assessment.

BENALLA  
*See the art in everything*





## Art, culture and heritage

Art, culture and heritage are at the heart of Benalla and surrounds' experience offering, playing a strong role in the profile of the community and in attracting visitors. Arts and culture are locally recognised as being an important economic driver in the region, and the Benalla Art Gallery is renowned as one of Australia's best and most striking regional galleries. This is supported by street art installations and the Benalla Street Art Festival, silo and water tank art and installations in the Winton Wetlands.

### Main products and experiences:

- Benalla Art Gallery
- Home to the Benalla Street Art Festival
- North East Victoria Silo Art trail
- Lotjpatj Natjan Danak Sculpture Walk
- Benalla Ceramic Mural
- Benalla Aviation Museum
- Ned Kelly History
- Benalla Costume and Kelly Museum
- Benalla Heritage Festival
- Benalla Migrant Camp
- Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Memorial
- Heart of Art Benalla
- Taunguarung, Yorta Yorta and Bpangerang stories and Aboriginal Community Garden
- Siva Singh Memorial
- Swanpool Cinema..



## Nature and outdoors

Benalla and surrounds has a beautiful rural and urban landscape, and there are a number of opportunities to enjoy it. The Botanical Gardens, known for its rose garden, along with the Winton Wetlands and trails throughout the region offer visitors the choice of walking, riding or drive touring.

### Main products and experiences:

- Benalla Botanic Gardens
- Winton Wetlands: Citizen science, birdlife, visitor centre, art and stargazing
- Bird watching
- Cycling: Road riding – local roads, wetlands, lake Mountain Biking - Mount Samaria State Park and Reef Hills State Park
- Aboriginal Community Garden
- Walking tracks - Lake Benalla 4.25km and nearby State Parks and Reserves, Warby and Strathbogie Ranges.
- Rural towns and landscapes: Baddaginie, Devenish, Goorambat, Swanpool, Tatong, Thoona and Winton
- Splash park, skate park and adventure playground
- Lake Nillahcootie – fishing, boating and swimming.



## Sport

Victoria is a sporting state, and many people travel extensively for sporting competitions and events. Benalla and surrounds is well set up to receive golfing, bowls, football, horse racing, indoor sports such as basketball, and also hosts Australia's largest gliding club, which attracts visitors from around the world.

The jewel in the sporting crown for Benalla and surrounds is the Winton Motor Raceway. Described as Australia's action track, the Raceway attracts around 100,000 visitors per year who generally stay overnight in the region, many camping. Although motor racing is not a pillar of the regional or state tourism strategies, it does attract more people than any other attraction in the region, is actively growing, with plans to expand if funding is secured.

### Main products and experiences:

- Winton Motor Raceway – venue hire and corporate events, camping
- Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre
- Visiting sports tournaments
- Equestrian Centre
- Benalla Golf Club
- Benalla Bowls Club
- Goldrush Hot Air Ballooning
- Victorian Ballooning Federation
- Benalla Gliding Club
- Benalla Racing Club & Benalla Gold Cup.

# Our visitors

Benalla and surrounds mostly attracts domestic day and overnight visitors from Melbourne and neighbouring regions.

Regional Victoria has the benefit of a growing and thriving source market in metropolitan Melbourne, as well as several growing regional centres nearby. Visitors from the High Country and neighbouring regions currently spend more than those from Melbourne, identifying an opportunity to better engage this high value market.<sup>6</sup>

Benalla and surrounds enjoys direct connectivity with Melbourne not only through the Hume Freeway, but also through the Express Passenger Train (XPT) and VLine rail services, and light aircraft to Benalla airport, both within walking distance to the centre of town. Benalla and surrounds is also at about the halfway point between Melbourne and the alpine resorts of Hotham and Falls Creek, and is on a main route for caravanners and others travelling north on long trips.

With this level of connectivity, Benalla and surrounds has the opportunity to engage with a high number of visitors, many of whom are already predisposed to the product and experiences on offer.

## High Country target markets

Victoria's High Country visitors fall into two primarily self-drive markets:<sup>7</sup>

**Lifestyle Leaders** are progressive, educated and professional individuals who actively seek out new experiences. They are viewed as trusted advisors and influencers. They are higher in affluence and discretionary expenditure than the average Australian, so travel frequently and spend more when travelling. They account for 40 per cent of the market.

**The Habituals** are travellers who come to the High Country each year (sometimes many times a year), tend to return to a consistent location and often travel with the same group. They prioritise value for money, and are often motivated by familiarity with a destination. They account for 28 per cent of the market.

Victoria's High Country focuses on Lifestyle Leaders because of their propensity to travel, experience new things and consider multiple destinations when they travel. This means there is potential to influence them with motivating communication and effective product development.

The Lifestyle Leader is a focus for Visit Victoria and strongly aligns to Tourism Australia's High Value Traveler (HVT) audience. As such, Victoria's High Country is well placed to collaborate with both Visit Victoria and Tourism Australia on statewide and national demand driving tourism strategies.

## Benalla and surrounds target markets

As part of the High Country region, Benalla and surrounds stands to gain from the targeted marketing and market development activities being undertaken through the visitor economy partnership.

The Lifestyle Leaders clearly align with Benalla and surrounds' product - in particular, they like to stay active, and the majority likes to experience local culture and nature. They plan for their own trips and are less likely to prefer their trips organised for them.

Within and outside of the Lifestyle Leaders, there are four potential sub-markets that could specifically be drawn to Benalla and surrounds. These sub-markets present significant opportunities to Benalla and surrounds to target with key marketing messages, product and experience development and visitor services. These are listed on the following page.

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<sup>6</sup> CommIQ credit card insight data – Benalla Jan – Oct 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan 2023 - 2033





### PASSING TRAFFIC

Passing Traffic drive to the High Country, ski fields, or Murray Region for a week or weekend holiday from Melbourne. These could be couples or families looking to break their journey with a stop, something to eat, a look in a special shop and a walk around/play. If this market can be engaged to stop for a great experience, they may stay longer and spend more, or think about returning as a weekend chaser. This market are the window shoppers who could be converted to customers. **Potential:** With Alpine Resorts Victoria reporting over 800,000 visitors to their resorts in 2023,<sup>8</sup> and 5 million visitors annually to Victoria's High Country, there is a significant opportunity to connect with this market as they make the journey to the region.



### BIG TRIPPERS

Big Trippers look to travel slowly and experience the 'real' Australia. Interested in spending two or three days enjoying heritage, easy nature based experiences and cultural attractions. There are many competitors for the Big Trippers, because they are not afraid to go off the beaten track, and they love to find hidden gems. They also like to enjoy free activities and a reasonably priced coffee, but will spend for the right experiences, and can support services and retail in the towns. **Potential:** With more than 800,000 registered RVs, caravans and campervans in Australia embarking on 15.5 million trips over 62.3 million nights per year, there is significant scope for Benalla and surrounds to connect with more of this market.<sup>9</sup>



### WEEKEND CHASERS

Weekend Chasers seek some inspiration and new experiences that enrich their view on the world, connect them to a new place and provide them with good food and drink. The Weekend Chasers are hotly contested in Victoria. While Melbourne receives many Weekend Chasers from the regions, the regions also receive them from Melbourne and other regions. **Potential:** More than 40 per cent of Victorians as planning to take a road trip within Australia in the next six months, and more than 83 per cent of those intend to take the trip within Victoria.



### GROUPS AND NICHE

Groups and Niche travel for conference, sports or education either to Benalla and surrounds or nearby, looking for opportunities to learn, share experiences, train, or engage in team building. This market is diverse, with travel often initiated to attend events such as sporting meets, conferences or cultural events. Groups and Niche may also travel in commercially or privately organised tour trips, including for schools, friend groups or university field trips. **Potential:** There is inconsistent and outdated research available on the potential of this market. In 2019, Sports Events were estimated to bring 1.5 million visitors and 2.5 million visitor nights to Regional Victoria,<sup>10</sup> indicating that in sport alone, there is market opportunity to attract group travel. Business events and education, as well as private niche tour groups also have potential for the region.

<sup>8</sup> Alpine Resorts Victoria Visitation Statistics Winter 2023 End of Season Report

<sup>9</sup> Caravan Industry Association of Australia 30 June 2023

<sup>10</sup> Event Visitors to Victoria – Sporting Events, Cultural Events and Festivals. August 2019.





# Opportunities



PAINTING CREDIT: Sofles



# Starting point

Benalla and surrounds is starting from a solid asset base on which to build a flourishing tourism industry. Ongoing investment in infrastructure such as the Benalla Art Gallery, Winton Wetlands Precinct, Silo Art, Benalla Street Art Festival, Winton Motor Raceway, tracks and trails, airport and the Benalla brand, provides many opportunities for visitors to engage in the region, however there are some intrinsic weaknesses that need to be accounted for, and if possible, addressed.

Maximising strengths and managing weaknesses is critical to ensuring the robust development of the visitor economy. Listed below are some of Benalla and surrounds' key tourism strengths and weaknesses for consideration within this plan.

## Tourism strengths

- **Strong existing arts, culture and heritage assets** - including Benalla Art Gallery as one of the best regional art galleries in Victoria, the established and successful Benalla Street Art Festival, Benalla Migrant Camp, Ned Kelly's Sash, and the Aboriginal Community Garden.
- **Winton Wetlands** - assets including the Mokoan Hub, sculpture and art trails, Lotjpatj Natjan Danak sculpture walk, stargazing, Mokoan Discovery Trail connecting to Benalla, walking tracks.
- **Winton Motor Raceway** - regular events and drive school. Plans for expansion into larger events and festivals, potential hosting of V8 Supercars, motorsport museum and convention centre.
- **Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage Precinct** – one of very few remnants of Australia's post WWII migrant history, with original buildings, this area forms part of a rich story for the region and links to the aviation precinct.
- **Aviation Precinct** - within close proximity of town, with existing assets including ballooning & gliding (seasonal), flying, and aviation museum.

- **Local produce** – as part of the food bowl of Victoria, there is plenty of nearby local produce to tap in to, including beverages.
- **Beautiful natural, rural and urban landscapes** – changing year-round.
- **Infrastructure and visitor servicing** – new VIC, tracks and trails network.
- **Growing and strengthening economy** outside of tourism.
- **Gateway** and/or connector to the wider region.
- **Connectivity** to road, rail and flying.
- **Strong and relevant brand** that is versatile and able to be rolled out across products and experiences in the region.
- **Weather** – mild climate with sunny days and good flying conditions.

## Tourism weaknesses

- **Food, beverage and dining** opportunities for visitors – particularly in the evenings.
- **Quality accommodation** at a range of levels and price points.
- **Signage, wayfinding and visitor servicing** – no indication of the arts presence from the highway, lack of wayfinding for cycling and walking trails.
- **Connection within the industry** – operators understanding where they 'fit' into tourism.
- **Bookable tourism product** – very little paid tourism product in the area, most attractions are free and provided by Council.

- **Brand infrastructure** - Whilst the “See the art in everything” brand is well positioned, there is currently a lack of infrastructure behind it that can be used by operators to get on board with the brand.
- **Marketing resources and infrastructure** – A lack of resource dedicated to strategic marketing for Benalla and surrounds to maximise marketing impact.
- **Retail options** – limited unique retail options within the Bridge Street East Precinct.

# Realising our potential

There is room for Benalla and surrounds to better maximise its assets for the benefit and growth of the visitor economy. While the region’s natural and cultural assets, leisure and lifestyle options make it one of Victoria’s most liveable regions, these are yet to be harnessed to their full potential for tourism and economic benefit. Underpinning this is the need to generate and stimulate investment and private enterprise that meets the needs of visitors and builds a vibrant visitor economy.

Opportunities and challenges often go hand in hand in the development of a thriving industry and region. Understanding what is holding the region back and exploring the opportunities to address them helps target investment and resources. The following opportunities and challenges have been identified for the region for the life of this plan.

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
INVESTMENT		
Public investment	Limited financial capacity of Council to deliver services and the major projects needed to elevate the visitor economy.	Advocate to state and federal government for investment in projects that will generate growth in the visitor economy and leverage private investment. Create a government funding prospectus with priority projects for the region.
Private investment	Lack of private investment in products, services and experiences that support the visitor economy.	Enterprise investment prospectuses, communicating a ‘red carpet, not red tape’ approach with business concierge and planning assistance for key areas that require development, such as food and beverage, accommodation, experiences (eg. bike and e-bike hire, tours), brand aligned experiences.



THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
CONNECTING WITH THE MARKET		
<b>Marketing strategy</b>	Lack of resource and direction in connecting with the market. Lack of voice in TNE means little marketing is undertaken for Benalla and surrounds.	<p>Develop a simple, clear and prioritised tourism marketing strategy that leverages small investment to maximum impact – such as engaging strategically with influencers, media, famils, advocacy and programs with TNE and Visit Victoria.</p> <p>Work to develop a product proposition to experience Benalla and surrounds such as a ride/rail/art weekend experience, and package as a core offering.</p>
<b>Online presence</b>	Duplication and lack of coordination across websites and socials for Benalla and surrounds.	<p>Negotiate the rationalisation of VisitBenalla.com.au to support Enjoybenalla.com.au, align with brand and build consistent message.</p> <p>Ensure seamless connection with social media and harness the power of influencers to organically build audience, especially through events.</p> <p>Further develop the events calendar on EnjoyBenalla.com.au with regular social posts and updates, as well as profiles on operators and products coming online.</p>
<b>Freeway signage</b>	No signage indicating what Benalla and surrounds has to offer on the Hume Freeway. No indication of the creative credentials in the region to draw interest or visitation.	<p>Significant through traffic passing the region on the Hume Freeway.</p> <p>Harness Benalla's art credentials to build a highway installation (potentially as part of the Benalla Street Art Festival) to draw people in to Benalla and surrounds and show what it has to offer.</p> <p>Brand aligned signage on the Freeway to indicate the brand and start the journey of brand recognition.</p>
<b>Directional signage</b>	<p>Lack of directional signage for visitors around the city – in vehicles and walking.</p> <p>Lack of interpretive signage around the city.</p>	<p>Extend the connective brand aligned signage from the Hume Freeway into the town and into key experience areas. Develop a storytelling theme to support the Benalla brand to connect the attractions together.</p> <p>Signage audit and strategy to develop coordinated visitor experience and engage more people from the Hume Freeway and into major attractions.</p>

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>MAJOR ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT</b>		
<b>Benalla Art Gallery</b>	<p>Insufficient operational funding for the Benalla Art Gallery. Limited staff resources splits focus between securing funding, and product and opportunity development, diluting the impact that could be generated through the Gallery's offerings and Collection.</p> <p>Ageing infrastructure with limited gallery and engagement spaces, Collection and general storage, amenities, and critical systems such as climate control and security means an inability to loan significant works from esteemed public collection, or present blockbuster exhibitions.</p>	<p>Successful delivery in full of Stage 1 redevelopment to address pressing infrastructure issues, including climate control, amenities, and Collection storage.</p> <p>Council endorsement in principle of the Stage 2 redevelopment plan (Masterplan) and commitment to working with the Benalla Art Gallery Foundation, and advocating to State and Federal Government, to enable its realisation. This project would allow the Gallery to host blockbuster exhibitions.</p> <p>Address operational funding for Benalla Art Gallery to ensure specialist focus on areas including commercial revenue generation, marketing and promotion, and Collection care to maximise the impact and visitor awareness/appeal of the offerings of Benalla Art Gallery.</p> <p>Exploration of events and marketing opportunities around blockbuster exhibitions to build reputation of the Gallery and collection. Collaborate with others such as quality local food and beverage producers or Indigenous storytellers to provide full cultural experience.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to build on existing relationships with peer regional galleries in the expanded region (such as SAM, Wangaratta Art Gallery, HYPHEN Wodonga, and MAMA Albury) to collaborate, cross promote, possibly present an expanded event across all galleries, and generate more 'cultural road trip' visitors to hop from one to the other. Art galleries can also be creative in their delivery – like having pop up installations in unexpected places, offering wine and art, growing masterpiece collections and offering online shops for creative pieces.</p>
<b>Benalla Migrant Camp Heritage Precinct</b>	<p>Lack of space for the Migrant Camp to develop, need for infrastructure to meet the needs of all users.</p> <p>Lack of clarity on where and how visitors can connect with the experiences available in the precinct, and little visible signage that connects to the overall Benalla and surrounds story.</p>	<p>Inclusion in priority project advocacy document seeking funding for masterplan to maximise the value from these significant assets for community and visitor experience.</p> <p>The Benalla Migrant Camp and Aviation Museum in particular present significant opportunities to attract people seeking to connect with WWII history and their personal heritage. These need significant investment and resourcing to be able to develop and as such any plans need to include revenue streams such as ticket sales, experiences and café/dining options.</p> <p>Extend the town's creative credentials and connected storytelling into the precinct through murals, installations and signage.</p>

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>Aviation Precinct</b>	<p>Need for infrastructure to meet the needs of all users.</p> <p>Conflict between users with a lack of strategic management of the precinct.</p> <p>Lack of clarity on where and how visitors can connect with the experiences available in the precinct, and little visible signage that connects to the overall Benalla and surrounds story.</p>	<p>Inclusion in priority project advocacy document seeking funding for masterplan to maximise the value from the Aviation Precinct. Important to maximise the opportunity from the Migrant Camp, Aviation Museum, Gliding Club of Victoria, Airport and Ballooning, as well as access from the town.</p> <p>Extend the town's creative credentials and connected storytelling into the precinct through murals, installations and signage.</p>
<b>Winton Motor Raceway</b>	<p>Lack of funding for further development.</p>	<p>Further engaging with the existing market attending the raceway through collaborations with local providers and accommodation packages.</p> <p>Inclusion in priority project advocacy document seeking funding for the current proposal for the motor racing museum, corporate function centre, expanding outdoor events and camping facilities, and more.</p> <p>Engage in the arts scene through participation in the Street Art Festival and other connections.</p>
<b>Winton Wetlands</b>	<p>Wayfinding and signage is high quality but unclear for navigation for new visitors. No clear pathway of connectivity to Benalla.</p>	<p>Masterplan that maps and builds the visitor experience right to the heart of Benalla rather than being a finite experience. Improve signage and wayfinding to encourage more engagement from visitors, with storytelling and connective pathways with water stations and stops from Benalla.</p>
<b>Bpangerang, Yorta Yorta and Taungurung operated tours</b>	<p>No Indigenous product offering in the region.</p>	<p>Mount Buffalo is one of the Taungurung Peoples' important story places, as are places around Benalla, where there is an old greenstone axe quarry. Exploring opportunities for Taungurung, Yorta Yorta and Bpangerang-operated tours, cultural events and knowledge seminars which promote and interpret natural and cultural features of Country.</p>

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>CBD precinct development</b>	Declining retail area with limited opening hours. Limited on street dining options. Limited active transport options. Vacant Shops and large vacant spaces such as the Commercial Hotel and The Shed.	<p>Focused planning to encourage centres of activity in Benalla and main villages, connected where possible by all ability and active transport. Cityscape landscape and maintenance, and provision of strategic outdoor dining areas/food truck parking areas.</p> <p>The CBD precinct presents a major event delivery opportunity for the centre of Benalla.</p> <p>The Commercial Hotel and The Shed are major assets in the centre of Benalla. They could be developed to facilitate a number of small operators providing a range of eating/drinking/brewing/distilling products, with set opening hours as part of the rental conditions. This could double as a small tourism and food/drink business incubator.</p>
<b>Council Events</b>	Currently not maximising the benefits of existing events.	Benalla Street Art Festival is a major asset that can continue to be capitalised on, especially if event infrastructure is developed. Consider supporting events leading up to and after the main event such as street art workshops, creative kids weekends/weeks (in holidays), local Indigenous art exhibitions, car art (to align with the Winton Motor Raceway), rural landscape art prizes, and others that align with the existing product and brand. As these evolve, they may become splinter events that can be held at different times to spread the value across the year.
<b>Event Infrastructure</b>	Lack of staffing and resourcing to attract and develop new events in the region.  Limited fit for purpose event spaces.	<p>Developing an events space and providing planning assistance and council resourcing could open up new opportunities for events in the centre of Benalla and at the Winton Motor Raceway, including music and cultural festivals.</p> <p>Identifying niche and business events that align with the pillars of arts and culture, nature and outdoors and sports, and are the right size for the available accommodation and facilities can open up new event markets.</p>
<b>Sport</b>	Need for further investment in current facilities. Lack of appropriate supporting accommodation.	<p>Inclusion in priority project advocacy document seeking funding for planned \$15m indoor sports centre redevelopment, which presents the opportunity to attract sporting camps, training and competitions. Work to attract accommodation offering that will support this development.</p> <p>Gliding and hot air ballooning are significant opportunities for Benalla to develop, with potential for packaging experiences designed for the high end market. A state of the art mini golf development at the Benalla Golf Course can add to the suite of attractions and activities in the region.</p>

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>VISITOR SERVICING</b>		
<b>Food and beverage</b>	Not enough Sunday and night time dining options for visitors, not enough aligned to what the travelling market is seeking.	<p>Build on the proximity and connection to primary producers, including vineyards and local bakers to build a strong food and beverage culture. Work to develop local markets and meet the maker experiences.</p> <p>Develop a needs assessment for food and beverage, with identified opportunities for develop. Provide access to data for potential investors, and develop an investment prospectus.</p> <p>Develop pop-up initiatives with local charity groups for fundraising at strategic times to attract passing traffic – such as Friday afternoon woodfired pizzas delivered by the local Rotary club and advertise directly to traffic passing to go skiing in winter, or to coincide with major Winton Motor Raceway or other events.</p>
<b>Opening hours</b>	Limited options for visitors on weekends/public holidays and in the evenings.	Attract visitors through activations, popups and events to engender confidence in existing businesses to open longer or more visitor-friendly hours. Through the tourism association, build business cases and educating operators on the benefits of hours that suit visitors.
<b>Accommodation</b>	Limited range of accommodation in the region, specifically a 4.5 star accommodation to support workers and raceway participants, and glamping/cabin/tiny home options that are aligned with what the market is seeking.	<p>Negotiate to attract a 4.5 star hotel, such as Quest or Mantra to Benalla. Work to provide a business case and planning advice to engender confidence in the investment.</p> <p>Develop an investment prospectus to attract investment in unique accommodation in the region.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for collaboration of existing accommodation and experiences to be packaged in rail/ride or weekend getaway packages. Champion these and market them.</p>

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>Connectivity and accessibility</b>	<p>Limited riding and walking connectivity throughout the town, including wayfinding, signage and interpretation.</p> <p>East-West public bus offers services throughout Benalla, although limited at night and with limited information available for visitors on how to engage with the service.</p> <p>No Uber service or Uber Eats, and taxi services are limited, acknowledging the existing taxi providers are important.</p> <p>Only one EV charging station, not always reliable.</p> <p>Lack of availability of signage and information in other languages.</p> <p>Lack of mobility accessible services and facilities for visitor attractions.</p>	<p>Develop path and track networks to connect the region with bike paths from the centre to key points of interest – including the Winton Wetlands and Silo Art. Integrate coordinated signage with interpretation and a storytelling theme throughout the network for legibility.</p> <p>Build out a rail/ride/art/eat product for people to have a full experience from Melbourne where they can catch the train and hire a car or e-bike to visit key areas of interest. Fully packaged, could also include accommodation. Attract investment in/development of car hire, e-bike, e-scooter and bike hire business.</p> <p>Enhance the visibility and accessibility of bus and taxi services to improve the visitor experience in Benalla and surrounds.</p> <p>Capitalise on the significant accessible tourism market by building out accessibility in all new products and feature it in marketing.</p> <p>Work to attract an EV supercharging station. Work with Winton Motor Raceway to develop EV racing events to build out EV and sustainability credentials.</p> <p>Accessible tourism infrastructure and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) grants available to assist with initiatives to improve accessibility. Explore offering brochures in languages other than English. Develop a basic map of the accessibility of the visitor journey and identify gaps in offering to address.</p>
<b>Visitor Information Centre (VIC)</b>	<p>New building needing to create more compelling reasons for visitors to engage.</p>	<p>Attract a food and beverage tenant to the new VIC with strict guidelines on opening hours, food quality and fit out that aligns with market preferences (such as local produce, daily specials, fresh options, Sunday and holiday hours). Offer marketing support to ensure business success, including collaborating with film screenings and events.</p> <p>As tours or bike/e-bike/scooter hire are developed for the area, work to establish the VIC as a central booking area and hub for visitor activity. Ensure that during the Benalla Street Art Festival and other events, the VIC has a key role to play in the events through acting as a hub or event space.</p> <p>Partner with the Benalla Art Gallery, Benalla Migrant Camp and local Indigenous groups to build the arts and culture credentials of the VIC. This could potentially be done through expanding</p>

THEME	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
		<p>local art collections, displaying some artworks and/or extending the local art shop from the gallery into the VIC.</p> <p>Consider inviting in local pop-up stalls into the VIC to expand the local creative offering.</p> <p>Maximise new Benalla Cinema space through special screenings and film festivals, potentially creating a new film festival for gliding and ballooning, or something similar.</p>
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT		
<b>Tourism association</b>	No tourism association or chamber of commerce.	<p>Develop and facilitate a local tourism industry association with regular industry catchups, including guest speakers from the RTO and state government, providing insight and information on the Benalla and High Country brand, the nature of visitors, trends, and opportunities, as well as showcasing new and developing product in the region.</p> <p>Through the association, build out partnerships within and across the regions for marketing and packaging.</p>
<b>Brand toolkit</b>	Limited use of the Benalla “See the art in everything” brand across the region.	Harness the power of the Benalla brand by ensuring it is fully rolled out across the region through developing a simple brand use toolkit and guideline. Continually educate and communicate on the brand through the tourism association.
<b>Workforce</b>	Limited availability of hospitality and tourism workforce and accommodation to support them.	Facilitate innovative education and training for workers to gain qualifications in hospitality and tourism management could attract workforce or retain young people. Work with broader programs across Victoria being rolled out to address housing shortages.

# Product development opportunities

Core to realising Benalla and surrounds' potential is the stimulation of market interest and opportunities for the market to actively commercially participate in tourism. While visitors enjoy the benefits of free experiences such as trails and public art, they also enjoy spending money on experiences that matter to them.

There is a growing appetite for experiences that are unique – first of, best of, only of. Understanding where Benalla and surrounds' distinctiveness lies within the region, the state and the world – what is special about the experiences and then building product around it – is central to connecting with and attracting both investment and visitors.

Sometimes the stimulation of investment and innovation requires inspiration. While the opportunities identified above can build a solid visitor economy that enables entrepreneurial investment, attracting that investment requires work.

Throughout the consultation and research process, several tourism product development opportunities arose for Benalla and surrounds. Although there are a lot of attractions in Benalla Rural City, the lack of bookable or commercial product in places a burden on the local government and makes it harder to attract further private investment. The following products were some of the major opportunities identified through this process:

**Benalla Art Gallery redevelopment.** A key major attractor of high value visitors for the region, need to fully fund the redevelopment, as well as ongoing management, maintenance and marketing.

**Commercial Hotel redevelopment.** At the heart of the town and a major element of the urban landscape, this hotel offering lunches and dinners that are locally connected and aligned to the market's preferences, could present a major opportunity for the city.

**Winton Motorsport Museum and Events Precinct.** Already housing many vehicles at the Winton Motor Raceway, the Motorsport Museum would offer a further attraction in the region, supplemented by the planned events space and major outdoor event facility.

**Brewery/distillery development.** Although there are many of these, offering locally brewed or distilled product to be sold at a venue in the city would meet market needs. This could be developed in partnership with the local brewery and wineries open in the Glenrowan region.

**Benalla Migrant Camp.** As such a significant historical site, the Benalla Migrant Camp needs to be developed as a product and also form an integrated part of the broader aviation precinct.

**Winton Wetlands.** Building on what is already a major attraction, develop the Winton Wetlands with track and trail infrastructure and interpretation. Examine potential for standing camps or other unique accommodation opportunities.

**Bike and e-bike hire.** Supporting the development of track and trail infrastructure, a bike and e-bike hire business could activate these and the businesses around them, such as cafes and museums.

**Creative hub.** Leverage the theme of a Creative City – or to aspire to be a UNESCO Creative City. Becoming a UNESCO Creative City like Ballarat means that the city places creativity and cultural industries at the heart of its development plan at the local level. This would also promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

**Yorta Yorta, Taungurung & Bpangerang Tours.** Surrounded by important places on Country, there are many opportunities to develop storytelling experiences.



A photograph of a long, straight dirt road stretching into the distance. The road is flanked by numerous dead, bleached trees with intricate, skeletal branches. The ground is covered in dry, scrubby vegetation. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue. The word "Strategy" is written in a large, white, cursive script across the lower half of the image, centered over the road.

Strategy





# Strategic priorities

Successful tourism growth can play a leading role in contributing to the Rural City's objectives of being a sustainable, thriving and cohesive community. This plan has identified many opportunities to develop tourism in Benalla and surrounds, but ensuring that resources and efforts are efficiently and effectively deployed is critical.

The **goal** of the priorities in this plan is that:

Tourism brings to Benalla and surrounds an enhanced quality of life through building connections with culture and heritage and improving services, infrastructure, economy and employment.

The **vision** we are seeking to achieve is that:

Benalla and surrounds is a place that excites and intrigues visitors to stop for an hour, a day or a few days to experience the best mix of culture, nature and rural charm in Victoria.

And the **mission** for Benalla Rural City is:

Benalla Rural City works to merge art with life in the region through creating meaningful experiences that connect people with our place.

To achieve these, this plan has identified three main strategic priorities to develop tourism in Benalla and surrounds: Grow our share, grow our value and build our industry. The following describes the key actions and metrics in delivering these.







## Grow our share

The 5 million visitors travelling to Victoria's High Country each year are within striking distance for Benalla and surrounds' tourism industry to grow. Benalla and surrounds currently attracts less than 7 per cent of these visitors. Additionally, many more are passing by on the Hume Freeway with no plans to stop.

Many of these potential visitors are unaware of the depth of experiences available in Benalla and surrounds. To be able to attract them, Benalla and surrounds needs to ensure that these potential visitors are aware of the experiences available, and that the experiences are compelling enough to draw them in. Some will only want to stay for an hour, some for a day or more, but none will stay if they don't first know about what is on offer.

**Aim:** Getting people in the door.

**Metric:** Increasing the number of visitors coming to Benalla and surrounds.

**Actions:** Growing Benalla and surrounds' share of the visitors to the region can be done through:

- Developing a strategic marketing strategy
- Improving signage from the Hume
- Improving online presence
- Partnering with operators who service the region.



## Grow our value

Currently Benalla and surrounds attracts an average overnight spend of \$131 per night and \$100 per day trip, compared with \$264 per night and \$154 per day trip in Victoria's High Country region. This indicates a major opportunity for the region to grow the value of the visitor economy through increasing spend.

Getting visitors in the door is just the first step in building value for the visitor economy. Once visitors arrive, the region needs to capture them with compelling experiences and stories that connect them to the place and the art. Essential to this is the availability of quality local food and beverages, and accommodation that is not just a hotel room but an experience they aspire to.

**Aim:** Getting people to stay longer and spend more once they arrive.

**Metrics:** Increasing the visitor dwell time and spend in Benalla and surrounds.

**Actions:** Providing opportunities to spend through product and experiences by:

- Improving signage within town for all experiences
- Improving the quality of experiences
- Improving the number of experiences
- Increasing length of stay by increasing the quality and range of accommodation options.
- Improving visitor servicing, including food and beverage and retail offerings



## Build our industry

Attracting and retaining visitors is a team sport, and team building in Benalla and surrounds' tourism industry is critical. Currently the businesses operating within Benalla and surrounds' visitor economy have little advocacy, access to insights, or platform to develop a strategic approach to tourism.

Not everyone is aware that they are operating within the visitor economy. Starting with the Chamber of Commerce, building knowledge capability and connections is the first step to building a stronger industry.

**Aim:** Building and equipping the tourism industry to collaborate, develop and strategically plan to grow and build value from the visitor economy.

**Metric:** Increasing the number of paid tourism products and experiences in Benalla and surrounds.

**Actions:** Building and supporting the industry through:

- Attracting public and private investment
- Delivering and maintaining infrastructure
- Creating a tourism association
- Developing resources to support the industry, including access to visitor insights, strategic planning and collaboration workshops, brand toolkit, regular events and newsletters.



A photograph of two large hot air balloons at night. The balloon on the left has a colorful patchwork pattern of yellow, orange, red, and black, with a bright flame visible in its burner. The balloon on the right is primarily dark blue and purple with orange and yellow sections, also with a bright flame. In the background, a large crowd of people is gathered on a grassy field, with some buildings and trees visible under a dark sky. The text "Action Plan" is overlaid in a large, white, handwritten-style font across the center of the image.

# Action Plan




# Prioritised action plan


The limited human and financial resources of Benalla Rural City requires a strategic approach to be able to achieve the goals and priorities of this plan. Within each of the strategic priorities there are key actions that can deliver immediate outcomes, and others that require longer term commitment.

## 1. What we can do now

The below table identifies key actions from the opportunities identified that can be delivered **in the short term**.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 <b>Build our industry</b>	<b>1.1. Develop and deliver a Priority Projects Prospectus to attract government funding</b>	<p>Create a government funding prospectus with priority projects for the region that is supported and endorsed by key visitor economy partners, such as Tourism North East. This needs to be collaboratively developed across business and operators in the region and stretches well beyond the visitor economy. Ownership of this document across industry and partners is critical.</p> <p>Key inclusions in the priority projects should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Benalla Art Gallery Stage 2 redevelopment (Masterplan) so it can attract major touring exhibitions</li> <li>- Benalla Migrant Camp Masterplan and funding</li> <li>- Aviation Precinct Masterplan</li> <li>- Winton Motor Raceway proposal for the motor racing museum, corporate function centre, expanding outdoor events and camping facilities, etc.</li> <li>- Winton Wetlands next stage of master planning, including riding/walking connectivity</li> <li>- CBD precinct development</li> <li>- Planned \$15m indoor sports redevelopment, which presents the opportunity to attract sporting camps, training and competitions.</li> </ul>



STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 <b>Grow our share</b>	<b>1.2. Develop and deliver private investment prospectuses for targeted areas of development</b>	<p>Create a series of simple enterprise investment prospectuses, communicating a red carpet, not red tape approach with business concierge and planning assistance for key areas that require development, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food and beverage, specifically a brew pub/distillery experience in Benalla open during the evenings, pop-up food vans and/or trucks, dining experiences with connections to local produce.</li> <li>- Accommodation, specifically 4.5 star and unique accommodation including glamping/cabin/tiny home options, destination caravan park.</li> <li>- Tours and experiences, specifically bike and e-bike hire, tours, indigenous storytelling and experiences.</li> </ul> <p>Work with clubs and operators to develop an understanding of the needs of special interest and sports visitors, such as Motor Raceway participants, golf visitors, gliding club, racing club and others to inform the investment prospectuses.</p>
	<b>1.3. Establish a tourism association</b>	<p>Develop and facilitate a local tourism industry association with regular industry catchups, including guest speakers from the RTO and state government, providing insight and information on the Benalla and High Country brand, the nature of visitors, trends, and opportunities, as well as showcasing new and developing product in the region. Establish a governance framework as an incorporated association with a board consisting of local operators, council representatives and Tourism North East representative as a start. This could be part of the Benalla Business Network.</p>
	<b>1.4. Write a simple, actionable tourism marketing strategy</b>	<p>Develop a simple, clear and prioritised tourism marketing strategy that leverages small investment to maximum impact – such as engaging strategically with influencers, media, famils, advocacy and programs with Tourism North East and Visit Victoria.</p>
	<b>1.5. Build Hume Freeway presence</b>	<p>Harness Benalla and surrounds' art credentials to build a highway installation (potentially as part of the Benalla Street Art Festival) to draw people in to Benalla and surrounds and show what it has to offer. Brand aligned signage on the Hume Freeway to indicate the brand and start the journey of brand recognition.</p>

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 <b>Grow our value</b>	<b>1.6. Conduct a signage and wayfinding audit and develop strategy</b>	Conduct a signage audit and develop a strategy to coordinate the visitor experience and engage more people from the Hume Highway and into major attractions. Key objectives should be to extend the connective brand aligned signage from the Hume Freeway into the town and into main experience areas with a storytelling theme to support the Benalla brand to connect the attractions together.
	<b>1.7. Maximise the investment in the Visitor Information Centre (VIC)</b>	<p>Prioritise attracting a food and beverage tenant to the VIC with strict conditions on opening hours, using local produce and brand alignment.</p> <p>Expand the Benalla VIC Business Plan to include connecting with Benalla Art Gallery retail, curating art displays/murals, shopfitting to a high standard, maximising the theatre space, tours and events hub and bike/e-bike hire.</p>



## 2. What we can do next


The below table identifies key actions from the opportunities identified that can be delivered **once the initial actions have been delivered**.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 <b>Build our industry</b>	<b>2.1. Support the tourism association with regular events and workshops</b>	<p>Develop and facilitate a local tourism industry association with regular industry catchups, including guest speakers from the RTO and state government, providing insight and information on the Benalla and High Country brand, the nature of visitors, trends, and opportunities, as well as showcasing new and developing product in the region. Build business cases and educating operators on the benefits of hours that suit visitors.</p> <p>Harness the power of the Benalla brand by ensuring it is fully rolled out across the region through developing a simple brand use toolkit and guideline. Continually educate and communicate on the brand through the tourism association.</p>
	<b>2.2. Build the core Benalla and surrounds visitor experience</b>	Build out a rail/ride/art/eat product for people to have a full experience from Melbourne where they can catch the train and hire an e-bike to visit key areas of interest. Fully packaged, could also include accommodation. Attract investment in/development of e-bike, e-scooter and bike hire business.
 <b>Grow our share</b>	<b>2.3. Clean up online presence</b>	<p>Negotiate the rationalisation of VisitBenalla.com.au to support Enjoybenalla.com.au, align with brand and build consistent message.</p> <p>Further develop the events calendar on EnjoyBenalla.com.au with regular social posts and updates, as well as profiles on operators and products coming online.</p>
	<b>2.4. Attract events</b>	Create an events prospectus/web page extension for Benalla and surrounds that highlights the existing events spaces (capacity, flexibility, facilities, etc), catering opportunities, group activities, access and accommodation options with an arts and culture overlay. Once complete, work with Business Events and Events Victoria, professional conference and events organisers to identify key information required for decision making, and assist with on-ground planning.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 <b>Grow our value</b>	<b>2.5. Ensure Benalla and surrounds' arts and culture credentials are underpinned by adequate funding</b>	Allocate dedicated and secure funding streams for ongoing operation, marketing and promotion of the Benalla Art Gallery and Benalla Street Art Festival.
	<b>2.6. Attract targeted accommodation investment</b>	<p>Negotiate to attract a 4.5 star hotel, such as Quest or Mantra to Benalla. Work to provide a business case and planning advice to engender confidence in the investment. Develop an investment prospectus to attract investment in unique accommodation in the region.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for collaboration of existing accommodation and experiences to be packaged in rail/ride or weekend getaway packages. Champion these and market them.</p>
	<b>2.7. Pop-up food and drink park development</b>	<p>Work to attract food trucks and vans to support times of high traffic and low servicing.</p> <p>Develop pop-up initiatives with local charity groups for fundraising at strategic times to attract passing traffic – such as Friday afternoon woodfired pizzas delivered by the local Rotary club and advertise directly to traffic passing to go skilling in winter, or to coincide with major Winton Motor Raceway or other events.</p>
	<b>2.8. Support business investment for future development of commercial areas in the CBD</b>	<p>The CBD precinct present a major event delivery opportunity for the centre of Benalla. Pedestrianising Fawckner drive and developing event infrastructure adjacent to the Commercial Hotel.</p> <p>The CBD is a major asset for Benalla. If the CBD Masterplan is realised, it could develop and facilitate a number of small operators providing a range of eating/drinking/brewing/distilling products.</p>
	<b>2.9. Winton Wetlands Visitor experience plan</b>	Masterplan that maps and builds the visitor experience right to the heart of Benalla rather than being a finite experience. Improve signage and wayfinding to encourage more engagement from visitors, with storytelling and connective pathways with water stations and stops from Benalla.
	<b>2.10. Cycling and e-bike connectivity plan connecting Benalla to Winton Wetlands</b>	Develop path and track networks to connect the region with bike paths from the centre to key points of interest – including the Winton Wetlands and Silo Art. Integrate coordinated signage with interpretation and a storytelling theme throughout the network for legibility.

### 3. What we can do in the longer term

The below table identifies key actions from the opportunities identified that can be delivered once the initial actions have been delivered, **with an aim to deliver by the end of the life of this plan.**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	ACTION	DETAILS
 <b>Build our industry</b>	<b>3.1. Build collaborative tourism products and packages aimed at Benalla and surrounds' target markets</b>	Through the tourism association, build out partnerships within and across the regions for marketing and packaging.
	<b>3.2. Support the industry by attracting innovative workforce training delivery</b>	Facilitate innovative education and training for workers to gain qualifications in hospitality and tourism management could attract workforce or retain young people.
 <b>Grow our share</b>	<b>3.3. Build social media presence</b>	Ensure seamless connection with social media and harness the power of influencers to organically build audience, especially through events.
 <b>Grow our value</b>	<b>3.4. Maximise commercial opportunities from Benalla Art Gallery visitors</b>	<p>After upgrades are completed, work to attract blockbuster exhibitions to build the reputation of Benalla Art Gallery and collection. Build relationships with local quality local food and beverage producers and Indigenous storytellers to provide full cultural experience.</p> <p>In collaboration with peer regional galleries in the region, build a 'cultural road trip' product and collaboratively market it.</p> <p>Explore new commercial opportunities for Benalla Art Gallery and Benalla Street Art Festival, such as pop up installations connecting with other key attractions such as Winton Wetland &amp; Winton Motor Racing Precinct, growing masterpiece collections and offering online shops for creative pieces.</p>
	<b>3.5. Maximise commercial opportunities from special interest sports and niche visitors</b>	Building on insights gained from developing the investment prospectuses, develop a targeted niche tourism development strategy to develop collaborations with local providers and accommodation packages to maximise benefit of sports and niche visitors.
	<b>3.6. Scope new event opportunities that align with Benalla and surrounds' offering</b>	Explore new event opportunities, including local markets and food events.







## 4.2 Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget

Ref: 1941942552-3368  
Cathy Fitzpatrick – Manager Finance  
Robert Barber – General Manager Corporate  
Peter Keane – Chief Executive Officer

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### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents for adoption the *Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget*.

### BACKGROUND

The Council at its meeting on Wednesday 30 April 2025 resolved:

1. *That the proposed 2025/26 Budget be endorsed for public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days from 1 May 2025.*
2. *That submissions relating to the proposed 2025/26 Budget be heard at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 4 June 2025.*
3. *That the Council consider submissions relating to the proposed 2025/26 Budget at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 18 June 2025.*
4. *That the Council consider the adoption of the 2025/26 Budget at a meeting of the Council on Wednesday 25 June 2025.*

Public notice of the proposed *2025/26 Budget* was given on the Council's website on 2 May 2025 and in the *Benalla Ensign* on Wednesday 7 May 2025.

Feedback was also sought via the Council's website and promoted on social media.

A community information session was held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at the Benalla Civic Centre.

The submission period closed 5pm Thursday 29 May 2025. At the close of the submission period four submissions were received.

In accordance with the Council's *Governance Rules 2020*, submitters were invited to address the Finance and Planning Committee at its meeting on 4 June 2025.

Hamish McPherson from Benalla Waminda Community House spoke in support of their submission. Due to illness, Mr Wood was unable to attend the meeting, however, a statement was read aloud on his behalf.

Submissions were considered by the Council at its Finance and Planning Committee meeting on 18 June 2025.

### DISCUSSION

The *2025/26 Budget* has been distributed under separate cover and is available for download from the Council's website.



## **Operating result**

The budgeted operating result is a surplus of \$3.979 million. The surplus is primarily due to the receipt of \$5.940 million in capital grant income. Modest surpluses are projected in 2026/27: \$481,000; 2027/28: \$468,000; and 2028/29: \$311,000.

## **Rates and charges**

Based on an increase of 3 per cent in line with the Victorian Government's Rate Capping system, Rates and Charges are budgeted to raise \$24.013 million a \$939,000 increase from the 2024/25 forecast.

## **Rate capping**

The Victorian Government's rate capping system establishes limits by which Victorian councils can increase rates in a year without seeking an exemption from the Minister for Local Government.

The Minister has set the maximum percentage increase in average rates for the 2025/26 financial year at 3 per cent. The Council has not sought a rate cap exemption.

It is recommended that the full 3 per cent rate cap be applied in 2025/26 to:

- Ensure the organisation's ongoing long-term financial sustainability. The Council's long-term financial sustainability needs to be closely monitored. A \$610,000 underlying deficit is budgeted for 2025/26 with modest underlying surpluses budgeted for the remaining four years.

The Council's financial sustainability continues to be heavily reliant on grant funding from other levels of government and a 3 per cent increase will not cover all cost increases, particularly those associated with capital works, incurred by local government.

- Cater for a growing municipality that requires new infrastructure, programs and services.

## **Rate revenue**

In the 2024/25 financial year, general rates and the Municipal Charge are forecast to raise \$18.047 million. In 2025/26 revenue from general rates and the Municipal Charge will increase by \$750,000 to \$18.798 million.

## **Waste Service Charges**

In 2024/25, it is forecast that Waste Service charges will raise \$4.534 million. In 2025/26 it is budgeted for Waste Service charges to raise \$4.711 million an increase of \$176,000.

Assumptions in the *Financial Plan 2023-2032* include a 5 per cent increase in service charges, however, it is recommended that Waste Service charges increase by three per cent in line with the State Government's rate cap.

The increase is intended to cover costs associated with escalating waste and recycling regulations and standards, and rising rehabilitation and cell construction costs.

## Operating Grants

Operating grants totaling \$7.621 million are budgeted to be received in 2025/26.

Full receipt of the Council's Financial Assistance Grant allocation (\$5.614 million) is budgeted to be received in 2025/26. Subsequent to the release of the proposed *2025/26 Budget*, the Council was advised that it will receive an extra \$196,000 in Financial Assistance Grants. The additional funding will be brought to account at the first quarter *2025/26 Budget* review.

## Cash Position

The Council's year-end cash position for the term of the budget is detailed in the table below:

Year (30 June)	2026	2027	2028	2029
Cash and cash equivalents	\$21.525m	\$22.106m	\$22.915m	\$25.280m

## Borrowings

No new borrowings were proposed in the draft *2025/26 Budget*, however, it is now recommended that borrowings of \$2 million be included in the adopted 2025/26 Budget.

In the 2025/26 financial year it is anticipated that Council will undertake procurement processes for significant building projects. It is considered prudent to provide a \$2 million Council funding option. These additional loan funds may not be required, however, they do provide the Council with an additional funding option depending on the outcome of construction contract procurement processes.

If the loan is drawn down in full, projected borrowings as at 30 June 2026 would be \$3.290 million.

With a \$2 million loan, the Council's 2025/26 Loans and Borrowings ratio (interest bearing loans and borrowings/rate revenue) would increase from 5.95 percent to 10.12 per cent. The Indebtedness ratio (non-current liabilities/own source revenue) increases from 45.44 percent to 52.57 per cent.

## Key Strategies

The *2024/25 Budget* included allocations to the development of several Council-funded key strategies that will not be completed this financial year. It is proposed that allocations for these strategies be included in the *2025/26 Budget* as detailed in the table below:

Strategy/Plan	2024/25 Budget	2024/25 Spend	Proposed 2025/26 Allocation
Barkly Street Precinct Master Plan	\$100,000	\$0	\$100,000
Churchill Recreation Reserve Masterplan	\$100,000	\$0	\$100,000
Benalla Station Precinct connection to Benalla CBD Precinct Plan	\$50,000	\$0	\$50,000
Benalla Planning Scheme Review	\$60,000	\$0	\$40,000

## 2025/26 Budget Additional Expenditure

The *2025/26 Budget* includes increased expenditure of \$403,000 as detailed in the table below:

	Funding Type	Expenditure
Second general manager (salary and on-costs).	New	\$231,000
Arborist assessment of trees across the municipality (\$150,000 over two years).	New	\$75,000
Increase in immunisation contract cost. New contract \$64,000 per annum, current budget allocation \$33,000.	Additional	\$31,000
Development of Safe Work Method Statements and review of safe operating procedures.	New	\$30,000
Feasibility study into the installation of closed-circuit television cameras in the Benalla CBD	New	\$10,000
Benalla Seniors and Community Centre masterplan (budget submission)	New	\$10,000
Subscription to Elfant cloud platform – integration to Enjoy Benalla website	New	\$10,000
Buy Local promotion	New	\$6,000
Waiving of Benalla Town Hall Hire fees for Waminda Community House (budget submission)	New	NA
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$403,000</b>

## Adjusted underlying result

Adjusted underlying results in the proposed 2025/26 Budget are detailed in the table below. The underlying results comprise adjusted underlying revenue less total expenditure.

Year	2026	2027	2028	2029
<b>Underlying Result Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	(\$610,000)	\$234,000	\$217,000	\$61,000

The adjusted underlying deficit of \$610,000 in the 2025/26 financial year is primarily due to the removal of \$4.380 million of non-recurrent capital grants.

Future underlying results may be positively impacted by the following factors:

- Additional revenue in lieu of rates due to increasing income from solar farms. The proposed *2025/26 Budget* includes revenue in lieu of rates of \$426,000. It is estimated that by the end of the forecast period (FY 2028/29) solar farm income will exceed \$2 million.
- An organisational review to be undertaken over 2025/26 by the recently appointed CEO.
- Adoption of a new Benalla Landfill and Resource Recovery Centre Masterplan.
- An operational review of the Benalla Landfill and Resource Recovery Centre to identify costs savings.

## Capital Works

Capital works total \$12.629 million in 2025/26. Key areas of expenditure include:

- Roads \$4.178 million
- Property and Buildings \$2.268 million
- Waste Management \$2.226 million
- Plant and Equipment \$1.331 million
- Recreational, leisure and community facilities \$1 million
- Drainage \$718,000.

New asset expenditure is \$3.370 million, asset renewal \$8.259 million and asset upgrade \$1 million.

## Proposed 2025/26 Fees and Charges

Fees and Charges for 2025/26 have been reviewed in line with a proposed 3 per cent increase in line with the rate cap. However, for practical purposes some fees have been rounded to the nearest dollar.

An exception is domestic customer charges at the Benalla Transfer Station. It is recommended for the second consecutive year that no increases be applied. The proposed zero increase in 2025/26 offsets the significant increase incurred by customers when volume-based charging was introduced in 2022/23.

Please note that some legislated fees have not yet been finalised.

User fees are budgeted to raise \$2.973 million in the 2025/26 financial year. Benalla Landfill and Resource Recovery Centre Waste Management Services income decreases by \$754,000 due to the cessation of two municipal waste disposal contracts at 30 June 2025<sup>96</sup>.

## ***COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025 IMPLICATIONS***

### Leadership

- *Good governance.*
- *High performance culture.*
- *Engaged and informed community.*

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Subsequent to the release of the proposed 2025/26 Budget, the following additional revenue items the table below have been identified. These items and associated expenditure will be brought to account at the first quarter *2025/26 Budget* review:

Benalla Art Gallery Redevelopment – Growing Regions Fund Program grant	\$2,965,000
Benalla Local Development Strategy Implementation – Forestry Transition grant	\$500,000
Additional Financial Assistance Grant Program additional funding	\$196,000
Saleyards Road Dog Park – Open Space For Everyone – New and Upgraded Dog Parks (Round 2) grant	\$150,000
Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop Centre Neighbourhood Battery – 100 Neighbourhood Battery Fund (Round 2) grant	\$100,000
Benalla Rural City Council Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2030 – Transport Accident Commission Local Government Grant Program funding	\$50,000

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has been undertaken at the ‘Involve’ level on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to the used
Involve	Work with the community to ensure their concerns or aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed. Feedback provided on how community input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Community input sought via ‘the Hive’ community engagement website prior to the development of the proposed budget.</li><li>Public report presented to Council.</li><li>Public notice in the <i>Benalla Ensign</i> and on the Council website.</li><li>Proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> exhibited and feedback invited.</li><li>Promotion of proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> via media, website and social media.</li><li>Community information forum conducted.</li><li>Proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> made available in hardcopy for review at key locations.</li><li>Audit and Risk Committee members invited to provide feedback.</li></ul>

Once adopted, the *2025/26 Budget* will be made available on the Council’s website and hardcopies displayed at key Council locations.

## GENDER EQUALITY ACT

Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* the Council is required to undertake a gender impact assessment when developing or reviewing any policy, program or service that has a direct and significant impact on the public.

A gender equity assessment found the proposed *2025/26 Budget* as having an overall neutral gender impact.



## LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

The proposed *2025/26 Budget* has been developed to ensure compliance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and *Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2020*.

## OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

## CONCLUSION

The *2025/26 Budget* is based on sound financial principles, prudent debt management and responsible asset management.

As detailed in the *2025/26 Budget*, the Council continues to face challenges to its long-term financial sustainability. Rate capping, the escalation of costs for materials and services, ageing infrastructure and the changing nature of government funding all put at risk the financial sustainability of small rural councils and their ability to meet community expectations for new and improved infrastructure and services.

To address the Council's underlying deficit position, service delivery will continue to be examined to identify efficiencies, other levels of government will be advocated to increase funding and other potential revenue sources explored, including ongoing residential development and the attraction of business and industry to expand and vary Benalla Rural City's rate base.

### Recommendation:

#### 1. Adoption of the *2025/26 Budget*

That the Council:

- having considered the results of the community engagement undertaken by Council, the *2025/2026 Budget* presented to this meeting be adopted by Council in accordance with section 94 of the *Local Government Act 2020*.
- note the *2025/26 Budget* also incorporates a Budget for the 2026/2027, 2027/2028 and 2028/2029 Financial Years.

#### 2. Fees and Charges

- That each of the fees, charges and penalties referred to in the Schedule of Fees of Charges (the Schedule) contained in the Budget be fixed in the respective amounts specified in the Schedule.

#### 3. Declaration of Rates and Charges

Amount Intended to be Raised:

An amount of \$23,509,000 (or such greater amount as is lawfully levied as a consequence of this Recommendation being adopted) be declared as the amount which Council intends to raise by general rates, the municipal charge and the waste management charge (described later in this Recommendation), which amount is calculated as follows:

General Rates	\$16,446,000
Municipal Charge	\$2,352,000
Waste Management Charge	\$4,711,000

#### **4. General Rates**

**4.1 That the Council declare a general rate in respect of the 2025/2026 Financial Year.**

**4.2 That the Council further declared that the general rate be raised by the application of differential rates.**

**4.3 That the differential rate be respectively declared for rateable land having the respective characteristics specified below, which characteristics will form the criteria for each differential rate so declared.**

**4.3.1 Residential Land (Benalla)**

**Any land which is:**

- a) used or adapted to being used primarily for residential purposes; and**
- b) located within the Benalla urban area.**

**4.3.2 Residential Land (Rural Township)**

**Any land which is:**

- a) used or adapted to being used primarily for residential purposes; and**
- b) located outside the Benalla urban area in an area zoned TZ (Township Zone) or LDRZ (Low Density Residential Zone) under the Benalla Planning Scheme.**

**4.3.3 Business Land**

**Any land which is:**

- a) used or adapted to being used primarily for commercial or industrial purposes; and**
- b) not Rural Land – Farmland.**

**4.3.4 Vacant Land (Benalla)**

**Any land:**

- a) on which no habitable building is erected; and**
- b) which is located within the Benalla urban area.**

**4.3.5 Vacant Land (Rural Township)**

**Any land:**

- a) on which no habitable building is erected; and**
- b) is located outside the Benalla urban area in an area zoned TZ (Township Zone) or LDRZ (Low Density Residential Zone) under the Benalla Planning Scheme.**

**4.3.6 Rural Land – Non-Farming**

**Any land which is:**

- a) not Rural Land – Farmland; and**
- b) located in an area zoned RLZ (Rural Living Zone), FZ (Farm Zone), RCZ (Rural Conservation Zone) or UFZ (Urban Floodway Zone) under the Benalla Planning Scheme.**

**4.3.7 Rural Land – Farmland**

**Any land which is:**

- a) not less than 2 hectares in area; and**
- b) used primarily for the business of grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig-farming, poultry farming, fish farming, tree farming, bee-keeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit growing, the growing of crops of any kind or combination of any such activities.**

- 4.4** Differential rate will be determined by multiplying the Capital Improved Value of each rateable land (categorised by the characteristics described in paragraph 4.3 of this Resolution) by the relevant percentages indicated in the following table:

Property Category	Cents in the dollar of Capital Improved Value
Residential (Benalla)	0.003409
Residential (Rural Township)	0.002590
Business properties	0.005378
Vacant Land (Benalla)	0.005014
Vacant Land (Rural Township)	0.003068
Rural Land (Non-Farming)	0.002444
Rural Land (Farmland)	0.001938

- 4.5** considers that each differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of Council functions, and that:
- 4.5.1** the respective objectives of each differential rate be those specified in the Schedule to this Resolution; and
  - 4.5.2** the respective types or classes of land which are subject to each differential rate be those defined in the Schedule to this Resolution; and
  - 4.5.3** the respective uses and levels of each differential rate in relation to those respective types or classes of land be those described in the Schedule to this Resolution; and
  - 4.5.4** The relevant:
    - a) uses of;
    - b) geographical locations of;
    - c) planning scheme zoning of; and
    - d) types of building onthe respective types or classes of land be those identified in the Schedule to this Resolution.
- 4.6** Confirm that no amount is fixed as the minimum amount payable by way of general rate in respect of each rateable land within the municipal district.
- 4.7** In accordance with Section 4(1) of the *Cultural and Recreational Lands Act 1963*, the amount of rates payable in respect of each of the rateable lands to which that Act applies be determined by having regard to the services provided by Council in relation to such lands and having regard to the benefit to the community derived from such recreational lands. This amount shall be 0.00396833 multiplied the Capital Improved Value of that rateable land.
- 5. Municipal Charge**
- 5.1** That the Council declare a Municipal Charge in respect of the 2025/2026 Financial Year.
  - 5.2** That the Municipal Charge be declared to cover some of the Council's administrative costs.

5.3 That the Municipal Charge be in an amount of \$286.00 for each rateable property within the municipal district.

**6. Waste Management Charge**

6.1 That the Council declare a waste management charge in respect of the 2025/2026 Financial Year.

6.2 That the waste management charge be declared for the collection and disposal of refuse, and be levied in respect of all rateable land within the municipal district.

6.3 That the waste management charge be in the sum of, and be based on the criteria, specified below:

Type of Receptable Made Available for Provision of Service	Per Rateable Property
<b>Urban Areas</b>	
80 lt Organic - 80 lt Waste with Recycle	\$424.50
120 lt Organic - 80 lt Waste with Recycle	\$469.50
240 lt Organic - 80 lt Waste with Recycle	\$565.00
80 lt Organic - 120 lt Waste with Recycle	\$518.00
120 lt Organic - 120 lt Waste with Recycle	\$612.50
240 lt Organic - 120 lt Waste with Recycle	\$706.00
80 lt Organic - 240 lt Waste with Recycle	\$800.50
120 lt Organic - 240 lt Waste with Recycle	\$893.50
240 lt Organic - 240 lt Waste with Recycle	\$988.00
<b>Rural Areas</b>	
80 lt Waste with Recycle	\$424.50
120 lt Waste with Recycle	\$612.50
240 Waste with Recycle	\$988.00
<b>Additional Collection Options</b>	
Additional Bin - Organic	\$280.00
Additional Bin - Waste	\$224.00
Additional Bin – Recycle	\$239.00
Weekly Collection – Waste	\$246.00
Weekly Collection - Recycle	\$202.50

**7. Incentive**

That no incentive be declared for the early payment of the general rates, municipal charge or waste management charge previously declared.

**8. Extra Instalment Options**

That the Council may, in addition to payment quarterly on the dates specified in section 167 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, by further Resolution, specify other options as to the manner in which the general rates, Municipal Charge and waste management charge may be paid.

**9. Consequential**

**9.1 That it be recorded that the Council requires any person to pay interest on any amounts of rates and charges which:**

**9.1.1 that person is liable to pay; and**

**9.1.2 have not been paid by the date specified for their payment, such interest to be calculated in accordance with section 172(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*.**

**9.2 That the General Manager Corporate be authorised to levy and recover the general rates, municipal charge and waste management charge in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989* and *Local Government Act 2020*.**

**10. That the *2025/26 Budget* include new borrowings of \$2,000,000 to potentially part-fund Building projects in the 2025/26 Capital Works Program.**

**That all submitters on the proposed *2025/26 Budget* be written to thanking them for their submission and advising of the Council's decision to adopt the *2025/26 Budget*.**

**11. That the Chief Executive Officer be authorised to effect minor administrative and wording changes to the *2025/26 Budget* if required.**



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### 4.3 Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029

Ref: 1941942552-3367

Cathy Fitzpatrick – Manager Finance  
Robert Barber – General Manager Corporate

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#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents for consideration and adoption the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029*.

#### BACKGROUND

The Council at its meeting on Wednesday 30 April 2025 resolved:

1. *That the draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 be endorsed for public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days from 1 May 2025.*
2. *That submissions relating to the draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 be heard at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 4 June 2025.*
3. *That the Council consider submissions relating to the draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 18 June 2025.*
4. *That the Council consider the adoption of the Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 at a meeting of the Council on Wednesday 25 June 2025.*

Public notice of the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* was given on the Council's website on 2 May 2025 and in the *Benalla Ensign* on Wednesday 7 May 2025.

Feedback was also sought via the Council's website and promoted on social media.

A community information session was held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at the Benalla Civic Centre.

The submission period closed 5pm Thursday 29 May 2025. At the close of the submission period two submissions were received.

In accordance with the Council's *Governance Rules 2020*, submitters were invited to address the Finance and Planning Committee at its meeting on 4 June 2025. No speakers spoke in support of their submissions.

Submissions were considered by the Council at the Finance and Planning Committee meeting on 18 June 2025.

#### DISCUSSION

Following the consideration of submissions, Councillor and Council staff input, the following change was made to the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029*:

- Wording under 5.10 was updated to read: Council continues to review its payment options to provide maximum benefit to the community.

The *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* is attached as **Appendix 1**.

## ***COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025***

### **Leadership**

- *Good governance.*
- *High performance culture.*
- *Engaged and informed community.*

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* has been developed from an existing budget allocation.

### **GENDER EQUALITY ACT**

Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* the Council is required to undertake a gender impact assessment when developing or reviewing any policy, program or service that has a direct and significant impact on the public.

A gender equity assessment found the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* has an overall neutral gender impact.

### **LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

The draft *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* has been developed to ensure compliance with the *Local Government Act 2020*, *Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2020* and with reference to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions *Local Government Revenue and Rating Plan Guide*.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement has been undertaken at the 'Involve' level on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as detailed in the table below:

<b>Level of Public Participation</b>	<b>Promise to the community</b>	<b>Techniques to the used</b>
Involve	Work with the community to ensure their concerns or aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed. Feedback provided on how community input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Community input sought via 'the Hive' community engagement website prior to the development of the proposed budget.</li><li>▪ Public report presented to Council.</li><li>▪ Public notice in the <i>Benalla Ensign</i> and on the Council website.</li><li>▪ Draft Plan to be exhibited and feedback invited.</li><li>▪ Promotion of Draft Plan via media, website and social media.</li><li>▪ Community information forum conducted.</li><li>▪ Draft Plan made available in hardcopy for review at key locations.</li></ul>

Once adopted, the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* will be made available on the Council's website and hardcopy format at key Council locations.

## **OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

## **CONCLUSION**

The *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* has been developed using a comprehensive deliberative engagement program. All submitters who participated in the process are thanked for their valuable contribution.

### **Recommendation:**

**That the *Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029* be adopted.**



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# **Benalla Rural City Council**

# **Revenue and**

# **Rating Plan**

# **2025-2029**

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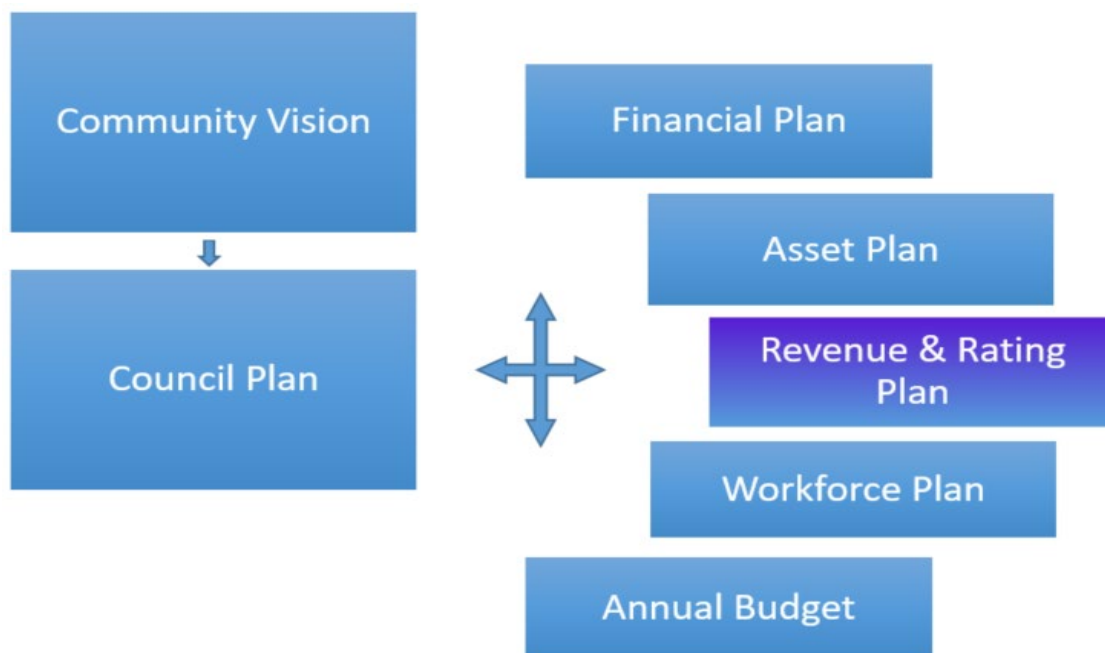
# 1 Purpose

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires each council to prepare a Revenue and Rating Plan to cover a minimum period of four years following each Council election. The Revenue and Rating Plan establishes the revenue raising framework within which the Council proposes to work.

The purpose of the Revenue and Rating Plan is to determine the most appropriate and affordable revenue and rating approach for Benalla Rural City Council which in conjunction with other income sources will adequately finance the objectives in the council plan.

This plan is an important part of Council's integrated planning framework, all of which is created to help Council achieve its vision to provide a sustainable, thriving and cohesive community where lifestyle, culture, health and wellbeing are supported by strong leadership and community partnership.

Strategies outlined in this plan align with the objectives contained in the Council Plan and will feed into our budgeting and long-term financial planning documents, as well as other strategic planning documents under our Council's strategic planning framework.



This plan will explain how Council calculates the revenue needed to fund its activities, and how the funding burden will be apportioned between ratepayers and other users of Council facilities and services.

In particular, this plan will set out decisions that Council has made in relation to rating options available to it under the *Local Government Act 2020* to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of rates across property owners. It will also set out principles that are used in decision making for other revenue sources such as fees and charges.

It is also important to note that this plan does not set revenue targets for Council, it outlines the strategic framework and decisions that inform how Council will go about calculating and collecting its revenue.

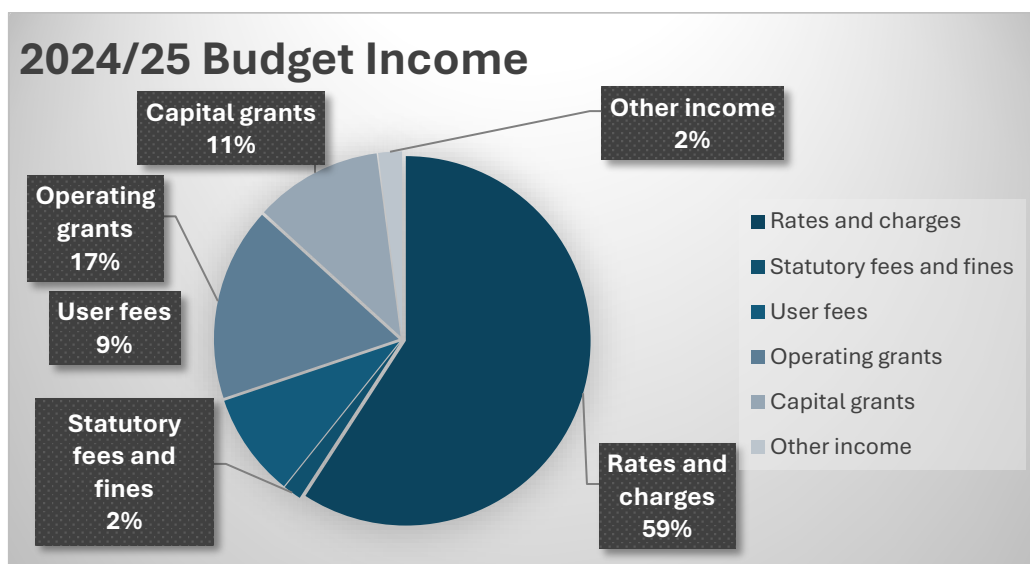


## 2 Introduction

Council provides a number of services and facilities to our local community, and in doing so, must collect revenue to cover the cost of providing these services and facilities.

Council's revenue sources include:

- rates and charges
- waste and garbage charges
- government grants
- statutory fees and fines
- user fees
- Other income (combine in graph below)
  - cash and non-cash contributions from other parties (ie developers, community groups)
  - interest from investments
  - sale of assets.



Rates are the most significant revenue source for Council and make up nearly 60 per cent of its annual income. The introduction of rate capping under the Victorian Government's Fair Go Rates System (FGRS) has required councils to increasingly focus on the long-term financial sustainability of council. The FGRS restricts Council from increasing rates revenue beyond the annual rate cap set by the Minister, unless a variation is sought through the Essential Services Commission. It remains a key focus of Council to maintain existing services and service levels along with maintaining the necessary community infrastructure to support these services.

A key purpose of this Plan is to consider Council's rating options under the Act, and how Council's choices in applying these options contribute towards meeting an equitable rating strategy.

It is important to note from the outset that the strategic focus of this Plan is very different to that which is discussed in the Annual Budget. In the Annual Budget the key concern is the quantum of rates required to be raised for Council to deliver the services and capital expenditure required. In this Strategy, the focus instead is on how this quantum will be equitably distributed amongst Council's ratepayers. The Plan will canvass the limited range of rating options available to Council under the Act.

The Council also provides a wide range of services to the community, often for a fee or charge. The nature of these fees and charges generally depends on whether they relate to statutory or discretionary services. Some of these, such as statutory planning fees are set by State Government statute and are commonly known as regulatory fees. In these cases, councils usually have no control over service pricing. However, in relation to other services, Council has the ability to set a fee or charge and will set that fee based on the principles outlined in this Revenue and Rating Plan Plan.

Council revenue can also be adversely affected by changes to funding from other levels of government. Some grants are tied to the delivery of council services, whilst many are tied directly to the delivery of new community assets, such as roads or sports pavilions. It is important for Council to be clear about what grants it intends to apply for, and the obligations that grants create in the delivery of services or infrastructure.

### 3 Executive Summary and Recommendations

The selection of rating philosophies and the choice between the limited rating options available under the Act is a challenge for all councils to develop.

It is likely that a perfect approach is almost impossible to achieve in any Local Government environment.

Four key platforms currently form the basis of the current approach to rating at Benalla Rural City Council that are recommended for continuation. They are that:

- a. Rates will continue to be based principally on an ad-valorem basis (i.e. based on the valuation of the various properties);
- b. Council will continue to apply a service charge to fully recover the cost of the collection and disposal of waste;
- c. Council will continue to apply differential rating to ensure all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council; and
- d. Council continues to levy a Municipal charge.

The following recommendations will be implemented over the duration of the 2025-2029 Plan:

1. From 1 July 2025, update the name and description of the “Residential (Benalla)” differential rate to “General Rate” and ‘All land except where otherwise classified’ respectively to ensure there are no anomalies where properties do not fit into an established differential rate.
2. To ensure the objective of the differential is being met, from 1 July 2025, gradually increase the differential rate for “Vacant Land (Rural Township)” so it is aligned with “Vacant Land (Benalla)” and can be consolidated as a single differential rate on 1 July 2029.
3. From 1 July 2029, consolidate the “Vacant Land (Benalla)” and “Vacant Land (Rural Township)” differential rates.
4. From 1 July 2025, update the name and description of the “Rural (Non Farming)” differential rate to “Rural 1 Rate” to reduce ambiguity in the previous name and description and to be less prescriptive about how small- to medium-sized rural properties are being used.
5. From 1 July 2025, update the name and description of the “Rural (Farmland)” differential rate to “Rural 2 Rate” to clearly define that this differential is applicable to ratepayers whose total rural landholdings are not less than 40Ha in area.

These recommendations are designed to reduce gaps in the existing framework, whilst also simplifying the framework to better align with the rating taxation principles.

## 4 Community Engagement

The Revenue and Rating Plan outlines Council's decision-making process on how revenues are calculated and collected. The following public consultation process will be/was followed to ensure due consideration and feedback is received from relevant stakeholders.

Revenue and Rating Plan community engagement process:

- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan prepared by officers.
- Draft Revenue and Rating Plan placed on public exhibition in April / May with public submissions invited.
- Community engagement through local news outlets and social media in 24 April – 22 May 2025
- Hearing of public submissions (4 June 2025).
- Revenue and Rating Plan adopted by the Council on 25 June 2025.

## 5 Rates and Charges

Rates are property taxes that allow Council to raise revenue to fund essential public services to cater to their municipal population. Importantly, it is a taxation system that includes flexibility for councils to use different tools in its rating structure to accommodate issues of equity and to ensure fairness in rating for all ratepayers.

Council has established a rating structure comprised of three key elements. These are:

- **General Rates** - Based on property values (using the Capital Improved Valuation methodology), which are indicative of capacity to pay and form the central basis of rating under the *Local Government Act 1989*.
- **Service Charges** - A 'user pays' component for council services to reflect benefits provided by Council to ratepayers who benefit from a service.
- **Municipal Charge** - A 'fixed rate' portion per property to cover some of the administrative costs of Council.

Striking a proper balance between these elements will help to improve equity in the distribution of the rate burden across residents.

Council makes a further distinction when applying general rates by applying rating differentials based on the purpose for which the property is used. That is, whether the property is used for residential, commercial/industrial, or farming purposes. This distinction is based on the concept that different property categories should pay a fair and equitable contribution, taking into account the benefits those properties derive from the local community.

The Benalla Rural City Council rating structure comprises seven differential rates. These rates are structured in accordance with the requirements of Section 161 'Differential Rates' of the *Local Government Act 1989*, and the Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating 2013.

The differential rates are currently set as follows:

- General (formerly Residential - Benalla) 100%
- Residential (Rural Township) 78%
- Business 163%
- Vacant Land (Benalla) 146%
- Vacant Land (Rural Township) 73%
- Rural 1 (formerly Rural – Non Farming) 73%
- Rural 2 (formerly Rural – Farmland) 57%

The Council also levies a municipal charge. The municipal charge is a minimum rate per property and declared for the purpose of covering some of the administrative costs of the Council. In applying the municipal charge, the Council ensures that each ratable property in the municipality makes a contribution.

The formula for calculating General Rates, excluding any additional charges, arrears or additional supplementary rates is:

- Valuation (Capital Improved Value) x Rate in the Dollar (Differential Rate Type).

The rate in the dollar for each rating differential category is included in Council's annual budget.

Planning for future rate increases is therefore an essential component of the long-term financial planning process and plays a significant role in funding both additional service delivery and the increasing costs related to providing Council services.

Council is aware of the balance between rate revenue (as an important income source) and community sensitivity to rate increases. With the introduction of the State Government's Fair Go Rates System, all rate increases are capped to a rate declared by the Minister for Local Government, which is announced in December for the following financial year.

Council currently uses a service charge to fully recover the cost of Council's waste services and provide for future landfill rehabilitation costs. The garbage service charge is not capped under the Fair Go Rates System, and Council will continue to allocate surplus funds from this charge towards the provision of waste services.

## 5.1 Rating Legislation

The legislative framework set out in the *Local Government Act 1989* determines council's ability to develop a rating system. The framework provides significant flexibility for Council to tailor a system that suits its needs.

Section 155 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may declare the following rates and charges on rateable land:

- General rates under Section 158
- Municipal charges under Section 159
- Service rates and charges under Section 162
- Special rates and charges under Section 163.

The recommended strategy in relation to municipal charges, service rates and charges and special rates and charges are discussed later in this document.

In raising Council rates, Council is required to primarily use the valuation of the rateable property to levy rates. Section 157 (1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides Council with three choices in terms of which valuation base to utilise. They are: Site Valuation, Capital Improved Valuation (CIV) and Net Annual Value (NAV).

The advantages and disadvantages of the respective valuation basis are discussed further in this document. Whilst this document outlines Council's strategy regarding rates revenue, rates data will be contained in the Council's Annual Budget as required by the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Section 94(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* states that Council must adopt a budget by 30 June each year (or at another time fixed by the Minister) to include:

- a) the total amount that the Council intends to raise by rates and charges;
- b) a statement as to whether the rates will be raised by the application of a uniform rate or a differential rate
- c) a description of any fixed component of the rates, if applicable
- d) if the Council proposes to declare a uniform rate, the matters specified in section 160 of the *Local Government Act 1989*
- e) if the Council proposes to declare a differential rate for any land, the matters specified in section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*

Section 94(3) of the *Local Government Act 2020* also states that Council must ensure that, if applicable, the budget also contains a statement:

- a) that the Council intends to apply for a special order to increase the Council's average rate cap for the financial year or any other financial year; or
- b) that the Council has made an application to the ESC for a special order and is waiting for the outcome of the application; or
- c) that a special Order has been made in respect of the Council and specifying the average rate cap that applies for the financial year or any other financial year.

This plan outlines the principles and strategic framework that Council will utilise in calculating and distributing the rating burden to property owners, however, the quantum of rate revenue and rating differential amounts will be determined in the annual Benalla Rural City Council budget.

In 2019 the Victorian State Government conducted a Local Government Rating System Review. The Local Government Rating System Review Panel presented their final report and list of recommendations to the Victorian Government in March 2020. The Victorian Government subsequently published a response to the recommendations of the Panel's report. However, at the time of publication (2025) many of the recommended changes have not yet been implemented, and timelines to make these changes have not been announced.

## 5.2 Rating Principles

Taxation Principles:

When developing a rating strategy, in particular with reference to differential rates, a Council should give consideration to the following good practice taxation principles:

- Wealth Tax
- Equity
- Efficiency



- Simplicity
- Benefit
- Capacity to Pay
- Diversity.

## **Wealth Tax**

The “wealth tax” principle implies that the rates paid are dependent upon the value of a ratepayer’s real property and have no correlation to the individual ratepayer’s consumption of services or the perceived benefits derived by individual ratepayers from the expenditures funded from rates.

## **Equity**

Horizontal equity - ratepayers in similar situations should pay similar amounts of rates (ensured mainly by accurate property valuations, undertaken in a consistent manner, their classification into homogenous property classes and the right of appeal against valuation). Vertical equity - those who are better off should pay more rates than those worse off (the rationale applies for the use of progressive and proportional income taxation. It implies a “relativity” dimension to the fairness of the tax burden).

## **Efficiency**

Economic efficiency is measured by the extent to which production and consumption decisions by people are affected by rates.

## **Simplicity**

How easily a rates system can be understood by ratepayers and the practicality and ease of administration.

## **Benefit**

The extent to which there is a nexus between consumption/benefit and the rate burden.

## **Capacity to Pay**

The capacity of ratepayers or groups of ratepayers to pay rates.

## **Diversity**

The capacity of ratepayers within a group to pay rates.

The rating challenge for Council therefore is to determine the appropriate balancing of competing considerations.

## **Rates and Charges Revenue Principles**

Property rates will:

- be reviewed annually
- not change dramatically from one year to next; and
- be sufficient to fund current expenditure commitments and deliverables outlined in the Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

Differential rating should be applied as equitably as is practical and will comply with the *Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating 2013*.

### 5.3 Determining which valuation base to use

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council has three options as to the valuation base it elects to use. They are:

- **Capital Improved Value (CIV)** - Value of land and improvements upon the land.
- **Site Value (SV)** - Value of land only.
- **Net Annual Value (NAV)** - Rental valuation based on CIV.

For residential and farm properties, NAV is calculated at 5 per cent of the Capital Improved Value. For commercial and industrial properties, NAV is calculated as the greater of the estimated annual rental value or 5 per cent of the CIV.

#### Capital Improved Value (CIV)

Capital Improved Value is the most commonly used valuation base by local government with over 90 per cent of Victorian councils applying this methodology. Based on the value of both land and all improvements on the land, it is generally easily understood by ratepayers as it equates to the market value of the property.

Section 161 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides that a Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate if:

- a) It uses the capital improved value system of valuing land; and
- b) It considers that a differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.

Where a council does not utilise CIV, it may only apply limited differential rates in relation to farm land, urban farm land or residential use land.

#### Advantages of using Capital Improved Value (CIV)

- CIV includes all property improvements, and hence is often supported on the basis that it more closely reflects “capacity to pay”. The CIV rating method takes into account the full development value of the property, and hence better meets the equity criteria than Site Value and NAV.
- With the increased frequency of valuations (previously two year intervals, now annual intervals) the market values are more predictable.
- The concept of the market value of property is more easily understood with CIV rather than NAV or SV.
- Most councils in Victoria have now adopted CIV which makes it easier to compare relative movements in rates and valuations across councils.
- The use of CIV allows council to apply differential rates which greatly adds to council’s ability to equitably distribute the rating burden based on ability to afford council rates.

#### Disadvantages of using CIV

The main disadvantage with CIV is the fact that rates are based on the total property value which may not necessarily reflect the income level of the property owner as with pensioners and low-income earners.

## **Site value (SV)**

There are currently no Victorian councils that use this valuation base. With valuations based simply on the valuation of land and with only very limited ability to apply differential rates, the implementation of Site Value in a Benalla Rural City Council context would cause a shift in rate burden from the industrial/commercial sectors onto the residential/farming sector, and would hinder council's objective of a fair and equitable rating system.

There would be further rating movements away from modern townhouse style developments on relatively small land parcels to older established homes on quarter acre residential blocks. In many ways, it is difficult to see an equity argument being served by the implementation of site valuation in the Benalla Rural City Council.

### **Advantages of Site Value**

- There is a perception that under site value, a uniform rate would promote development of land, particularly commercial and industrial developments. There is, however, little evidence to prove that this is the case.
- Scope for possible concessions for urban farm-land and residential use land.

### **Disadvantages of using Site Value**

- Under SV, there will be a significant shift from the industrial/commercial sector onto the residential sector of council. The percentage increases in many cases would be in the extreme range.
- SV is a major burden on property owners that have large areas of land. Some of these owners may have much smaller/older dwellings compared to those who have smaller land areas but well developed dwellings - but will pay more in rates. A typical example is flats, units, or townhouses which will all pay low rates compared to traditional housing styles.
- The use of SV can place pressure on Council to give concessions to categories of landowners on whom the rating burden is seen to fall disproportionately (e.g. farm land and residential use properties). Large landowners, such as farmers for example, are disadvantaged by the use of site value.
- SV will reduce Council's rating flexibility and options to deal with any rating inequities due to the removal of the ability to levy differential rates.

## **Net annual value (NAV)**

NAV, in concept, represents the annual rental value of a property. However, in practice, NAV is loosely linked to capital improved value for residential and farm properties. Valuers derive the NAV directly as 5 per cent of CIV.

In contrast to the treatment of residential and farm properties, NAV for commercial and industrial properties are assessed with regard to actual market rental. This differing treatment of commercial versus residential and farm properties has led to some suggestions that all properties should be valued on a rental basis.

Overall, the use of NAV is not largely supported. For residential and farm ratepayers, actual rental values pose some problems. The artificial rental estimate used may not represent actual market value, and means the base is the same as CIV but is harder to understand.

## Recommended valuation base

In choosing a valuation base, councils must decide on whether they wish to adopt a differential rating system (different rates in the dollar for different property categories) or a uniform rating system (same rate in the dollar). If a council was to choose the former, under the *Local Government Act 1989* it must adopt either of the CIV or NAV methods of rating.

Benalla Rural City Council applies Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to take into account the fully developed value of the property. This basis of valuation takes into account the total market value of the land plus buildings and other improvements.

## 5.4 Rating Differentials

Differential rating allows council to shift part of the rate burden from some groups of ratepayers to others, through different “rates in the dollar” for each class of property.

Section 161(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* outlines the requirements relating to differential rates, which include:

- a) A Council may raise any general rates by the application of a differential rate, if Council considers that the differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.
- b) If a Council declares a differential rate for any land, the Council must specify the objectives of the differential rate, which must be consistent with the equitable and efficient carrying out of the Councils functions and must include the following:
  - i. A definition of the types or classes of land which are subject to the rate and a statement of the reasons for the use and level of that rate.
  - ii. An identification of the type or classes of land which are subject to the rate in respect of the uses, geographic location (other than location on the basis of whether or not the land is within a specific ward in Council’s district).
  - iii. Specify the characteristics of the land, which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

Once the Council has declared a differential rate for any land, the Council must:

- a) Specify the objectives of the differential rates;
- b) Specify the characteristics of the land which are the criteria for declaring the differential rate.

The purpose is to ensure that Council has a sound basis on which to develop the various charging features when determining its revenue strategies and ensure that these are consistent with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

The general objectives of each of the differential rates are to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council. There is no limit on the number or types of differential rates that can be levied, but the highest differential rate can be no more than four times the lowest differential rate.

Council believes each differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of council functions. Details of the objectives of each differential rate, the classes of land which are subject to each differential rate and the uses of each differential rate are set out on the following pages.

## General

### Objectives:

The objective of the General differential rate is to ensure that all rateable land makes an equitable financial contribution to the cost of carrying out the functions of Council, including (but not limited to) the:

- construction and maintenance of infrastructure assets
- development and provision of health and community services
- provision of general administration and support services.

### Types and Classes:

All land except where otherwise classified.

### Use of Rate:

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the Differential rate is the rate that the Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 45.48 per cent.

### Level of Rate:

100 per cent of General Rate.

### Use of Land:

Any use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### Geographic Location:

Wherever located in the municipality.

### Planning Scheme Zoning:

Any zone within the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### Types of Buildings:

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.



## **Residential (Rural Township)**

### **Objectives:**

The objective of the Residential (Rural Township) differential rate is that the reduced benefits received by the lower density properties.

### **Types and Classes:**

Any land used primarily for residential purposes and on which there is a building affixed to the land which is designed and constructed primarily for residential purposes and can lawfully be used as a place of residence.

### **Use of Rate:**

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

The level of the Differential rate is the rate that the Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 1.34 per cent.

### **Level of Rate:**

78 per cent of General Rate.

### **Use of Land:**

Any residential use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### **Geographic Location:**

Situated in the Rural Township area.

### **Planning Scheme Zoning:**

The characteristics of planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of land which will be subject to the rate applicable to this category. The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the Benalla Planning Scheme, will be TZ – Township Zone or LDRZ – Low Density Residential Zone. Residences established in other zones with existing non-conforming rights or planning approval are also eligible for inclusion in this category.

### **Types of Buildings:**

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.

## **Business**

### **Objectives:**

The objective of the Business differential rate is to recognise the benefits derived by this class of property, including higher infrastructure investment and general support services.

### **Types and Classes:**

Any land used primarily for a commercial or industrial business purpose which is used primarily for commercial or industrial purposes or is obviously adapted or designed to be used primarily for commercial or industrial purposes.

### **Use of Rate:**

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the level of the Differential rate is the rate that the Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 14.94 per cent

### **Level of Rate:**

163 per cent of General Rate.

### **Use of Land:**

Any business use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### **Geographic Location:**

Wherever located in the municipal district.

### **Planning Scheme Zoning:**

The characteristics of planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of land which will be subject to the rate applicable to this category. The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the Benalla Planning Scheme will be, C1Z – Commercial 1 Zone, C2Z – Commercial 2 Zone, IN1Z – Industrial 1 Zone, IN2Z – Industrial 2 Zone, TZ – Township Zone, IN3Z – Industrial 3 Zone or MUZ – Mixed Use Zone. Businesses established in other zones (i.e. GRZ – General Residential Zone) with existing non-conforming rights or planning approval are also eligible for inclusion in this category.

### **Types of Buildings:**

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.

## **Vacant Land (Benalla)**

### **Objectives:**

The objective of the Vacant Land (Benalla) is to encourage development of this class of land.

### **Types and Classes:**

Any land on which no dwelling improvements (excluding sheds or other minor constructions) have been constructed and is land where a permit to build a dwelling is reasonably expected to be approved.

### **Use of Rate:**

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

The level of the Differential rate is the rate that Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 2.57 per cent.

### **Level of Rate:**

146 per cent of General Rate.

### **Use of Land:**

Any use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### **Geographic Location:**

Situated in the Benalla Urban area.

### **Planning Scheme Zoning:**

The characteristics of planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of land which will be subject to the rate applicable to this category. The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the Benalla Planning Scheme, will be LDRZ – Low Density Residential Zone (situated adjacent to the Benalla urban area), GRZ – General Residential Zone, UFZ - Urban Flood Zone or MUZ – Mixed Use Zone.

### **Types of Buildings:**

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.

## **Vacant Land (Rural Township)**

### **Objectives:**

The objective of the Vacant Land (Rural Township) differential rate is to encourage development of this class of property while taking into account the reduced benefits received by lower density properties.

### **Types and Classes:**

Any land on which no dwelling improvements (excluding sheds or other minor constructions) have been constructed and is land where a permit to build a dwelling is reasonably expected to be approved.

### **Use of Rate:**

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

The level of the Differential rate is the rate that the Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 0.06 per cent.

### **Level of Rate:**

73 per cent of General Rate.

### **Use of Land:**

Any use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### **Geographic Location:**

Situated in a Rural Township area.

### **Planning Scheme Zoning:**

The characteristics of planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of land which will be subject to the rate applicable to this category. The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the Benalla Planning Scheme, will be TZ – Township Zone or LDRZ – Low Density Residential Zone (situated in a Rural Township).

Properties located adjacent to established Township precincts, with a land area of generally less than 5ha and located in the Farm Zone – FZ, will be included in this category.

### **Types of Buildings:**

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.

## **Rural 1**

### **Objectives:**

The objective of the Rural 1 differential rate is to recognise the reduced infrastructure investment and provision of services to this class of property.

### **Types and Classes:**

Any land which:

1. does not have the characteristics of Residential (Rural Township) land, Business land, Vacant Land (Rural Township) land, or Rural 2 Land; and
2. is not less than 2ha.

### **Use of Rate:**

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

The level of the Differential rate is the rate that the Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 12.81 per cent.

### **Level of Rate:**

73 per cent of General Rate.

### **Use of Land:**

Any use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### **Geographic Location:**

Situated in a rural location (excluding areas immediately adjacent to rural township precincts).

### **Planning Scheme Zoning:**

The characteristics of planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of land which will be subject to the rate applicable to this category. The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the Benalla Planning Scheme, will be RLZ – Rural Living Zone or FZ – Farming Zone or RCZ – Rural Conservation Zone or UFZ – Urban Floodway Zone.

### **Types of Buildings:**

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.



## **Rural 2**

### **Objectives:**

The objective of the Rural 2 differential rate is to recognise the reduced infrastructure investment and provision of services to this class of property. The differential rate also recognises the land stewardship and amenity that large rural holdings provide to the rural landscape.

### **Types and Classes:**

Any land:

- 1.1 which is not less than 40ha in area; or
- 1.2.(i) is a component of a single farm enterprise [as defined in Section 9A(5) of the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012], and when combined total an area not less than 40ha; and
- 1.2.(ii) is not less than 2ha.

### **Use of Rate:**

The money raised by the differential rate will be applied to the items of expenditure described in the Budget by Council. The level of the rate for land in this category is considered to provide for an appropriate contribution to Council's budgeted expenditure, having regard to the characteristics of the land.

The level of the Differential rate is the rate that Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above, in conjunction with all the other categories of property - 2024/25 revenue share is 22.81 per cent.

### **Level of Rate:**

57 per cent of General Rate.

### **Use of Land:**

Any use permitted under the Benalla Rural City Council Planning Scheme.

### **Geographic Location:**

Wherever located in the municipal district.

### **Planning Scheme Zoning:**

The characteristics of planning scheme zoning are applicable to the determination of land which will be subject to the rate applicable to this category. The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the Benalla Planning Scheme will be FZ – Farming Zone, RCZ – Rural Conservation Zone or subject to an approved land use activity, RLZ – Rural Living Zone or LDRZ – Low Density Residential Zone or IN1Z – Industrial One Zone.

### **Types of Buildings:**

All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the relevant financial year.

## Advantages of a differential rating system

The advantages of utilising a differential rating system summarised below are:

- There is greater flexibility to distribute the rate burden between all classes of property, and therefore link rates with the ability to pay and reflecting the tax deductibility of rates for commercial and industrial premises.
- Differential rating allows Council to better reflect the investment required by Council to establish infrastructure to meet the needs of the commercial and industrial sector.
- Allows Council to reflect the unique circumstances of some rating categories where the application of a uniform rate may create an inequitable outcome (e.g. Farming enterprises).
- Allows Council discretion in the imposition of rates to facilitate and encourage appropriate development of its municipal district in the best interest of the community.

## Disadvantages of a differential rating system

The disadvantages in applying differential rating summarised below are:

- The justification of the differential rate can at times be difficult for the various groups to accept giving rise to queries and complaints where the differentials may seem to be excessive.
- Differential rates can be confusing to ratepayers, as they may have difficulty understanding the system. Some rating categories may feel they are unfavourably treated because they are paying a higher level of rates than other ratepayer groups.
- Differential rating involves a degree of administrative complexity as properties continually shift from one type to another (e.g. residential to commercial,) requiring Council to update its records. Ensuring the accuracy/integrity of Council's data base is critical to ensure that properties are correctly classified into their right category.
- Council may not achieve the objectives it aims for through differential rating. For example, Council may set its differential rate objectives to levy a higher rate on land not developed, however it may be difficult to prove whether the rate achieves those objectives.

## 5.5 Municipal Charge

Another principle rating option available to Councils is the application of a Municipal Charge. Under Section 159 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may declare a Municipal Charge to cover some of the administrative costs of the Council. The legislation is not definitive on what comprises administrative costs and does not require Council to specify what is covered by the charge. A Council's total revenue from a Municipal Charge in a financial year must not exceed 20 per cent of the combined sum total of the Council's total revenue from the Municipal Charge and the revenue from general rates.

The arguments in favour of a Municipal Charge are similar to waste charges. They apply equally to all properties and are based upon the recovery of a fixed cost of providing administrative services irrespective of valuation. The same contribution amount per assessment to cover a portion of Council's administrative costs can be seen as an equitable method of recovering these costs.

The argument against a Municipal Charge is that this charge is regressive in nature and would result in lower valued properties paying higher overall rates and charges than they do at present. The equity objective in levying rates against property values is lost in a municipal charge as it is levied uniformly across all assessments.

Council's current position is that all assessments should equally contribute to the administrative costs of running council and therefore a Municipal Charge is currently applied.

## 5.6 Special Charge Schemes

The *Local Government Act 1989* recognises that councils need help to provide improved infrastructure for their local communities. Legislation allows councils to pass on the cost of capital infrastructure to the owner of a property that generally receives a unique benefit from the construction works. The technical explanation of a Special Charge comes from legislation (under the *Local Government Act 1989*) that allows councils to recover the cost of works from property owners who will gain special benefit from that work.

The purposes for which special rates and special charges may be used include road construction, kerb and channelling, footpath provision, drainage, and other capital improvement projects.

The special rates and charges provisions are flexible and can be used to achieve a wide range of community objectives. The fundamental principle of special rates and charges is that “special benefit” applies to those being levied. For example, they could be used to fund cooperative fire prevention schemes. This would ensure that there were no ‘free-riders’ reaping the benefits but not contributing to fire prevention.

Landscaping and environmental improvement programs that benefit small or localised areas could also be funded using special rates or charges.

There are currently no special rates or charge schemes in place.

## 5.7 Service Rates and Charges

Section 162 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides council with the opportunity to raise service rates and charges for any of the following services:

- a. Waste, recycling or resource recovery services;
- b. Any other prescribed service.

Additionally, section 221 of the *Local Government Act 1989* provides council with the opportunity to impose the above rates and charges on non-rateable land.

Council currently applies a service charge for the collection and disposal of refuse on urban properties (compulsory) and rural properties (compulsory, if applicable) and providing waste services for the municipality (street litter bins for instance). Council retains the objective of setting the service charge for waste at a level that fully recovers the cost of the waste services, including providing for the cost of rehabilitation of the council’s landfill once it reaches the end of its useful life.

It is recommended that council retain the existing waste service charge – should council elect not to have a waste service charge, this same amount would be required to be raised by way of an increased general rate – meaning that residents in higher valued properties would substantially pay for the waste service of lower valued properties.

Whilst this same principle applies for rates in general, the mix of having a single fixed charge combined with valuation driven rates for the remainder of the rate invoice provides a balanced and equitable outcome.

## 5.8 Cultural and Recreational Lands

The *Cultural and Recreational Land Act 1963* (CRLA) requires that Council undertake a separate process for the purpose of setting an applicable Charge 'in lieu of Rates' for eligible properties. The purpose of this policy is to set parameters for setting the CRLA charge.

If land is 'recreational lands' within the meaning of the CRLA, rates under the *Local Government Act 1989* are not levied. Instead, there is payable to Council charges being such amount as Council thinks 'reasonable'.

Council considers each year as part of its planning and budget setting process the services utilised by each property and the benefit their land provides to the community.

## 5.9 Payment in Lieu of Rates – Electricity Generators

Established under the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (EI Act), the Payment in Lieu of Rates (PiLoR) framework allows for councils and electricity generators to negotiate annual payments.

A methodology currently exists under the EI Act for estimating payments and applies to all coal, gas, hydro, and wind generators. In addition, solar has been added as a defined energy source so that councils can use the methodology to estimate payments for all solar generators coming online now and in the future.

## 5.10 Collection and Administration of Rates and Charges

The purpose of this section is to outline the rate payment options, processes, and the support provided to ratepayers facing financial hardship.

### Payment options

In accordance with section 167(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989* ratepayers have the option of paying rates and charges by way of four instalments. Payments are due on the prescribed dates below:

- 1st Instalment: 30 September
- 2nd Instalment: 30 November
- 3rd Instalment: 28 February
- 4th Instalment: 31 May

Council offers a range of payment options including:

- in person at Council offices (cheques, money orders, EFTPOS, credit/debit cards and cash)
- direct debit (on prescribed instalment due dates or monthly/fortnightly/weekly),
- BPAY
- Australia Post (over the counter, over the phone via credit card and on the internet)
- by mail (cheques and money orders only).

Council continues to review its payment options to provide maximum benefit to the community.

## **Interest on arrears and overdue rates**

Interest is charged on all overdue rates in accordance with Section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. The interest rate applied is fixed under Section 2 of the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*, which is determined by the Minister and published by notice in the Government Gazette.

## **Pensioner rebates**

Holders of a Centrelink or Veteran Affairs Pension Concession card or a Veteran Affairs Gold card which stipulates TPI or War Widow may claim a rebate on their sole or principal place of residence. Upon initial application, ongoing eligibility is maintained, unless rejected by Centrelink or the Department of Veteran Affairs during the annual verification procedure. Upon confirmation of an eligible pensioner concession status, the pensioner rebate is deducted from the rate account before payment is required by the ratepayer.

With regards to new applicants, after being granted a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), pensioners can then apply for the rebate at any time throughout the rating year. Retrospective claims up to a maximum of one previous financial year can be approved by Council on verification of eligibility criteria, for periods prior to this claim may be approved by the relevant government department.

## **Deferred payments**

Under Section 170 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may defer the payment of any rate or charge for an eligible ratepayer, allowing ratepayers an extended period of time to make payments or alternatively to forestall payments on an indefinite basis until the ratepayer ceases to own or occupy the land in respect of which rates and charges are to be levied.

Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to submit an Application for Rates Payment Plan or Rates Deferral form which is available at the council offices, on the Council website or which can be posted upon request.

## **Payment Plans**

Under Section 171B of the *Local Government Act 1989*, the Victorian State Government has prescribed more flexible payment plans as a means for councils to recover unpaid rates and charges in addition to the four instalments for payment currently mandated.

Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to submit an Application for Rates Payment Plan or Rates Deferral form which is available at the council offices, on the Council website or which can be posted upon request.

## **Financial Hardship**

It is acknowledged at the outset that various ratepayers may experience financial hardship for a whole range of issues and that meeting rate obligations constitutes just one element of a number of difficulties that may be faced. The purpose of a Financial Hardship Policy is to provide options for ratepayers facing such situations to deal with the situation positively and reduce the strain imposed by financial hardship.

Ratepayers may elect to either negotiate a rate payment plan or apply for a rate deferral. Ratepayers seeking to apply for such provision will be required to submit a Rates Deferment Application form or a Rate Arrangement Application which is available at the council offices or can be posted upon request.



## Debt recovery

Council makes every effort to contact ratepayers at their correct address, but it is the ratepayers' responsibility to properly advise Council of their contact details. The *Local Government Act 1989* Section 230 and 231 requires both the vendor and buyer of property, or their agents (e.g. solicitors and or conveyancers), to notify Council by way of notice of disposition or acquisition of an interest in land.

In the event that an account becomes overdue, Council will issue an overdue reminder notice which will include accrued penalty interest. In the event that the account remains unpaid, Council may take legal action without further notice to recover the overdue amount. All fees and court costs incurred will be recoverable from the ratepayer.

If an amount payable by way of rates in respect to land has been in arrears for three years or more, Council may take action to sell the property in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989* Section 181.

## Fire Services Property Levy

In 2012 the Victorian State Government passed legislation requiring the Fire Services Property Levy to be collected from ratepayers. Previously this was collected through building and property insurance premiums. The Fire Services Property Levy helps fund the services provided by Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and Country Fire Authority (CFA), and all levies collected by Council are passed on to the State Government.

The Fire Services Property Levy is based on two components, a fixed charge, and a variable charge which is linked to the Capital Improved Value of the property. This levy is not included in the rate cap and increases in the levy are at the discretion of the State Government.

State Governments proposes from July 2025, the Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL) will be replaced by the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF).

# 6 Other Revenue Items

## 6.1 User Fees and Charges

User fees and charges are those that Council will charge for the delivery of services and use of community infrastructure.

Examples of user fees and charges include:

- Kindergarten and Childcare fees
- Leisure Centre, Gym, and Pool visitation and membership fees
- Waste Management fees
- Aged and Health Care service fees
- Leases and facility hire fees.

The provision of infrastructure and services form a key part of council's role in supporting the local community. In providing these, council must consider a range of 'Best Value' principles including service cost and quality standards, value-for-money, and community expectations and values. Council must also balance the affordability and accessibility of infrastructure and services with its financial capacity and in the interests of long-term financial sustainability.

Councils must also comply with the government's Competitive Neutrality Policy for significant business activities they provide and adjust their service prices to neutralise any competitive advantages when competing with the private sector.

In providing services to the community, council must determine the extent of cost recovery for particular services consistent with the level of both individual and collective benefit that the services provide and in line with the community's expectations.

Services are provided on the basis of one of the following pricing methods:

- a. Market price
- b. Full cost recovery price
- c. Subsidised price

Market pricing (a) is where council sets prices based on the benchmarked competitive prices of alternate suppliers. In general market price represents full cost recovery plus an allowance for profit.

Market prices will be used when other providers exist in the given market, and council needs to meet its obligations under the government's Competitive Neutrality Policy.

*It should be noted that if a market price is lower than council's full cost price, then the market price would represent council subsidising that service. If this situation exists, and there are other suppliers existing in the market at the same price, this may mean that council is not the most efficient supplier in the marketplace. In this situation, council will consider whether there is a community service obligation and whether council should be providing this service at all.*

Full cost recovery price (b) aims to recover all direct and indirect costs incurred by council. This pricing should be used in particular where a service provided by council benefits individual customers specifically, rather than the community as a whole. In principle, fees and charges should be set at a level that recovers the full cost of providing the services unless there is an overriding policy or imperative in favour of subsidisation.

Subsidised pricing (c) is where council subsidises a service by not passing the full cost of that service onto the customer. Subsidies may range from full subsidies (i.e. council provides the service free of charge) to partial subsidies, where council provides the service to the user with a discount. The subsidy can be funded from council's rate revenue or other sources such as Commonwealth and state funding programs. Full council subsidy pricing and partial cost pricing should always be based on knowledge of the full cost of providing a service.

As per the Victorian Auditor General's Office report "Fees and charges - cost recovery by local government" recommendations, council has developed a user fee pricing policy to help guide the fair and equitable setting of prices. The policy outlines the process for setting fee prices and includes such principles as:

- both direct and indirect costs to be taken into account when setting prices
- accessibility, affordability and efficient delivery of services must be taken into account; and
- competitive neutrality with commercial providers.

Council will develop a table of fees and charges as part of its annual budget each year. Proposed pricing changes will be included in this table and will be communicated to stakeholders before the budget is adopted, giving them the chance to review and provide valuable feedback before the fees are locked in.

## 6.2 Statutory Fees and Charges

Statutory fees and fines are those which council collects under the direction of legislation or other government directives. The rates used for statutory fees and fines are generally advised by the state government department responsible for the corresponding services or legislation, and generally councils will have limited discretion in applying these fees.

Examples of statutory fees and fines include:

- Planning and subdivision fees
- Building and Inspection fees
- Infringements and fines
- Land Information Certificate fees.

Penalty and Fee Units are used in Victoria's Acts and Regulations to calculate the amount of a fine or a fee.

## 6.3 Grants

Grant revenue represents income usually received from other levels of government. Some grants are singular and attached to the delivery of specific projects, whilst others can be of a recurrent nature and may or may not be linked to the delivery of projects.

Council will pro-actively advocate to other levels of government for grant funding support to deliver important infrastructure and service outcomes for the community. Council may use its own funds to leverage higher grant funding and maximise external funding opportunities.

When preparing its financial plan, council considers its project proposal pipeline, advocacy priorities, upcoming grant program opportunities, and co-funding options to determine what grants to apply for. Council will only apply for and accept external funding if it is consistent with the Community Vision and does not lead to the distortion of Council Plan priorities.

Grant assumptions are then clearly detailed in council's budget document. No project that is reliant on grant funding will proceed until a signed funding agreement is in place.

## 6.4 Contributions

Contributions represent funds received by council, usually from non-government sources, and are usually linked to projects.

Contributions can be made to council in the form of either cash payments or asset hand-overs.

Examples of contributions include:

- Monies collected from developers under planning and development agreements.
- Monies collected under developer contribution plans and infrastructure contribution plans.
- Contributions from user groups towards upgrade of facilities.
- Assets handed over to council from developers at the completion of a subdivision, such as roads, drainage, and streetlights.

Contributions should always be linked to a planning or funding agreement. Council will not undertake any work on a contribution-funded project until a signed agreement outlining the contribution details is in place.

Contributions linked to developments can be received well before any council expenditure occurs. In this situation, the funds will be identified and held separately for the specific works identified in the agreements.

## **6.5 Interest on Investments**

Council receives interest on funds managed as part of its investment portfolio, where funds are held in advance of expenditure, or for special purposes. The investment portfolio is managed per council's investment policy, which seeks to earn the best return on funds, whilst minimising risk.

## **6.6 Borrowings**

Whilst not a source of income, borrowings can be an important cash management tool in appropriate circumstances. Loans can only be approved by council resolution. The following financial sustainability principles must be adhered to with new borrowings:

- Borrowings must only be applied for where it can be proven that repayments can be met in the Long Term Financial Plan.
- Borrowings must not be used to fund ongoing operations.
- Borrowings are appropriate for funding large capital works where the benefits are provided to future generations.
- Council will maintain its debt at levels which are sustainable, with:
  - indebtedness <60 per cent of rate and charges revenue, and
  - debt servicing cost <5 per cent of total revenue (excluding capital revenue).

**benalla.vic.gov.au**

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### PURPOSE OF REPORT

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

### BACKGROUND

Section 90 of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires that the Council must prepare and adopt a Council Plan for a period of at least the next four financial years after a general election in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices.

A Council Plan must include the following:

- the strategic direction of the Council
- strategic objectives for achieving the strategic direction
- strategies for achieving the objectives for a period of at least the next four financial years
- strategic indicators for monitoring the achievement of the objectives
- a description of the Council's initiatives and priorities for services, infrastructure amenity
- any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

The *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan* is integrated within the Council Plan due to the inherent role the council plays in fostering community wellbeing.

Ninety Mile Consulting (NMC) continues to assist the Council in the development of the *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025–2029*.

### Engagement Summary

#### Community Panel

- Fifteen community members were appointed in December via an Expression of Interest (EOI) process. A total of 34 community members submitted an EOI. Those appointed represent a range of key demographic groups within Benalla Rural City.
- Three Community Panel meetings have been held on 21 January, 18 March and 6 May 2025. Two further sessions are planned to allow Community Panel members to review the draft plan and to attend a final session with Council staff to evaluate the effectiveness of our first Community Panel.

#### Community Surveys

- A total of 226 surveys were received. The Community Survey closed on 6 April 2025.
- The survey was promoted through Council's website and social media, Have Your Say, brochures, postcards, the Benalla Ensign, Council's intranet, and to external working groups and advisory committees.
- Community Survey results, including all comments made by the community, have been provided to Community Panel members and the Council.

## Other Engagement Activities

- U3A Listening Session: 20 attendees
- Tomorrow Today's Full Impact Squad
- Nearly 200 young people engaged through five school visits conducted - Benalla P-12 (Waller Street campus), St. Joseph's, Australian Christian College, FCJ College, Benalla P-12 (Faithful Street campus). 139 feedback forms from students at these sessions have been submitted.
- Creating Community Connections Expo
- Benalla Community Market
- Devenish Market
- Pop-ups in the main street and outside Coles Supermarket
- Rural community visits - Swanpool Community Spirit BBQ, Molyullah Fish and Chip Night and Lurg Community Gathering.

## Interviews

- NMC conducted 71 interviews, including 21 staff members and 50 external key stakeholders from local businesses, community organisations and interested community members.

## Workshops

- NMC hosted six themed workshops over February and March.

Theme	Attendees
Environment	16
Community Workshop 1	17
Community Workshop 2	11
Arts, Culture, and Tourism	20
Business and Economy	14
Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership	18

## DISCUSSION

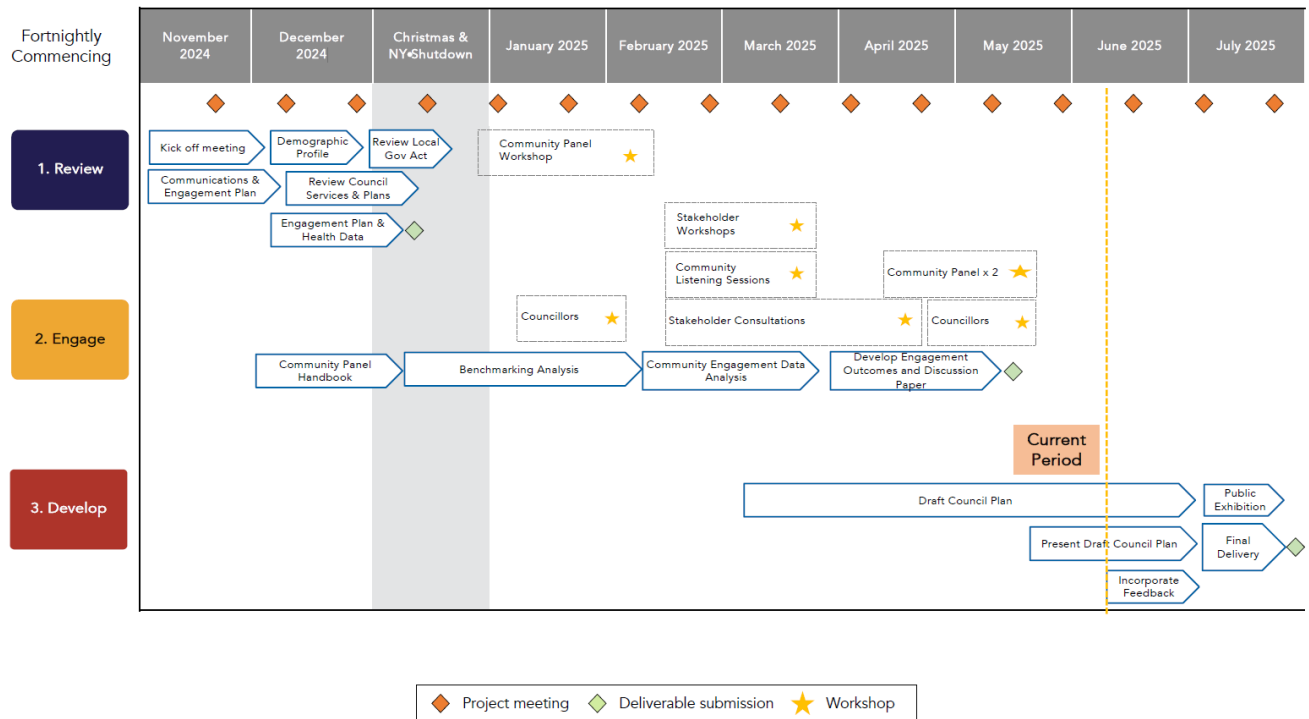
The draft *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025-2029* is progressing. Ninety Mile Consulting have continued to work on the preparation of the final document with a focus on demographics and analysis of information gathered through engagement activities.

During this period, Council staff have led an internal consultation process focussed on ensuring that the Objectives and Strategies within the Plan reflect the work that Council delivers now and into the future. Staff have been able to provide feedback through:

- information sessions being offered where Council Plan Working Group members are available to assist.
- dropping into the Town Hall basement where the draft is on display.
- viewing hard copies that have been made available at several key locations.
- responding to an email that has been circulated to all staff.

Feedback gathered will help to ensure all current and upcoming projects, initiatives and deliverables are appropriately covered in the Council Plan which will then be presented to the Council before going out on public exhibition. During this time the Community Panel will also be consulted and feedback received from the community will be considered before the final Council Plan is delivered.

## Timeline Summary



## COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025 IMPLICATIONS

### Community

- *A connected, involved and inclusive community.*

### Leadership

- *Good governance.*
- *Engaged and informed community.*
- *Effective and responsive advocacy.*

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In accordance with the Council's *Community Engagement Policy*, it is proposed, due to the administrative nature of the report, that community engagement be undertaken at the 'Inform' level under the *International Association for Public Participation's IAP2 public participation spectrum* as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to be used
Inform	We will provide information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Promotion of achievements via media, websites and social media.</li><li>▪ Public report presented to the Council.</li></ul>

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has allocated \$50,000 to the development of the draft *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025-2029* in the *2024/25 Budget*. To date, \$43,295 has been expended.

## LEGISLATIVE AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

It is considered that the report is consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

## OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

### Recommendation:

**That the report be noted.**

## 4.5 2024/2025 Community Grants Program

Ref: 620098092-783

Tom Arnold – Community Development and Recreation Coordinator  
Jane Archbold – Manager Community

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents applications recommended for funding under the 2024/2025 Major and Minor Community Grant Programs.

### BACKGROUND

The Community Grants Program is an annual funding allocation designed to encourage not for-profit community-based organisations to seek funding for projects and activities to assist in building healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities across the Benalla Rural City.

The Council has increased its annual funding allocation for the Annual Grants Program to \$110,000 in the 2024 / 2025 budget period based on a report reviewing the program in 2024. The table below details how the Annual Grant Program funds are distributed under the newly created Major and Minor Community Grant categories.

Grant Category	Maximum amount awarded	Funding pool
Quick Response Grants (QRG)	\$750	\$15,000
Major Community Grants (MCG)	\$7,000	\$35,000
Minor Community Grants (CG)	\$3,000	\$60,000
<b>Total Funding Pool:</b>		<b>\$110,000</b>

In April 2025 the Council invited interested community groups and not-for-profit organisations to apply for assistance under the two streams of Council's Community Grants Program.

Applications were open between 14 April 2025 and 1 June 2025. The Community Grant Program was promoted in the local media, in the Council's Community News, Council website, social media, local networks and to all previous recipients of Council grant funding. Promotion included encouragement for community groups to contact the Community Development team to discuss their potential projects.

### DISCUSSION

The 2024/2025 grant round saw more applications than previous years. The introduction of the Major and Minor streams created a positive impact, and organisations could see greater potential outcomes with access to increased grant funding.

Twenty-seven Major Community Grant applications were received, requesting \$168,500 in funding.

Twenty-nine Minor Community Grant applications were received, requesting \$72,060 in funding.



Applications were assessed against set criteria by a panel of Benalla Rural City Council staff members. The panel has recommended nine Major grant applications, and 23 Minor grant applications receive funding through the program.

Grant application details and proposed funding amounts for Minor and Major Grants are presented in the following tables:

<b>2025 Minor Community Grant Applications</b>				
<b>No.</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>	<b>Proposed Assistance</b>
1.	Astronomy Benalla Inc.	Reflective night signage, eyepiece, gazebo	\$1,359	\$1,359
2.	Benalla and District Preschool Partnership - Bernard Briggs Kindergarten	Vegetable Garden Beds at Bernard Briggs Kinder	\$1,959	\$1,959
3.	Benalla Aviation Museum and Men's Shed	Men's Shed air conditioner replacement	\$2,360	\$2,360
4.	Benalla Bushrangers Cricket Club	Facilitated junior coaching afternoons.	\$3,000	\$3,000
5.	Benalla Bushwalking Club	First Aid Training	\$2,750	\$2,750
6.	Benalla District Junior Football Club	Canteen upgrade - Pie Warmer	\$1,000	\$1,000
7.	Benalla Gymnastics Club	Improving entry to the Gymnastics Club - Removal of large cupboards.	\$3,000	\$3,000
8.	Benalla Health	Benalla Health 2025 Masquerade Ball	\$3,000	\$550
9.	Benalla Hockey Club	Various Hockey equipment and umpire training	\$2,515	\$1,520
10.	Benalla Men's Shed Inc.	Computer/Software/Printer Upgrades	\$2,950	\$2,950
11.	Benalla National and International Short Film Festival	Benalla Shorts 2025	\$3,000	\$3,000
12.	Benalla Netball Association	Netball Victoria skills development for netball umpires.	\$2,330	\$2,330
13.	Benalla RSL	Refurbishment of War Memorial. New plaque at cenotaph.	\$2,500	\$2,500
14.	Benalla Swimming Club	Purchase new training and competition equipment. Backstroke blocks and timers.	\$2,266	\$2,266
15.	Benalla Theatre Company Inc.	2025 musical - "9 to 5"	\$3,000	\$3,000
16.	Live Art Benalla	Fresh Juice artist development program and live music performance	\$3,000	\$3,000
17.	Moirra Benalla Club Inc.	Moirra House front fence replacement	\$3,000	\$3,000

<b>2025 Minor Community Grant Applications</b>				
<b>No.</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>	<b>Proposed Assistance</b>
18.	Molyullah Recreation and Public Hall Reserve Inc.	Outdoor tables and chairs	\$3,000	\$1,000
19.	North Eastern Archers Inc.	New target frames and targets	\$3,000	\$3,000
20.	Swanpool Bowls Club	Kitchen and BBQ equipment	\$3,000	\$2,700
21.	Swanpool Community Cinema	Four free community screenings for Seniors Festival, Benalla Festival, Heritage Month and Volunteers Week	\$2,550	\$2,550
22.	Tatong Anglers Group Inc.	Upgrade Group Computer, Protective and Emergency Equipment	\$2,874	\$2,874
23.	Tatong Memorial Hall	Removal of hall roof vent	\$2,750	\$2,750
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$60,163</b>	<b>\$54,418</b>

Proposed unsuccessful grant application details are presented in the following table:

<b>Unsuccessful 2025 Minor Community Grant Applications</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>
1.	Benalla Bowls Club	BBC Country Music Festival 2025	\$3,000
2.	Benalla Hospital Auxiliary	Plant labelling	\$198
3.	Cake Decorators - Benalla Branch	Tools and equipment	\$2,207
4.	LG Boxing	LG Boxing Grant	\$2,000
5.	North East Multicultural Association	Children's Week	\$1,500
6.	Victoria State Emergency Service (SES) Benalla Unit	Equipment – head torches, chainsaws, glass protection.	\$2,992
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$11,987</b>

<b>Minor Grants – Financial Summary</b>	
Total Funds Requested	\$72,060
Total Funds Allocated	\$54,418
Minor Grants Funding Pool	\$60,000
Unspent Funds	\$5,582

The underspend in the Minor Community Grant category this round was due to submissions being either incomplete, poor applications or not meeting the program criteria. As a result, not all available funds were distributed.

To ensure full use of the allocated budget and continued support for community initiatives, the remaining funds will be reallocated to the Major Grant category, where there is greater demand and a higher number of strong, eligible applications.

<b>2025 Major Community Grant Applications</b>				
<b>No.</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>	<b>Proposed Assistance</b>
1.	Benalla All Blacks Football and Netball Club inc.	Installation of improved lighting and CCTV to deter vandalism.	\$7,000	\$7,000
2.	Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club inc.	Replacing the ceiling tiles in the main room of the clubhouse and upgrade to LED lighting.	\$7,000	\$7,000
3.	Benalla Rose City Band	Revamping music library	\$4,311	\$4,311
4.	Goorambat and District Community Group	Historical Information Display Boards	\$6,128	\$6,128
5.	Goorambat and District Football and Netball Club	Upgrading the existing court lighting to energy-efficient LED lights	\$7,000	\$7,000
6.	Lurg Hall and Recreation Reserve Committee	Upgrade of Kitchen and Hall Security – New oven and Double doors	\$5,278	\$5,278
7.	Moorngag Public Hall Committee Inc	Outdoor seating	\$5,000	\$5,000
8.	Scout Association of Australia, Victorian Branch, Benalla Scout Group	Replace roller door, repair plumbing, new trailer tires, new dishwasher	\$6,500	\$6,500
9.	Waminda Community House	Kitchen appliances upgrade	\$6,998	\$5,500
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$55,215</b>	<b>\$53,717</b>

<b>Unsuccessful 2025 Major Community Grant Applications</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>
1.	Baddaginnie Community Inc	Shipping container for storage.	\$7,000
2.	Balloon Association of Victoria	Australian National Balloon Championships	\$7,000
3.	Benalla Agricultural and Pastoral Society Inc	Benalla Show - Wildlife education	\$7,000
4.	Benalla Cemetery Trust	Master Plan development	\$7,000
5.	Benalla district junior football league	Scoreboard upgrade. Small portable digital scoreboard.	\$7,000
6.	Benalla Motorcycle Festival Incorporated	Wheel to Wheel Festival	\$7,000
7.	Benalla Pony Club	Assistance with membership fees	\$7,000
8.	Benalla Saints Past Players and Officials	Native Box Garden	\$5,285
9.	Community Business Connect	Stay Connected Benalla – Online education sessions	\$7,000

Unsuccessful 2025 Major Community Grant Applications			
No.	Applicant	Details	Amount Requested
10.	Devenish Public Hall Committee of Management Inc.	Painting of Devenish Hall - kitchen/supper room	\$3,000
11.	For the Good of Devenish	Welcome signage to DEVENISH	\$4,000
12.	GANEA - Goulburn and North East Arts Alliance	Annual Mural Music 2025	\$7,000
13.	Goorambat Veterans Retreat Incorporated	GVR Water-Main and Septic Upgrade	\$7,000
14.	Molyullah Recreation and Public Hall Reserve Inc	Molyullah Hall – ceiling sound baffles	\$7,000
15.	North Eastern Archers Inc	NEA Enables Regional Archery Events	\$7,000
16.	Room at the Table Inc	RATT Upgrades – Purchase of various games and sundries	\$7,000
17.	Warrenbayne Recreation Reserve Committee Inc.	Wipe Out the White Ants	\$7,000
18.	Winton Motor Raceway	Winton Christmas Twilight Market	\$3,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$113,285</b>

## ***COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025 IMPLICATIONS***

### **Community**

- *A healthy, Safe and resilient community.*
- *A connected, involved and inclusive community.*

### **Leadership**

- *Engaged and informed community.*

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In accordance with the Council's *Community Engagement Policy*, it is proposed that community engagement be undertaken at the 'Inform' level under the International Association for Public Participation's IAP2 public participation spectrum.

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to be used
Inform	We will provide information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promotion of program via media, website and social media.</li> <li>▪ Program presented in public reports to the Council.</li> <li>▪ Outcomes advised directly to applicants.</li> <li>▪ Outcomes detailed in Annual Report.</li> </ul>

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The table below outlines the proposed revised Community Grant funding pool. The Major Community Grant funding pool has been increased through the reallocation of unspent funds from other grant categories and programs.

This includes the underspend in the Minor Community Grant program (\$5,582), unallocated Business Grant funding (\$10,000 with the program now scheduled to commence in the next financial year), and \$2,029 unallocated from the Quick Response Grant budget.

These adjustments ensure that available resources are directed to areas of high demand and community benefit.

2024/2025 Community Grant Budget Summary			
Budget		Expenditure	
Major Grant – Funding pool	\$35,000	Major Grant – Funding allocated	\$53,717
Minor Grant – Funding pool	\$60,000	Minor Grant – Funding allocated	\$54,418
Unallocated Business Grants	\$10,000		
Balance of 2024/2025 Quick Response Grant program	\$2,209	<b>Total</b>	\$108,135
<b>Total</b>	\$107,209	<b>Over Budget</b>	\$926

It is proposed that the budget shortfall of \$926 will be covered by unallocated funds within the Community Development budget.

## OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

### Recommendation:

1. That \$2,209 be reallocated from the Quick Response Grant Program to the Major Community Grant category.
2. That the \$5,582 unallocated in the Minor Community Grant category be reallocated to the Major Community Grant category.
3. That \$926 be reallocated from the Community Development budget to the Major Community Grant category
4. That \$108,135, as detailed in the tables above, be allocated from the 2024/2025 Community Grants Program.



### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presented the *Election Report Benalla Rural City Council – 2024 Local Government Elections*.

### BACKGROUND

The 2024 Benalla Rural City Council election was held on Saturday 26 October 2025.

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is responsible for the conduct of elections, including following all VEC processes and legislative requirements.

Under Regulation 83(1), the VEC must prepare a report to the Chief Executive Officer on the conduct of the election, within six months after election day. The report must include a certified record of the number of ballot-papers and declarations printed, issued, used, spoiled and returned.

Regulation 83(3) stipulates that the report be submitted to a meeting of the Council after it is received by the Chief Executive Officer.

### DISCUSSION

The report provides information relating to the conduct of the Benalla Rural City Council election and demonstrates that the election was executed with transparency and integrity with all VEC processes completed as agreed and legislative requirements met.

The report covers all aspects of the election, including changes that impacted the election resulting from the royal assent of the *Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Act 2024*.

The report also provides data and explanation on processes relating to the voters roll, communication/advertising, election office management, voting processes, results and complaints received.

A copy of the report is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Statistics of note in the report:

- Voters enrolled: 11,685.
- The overall voter turnout for the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election was 83.85%. This is compared to the state average turnout of 81.46 per cent. The voter turnout at the 2020 general election for the council was 84.67 per cent.
- The overall participation rate in the Benalla Rural City Council election was 85.51 per cent, which is higher than the state average of 83.79 per cent and lower than the 86.90 per cent rate at the 2020 Benalla Rural City Council general election.
- The VEC received two written complaints in relation to the election. One related to the enrolment processes and one related to a delayed postal vote receipt.

## **COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Leadership**

- *Good governance.*
- *Effective and responsive advocacy.*

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In accordance with the Council's *Community Engagement Policy*, it is proposed that community engagement be undertaken at the 'inform' level under the International Association for Public Participation's IAP2 public participation spectrum as detailed in the table below:

<b>Level of Public Participation</b>	<b>Promise to the community</b>	<b>Techniques to be used</b>
Inform	We will provide information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Report presented in a public report to the Council.</li><li>▪ Report published on Councils website.</li></ul>

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications with receiving the *Election Report Benalla Rural City Council – 2024 Local Government Elections*.

The Victorian Electoral Commission conducted the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council Local Government Election at a cost to the Council of \$157,749 (ex. GST).

### **LEGISLATIVE AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

It is considered that the report is consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

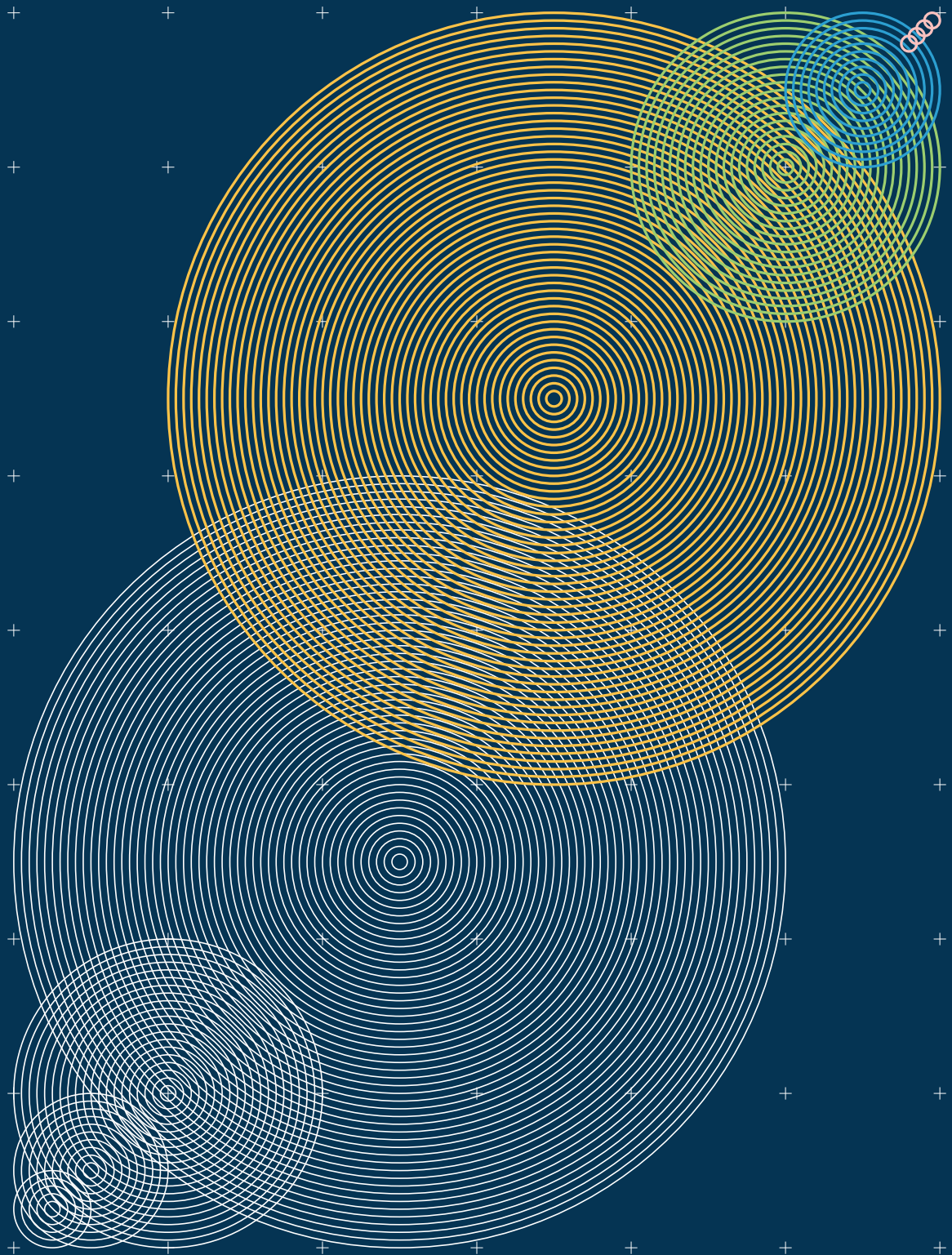
### **OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

#### **Recommendation:**

**That the *Election Report Benalla Rural City Council – 2024 Local Government Elections* be received.**

**Election report**  
**Benalla Rural City Council**  
2024 Local government elections  
April 2025



## **Letter of Transmittal**

14 April 2025

Mr Dominic Testoni  
Chief Executive Officer  
Benalla Rural City Council  
PO Box 227  
Benalla VIC 3671

Dear Mr Testoni

Pursuant to Regulation 83 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020, I submit this report to the Chief Executive Officer of Benalla Rural City Council on the general election held in October 2024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sven Bluemmel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Sven Bluemmel**  
Electoral Commissioner

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation, as the traditional custodians of the lands on which the VEC works and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging. The VEC is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

**Election report**  
**Benalla Rural City Council**  
2024 Local government elections



### Voter turnout (front cover)

Graphic representation of the Council's voter turnout rate for the 2024 and 2020 Local Government elections.

Rings are grouped into units to visualise the turnout percentage, each ring representing 1%. Data for 2024 is depicted using coloured rings, while data for 2020 is shown in white.

Benalla Rural City Council

Turnout (2024): 83.85%

Turnout (2020): 84.67%

1% 

5% 

10% 

20% 

50% 

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# 1. Introduction

The Victorian local government general elections are held every 4 years as set out in the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) (**LG Act**). In 2024, general elections were held for 78 of the 79 Victorian councils with Saturday 26 October marking election day. In accordance with section 263(1) of the LG Act, the Victorian Electoral Commission (**VEC**) is the statutory election service provider for the conduct of local government elections in Victoria.

This report provides information on the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election including details of the end-to-end service delivery of electoral activities throughout the election timeline. This report also provides details of post-election activities including compulsory voting enforcement.

## About the Victorian Electoral Commission

The VEC is an independent statutory authority established under the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) (**Electoral Act**). The VEC's principal functions are to conduct State elections, local government elections, certain statutory elections and polls, commercial and community elections, and to support electoral representation processes for local councils and the Electoral Boundaries Commission for State electoral boundaries. The VEC is also responsible for maintaining the Victorian register of electors and administering political funding and donation disclosure laws. The VEC has a mandated role to conduct electoral research, provide communication and education services, and inform and engage Victorians in the democratic process.

Sven Bluemmel is the appointed Electoral Commissioner and Dana Fleming is the appointed Deputy Electoral Commissioner. The Electoral Commissioner and Deputy Electoral Commissioner report to the Victorian Parliament in relation to the VEC's operations and activities.

The Electoral Commissioner heads the VEC's Executive Management Group that comprises the Deputy Electoral Commissioner, the Executive Director, Corporate Services and 7 Directors, each leading the main functional areas of the VEC. Each Director acts as subject matter experts and oversees legislative responsibilities under the LG Act and the Electoral Act.

The VEC has a dedicated local government election program framework that incorporates a range of programs, projects and activities that are supported through strategic planning, project management, and process mapping. The program is overseen by the VEC's Delivery Group and has sponsorship from the Executive Management Group.

## 2. Key changes

### Changes in legislation

The *Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Act 2024* (Vic) received royal assent on 25 June 2024 and introduced a number of changes to local government electoral legislation.

The VEC implemented the necessary changes to the 2024 local government election program in response to the reforms as they applied to the elections.

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#### Key changes from *Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Act 2024*

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Close of roll	<p>The date for the close of roll was extended from 57 days to 80 days before the election. For all elections after the October 2024 general elections, including by-elections, the date for the close of roll will be 73 days before election day.</p> <p>The previous timelines were no longer viable due to an increase in the scale and complexity of local government elections, including changes to enrolment entitlements, population growth, higher number of wards, likely increase in the number of candidates, and reduction in mail services offered by Australia Post.</p> <p>By moving this date earlier, other key dates including nomination day, the lodgement date for candidate statements and questionnaires, and the period for mailing out of ballot materials have been brought forward through the <i>Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020</i> (Vic) (<b>LG Regulations</b>) providing more time to ensure they are sustainable.</p>
Certification of the roll	<p>The timeframe for roll certification was increased to 23 business days (previously 13 business days) to ensure CEOs (or their delegates) and the VEC have adequate time to process enrolment applications and complete related roll certification processes.</p>
Candidate statement word limit	<p>In response to the pandemic, the LG Regulations permitted candidate statements to be increased from 200 to 300 words for the 2020 local government elections, acknowledging that candidates at the 2020 elections would face restrictions in campaigning.</p> <p>As candidates would no longer face pandemic-based barriers to campaigning activities, the word limit was reverted to 200 words. Equivalent amendments were also applied to the <i>City of Melbourne (Electoral) Regulations 2022</i> (Vic).</p> <p>Returning to the original word limit allowed the VEC to produce smaller candidate statement booklets, reducing associated printing costs and administrative burden.</p>
Rejection and amendment of candidate statements	<p>The time allowed for a candidate to amend their statement was reduced by one day to now be the day after the close of nominations (or 38 days before election day). This aligned the periods for rejections and amendments with the earlier deadline for lodging a candidate statement, allowing additional time to print ballot packs.</p>
Close of candidate statements, photos and questionnaires	<p>The deadline for submitting a candidate statement, photograph and questionnaire was amended to close the same day as the close of nominations at 12 noon, facilitating a more efficient process for candidates and allowing the VEC more time to print ballot packs.</p>
Mailout of ballot pack	<p>The timeline for conducting the mailout of ballot materials was extended from occurring over 3 business days to 4 business days, allowing the VEC to manage the risk of mail service level reductions and provide additional safeguards against election fraud.</p>

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### 3. Election dates

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#### Key timelines for the 2024 local government elections

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Deadline fixed by the VEC for council primary enrolment data	Monday 15 July 2024
Close of roll	4 pm Wednesday 7 August 2024
Opening of the election office to the public	Monday 9 September 2024
Certification of the voters' roll and opening of nominations	Monday 9 September 2024
Close of nominations	12 noon Tuesday 17 September 2024
*Deadline for lodging candidate statements, photographs and questionnaires	12 noon Tuesday 17 September 2024
*Ballot draw	From 10 am Wednesday 18 September 2024
*General mail out of ballot packs to voters	Monday 7 October to Thursday 10 October 2024
*Close of voting	6 pm Friday 25 October 2024
Day prescribed as Election Day	Saturday 26 October 2024
*Close of extended postal vote receipt period	12 noon Friday 1 November 2024
Declaration of election results	No later than Friday 15 November 2024

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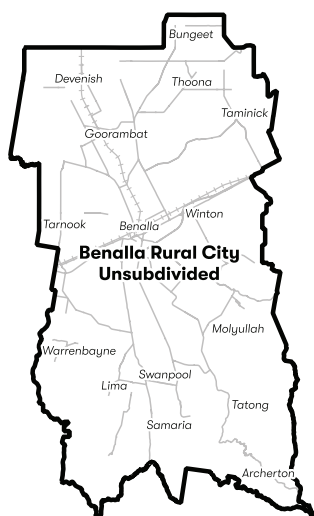
\*Dates with asterisks relate to contested elections only.

## 4. About Benalla Rural City Council

Benalla Rural City Council is comprised of 7 councillors elected from an unsubdivided structure.

The structure was last reviewed in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989* through an electoral representation review in 2019.

Figure 1: The electoral structure of Benalla Rural City Council at the general election held on 26 October 2024.



## 5. Voters' roll

The VEC prepared the voters' roll for the election under section 8(2)(c) of the Electoral Act and in accordance with section 249 of the LG Act. The close of roll for the election was 4 pm on Wednesday 7 August 2024. Pursuant to section 249(4) of the LG Act, the VEC certified the voters' roll on Monday 9 September 2024.

At certification, the voters' roll for the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election included 11,685 enrolled voters.

### Composition of the voters' roll

Section 249 of the LG Act specifies that the voters' roll for a local government election is formed by combining 2 separate lists of voters:

1. The Electoral Commissioner's list (EC list) – list of State electors that are enrolled within that local government area.
2. The Chief Executive Officer's list (CEO list) – list of council-entitled voters.

Refer to **Appendix 1** for a breakdown of the Benalla Rural City Council general election voters' roll.

### Amendments to the voters' roll

In accordance with section 250 of the LG Act, the VEC is able to amend any error or omission in the preparation, printing or copying of the voters' roll, or correct any misnomer or inaccurate description of any person, place or thing on the voters' roll. Amendments to the voters' roll are to be certified by the VEC.

All voters added to the roll were issued with a ballot pack. Where a voter was removed from the roll after the mail-out of ballot material, the VEC had systems in place to ensure that returned ballot papers from the deleted voters could be identified and excluded from the extraction and count. Where roll amendments were required, the total number of voters on the roll was updated.

Following the close of roll, the VEC made one amendment to the voters' roll, zero additions and one deletion.

## 6. Advertising and communication campaign

### State-wide advertising

The VEC delivered a state-wide advertising campaign to maximise public awareness and participation amongst all eligible voters. Campaign activities and consistent messaging were delivered across 2 phases – enrolment and voting – and through multiple traditional and emerging mediums, including radio, digital and social media, and offline/outdoor advertising.

### Public notices

The VEC published a series of public notices on the VEC website throughout the election as required by the LG Act. The notices included critical information relevant to each milestone of the election timeline.

For the 2024 general election, Benalla Rural City Council nominated the following newspaper for the public notices:

› Benalla Ensign

Refer to **Appendix 2** for further information in relation to the public notices.

### VEC website

The VEC provided council specific information regarding the election on its website. The VEC website went live for the local government elections in early July 2024. Whilst some council-specific data remained static during the election, the website was regularly updated with content relevant to the election and at each key milestone such as close of roll, nominations, voting and results.

### Media liaison

An online media briefing was held on Monday 29 July 2024. The briefing was made available to view on the VEC website for media representatives unable to join the live event. The media briefing provided an overview of the planning, timeline, legislative changes and other key information for the 2024 local council elections.

Media outlets were provided with a media handbook that outlined the election timeline and key information, and provided the VEC's head office media contacts. This was made available along with other resources from the VEC's media centre webpage. The VEC's communication team supported each election manager with managing media interest locally in their council area.

The VEC's media liaison program principally featured scheduled state-wide and tailored council-specific media releases aimed at highlighting key milestones during the election and capitalise on existing general news coverage.

More information on the VEC's media release schedule is available at **Appendix 3**.

The media program also involved a responsive media enquiry service, as well as the translation and distribution of 3 key media releases for multiple non-English news outlets in Victoria.

### Social media campaign

As part of its state-wide advertising campaign, the VEC used paid promotions on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and WeChat, targeting voters through audience segmentation.

This advertising was supported by a defined timeline of organic social media posts on the VEC's channels, designed to cover each of the key messages of the communication campaign to further extend the reach to the community and promote conversation about the democratic process.

### VoterAlert advisories

State-enrolled voters can sign up to VoterAlert, our free SMS and email service, to receive reminder messages about elections that affect them. They can subscribe to messages via SMS, email, or both.

During the general election, we used VoterAlert to send direct messages on:

#### Wednesday 17 to Wednesday 31 July 2024 –

6,149 voters were contacted by VoterAlert messages sent by SMS and/or email reminding voters to enrol or update their details by the close of roll.

#### Monday 7 October to Monday 14 October 2024 –

6,201 voters were contacted by VoterAlert messages sent by SMS and/or email advising that we had commenced posting ballot packs.

#### Tuesday 22 October to Wednesday 23 October 2024 –

4,372 voters were contacted by VoterAlert messages sent by SMS and/or email reminding voters that it was the last week to post their ballot material back to us.

More information on VoterAlert is available at **Appendix 4**.

### Voter engagement

The VEC delivered an extensive voter engagement program throughout Victoria, specific to local demographics.

**Appendix 5** contains the full list of initiatives for the 2024 local government elections.

### **Democracy ambassadors**

The VEC delivered education sessions conducted by our Democracy Ambassadors to a range of councils. The sessions focused on enrolment and voting for the election. These sessions were offered to councils in priority areas and delivered at no cost to council. Where resourcing allowed, requests for sessions that were not in the priority area were also fulfilled.

The VEC did not deliver any sessions for the Benalla Rural City Council election.

### **Blind and low-vision services**

Braille and large print ballot material was available to blind and low-vision voters who registered for these products by 5 pm on Tuesday 17 September 2024.

The VEC received and processed no requests for braille ballot material and 4 requests for large print ballot material for Benalla Rural City Council.

### **Interpreting services**

The VEC engaged the Victorian Interpreting and Language Services' Language Loop to provide a telephone interpreting service for telephone enquiries from voters who had a first language other than English. The VEC advertised direct lines for 20 languages other than English and a general line for all other languages.

### **Public enquiry service**

A centralised contact centre was established to respond to telephone public enquiries. This ensured consistency in messaging, early identification of themes and trends along with the opportunity to enable election offices to focus on election administration. The call centre was also responsible for emails received during the local government elections. Any calls regarding CEO list applications were referred to the relevant councils. Outside the call centre hours of operation, a recorded service was available that provided information on enrolment and voting.

Election offices fielded phone queries from local candidates on issues directly related to their candidacy (as separate to general queries about running as a candidate).

A total of 94 telephone calls were recorded for Benalla Rural City Council during the 2024 local government elections. An overall total of 11,758 email queries were received for all councils.



## 7. Election manager

The VEC maintains a pool of trained senior election officials from across Victoria to fill election management roles for State and local government elections. Election-specific training is provided to senior election officials before they are appointed for each election.

The size of election management teams depends on the size of the council. Under the LG Act, an election manager is appointed to conduct each council's election and is supported by one or more assistant election managers.

In accordance with regulation 21(1) of the LG Regulations, the VEC appointed Wendy McDonald as the election manager for the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election.

The appointed assistant election manager was Heather McIntosh.

## 8. Election office

The election manager was responsible for establishing and managing the election office at 75 Bridge Street East, Benalla. The premises were provided by the VEC.

## 9. Candidates

Nominations opened at 9 am on Monday 9 September and closed at 12 noon on Tuesday 17 September 2024. Candidates were required to lodge their nomination forms in person at the election office. The nomination fee was \$250.

### Candidate information

The VEC developed resources to support prospective candidates with the nomination process, including a candidate handbook. From mid-July, candidates could access information about nominating as a candidate for the election. The online Candidate Helper, accessible via the VEC website, went live on Tuesday 20 August 2024. Candidate Helper enabled candidates to complete most of their nomination forms and other forms online before lodging them in person with the election manager.

For the Benalla Rural City Council 2024 election, the VEC's candidate information session was delivered in person by the election manager. Additionally, a candidate information video was available on the VEC website from Tuesday 20 August 2024.

### Nominations

At the close of nominations, 15 candidates had successfully nominated for the election, which includes any candidates who retired after the close of nominations. Candidates who withdrew before the close of nominations are not included.

The ballot draw to determine the order of the names on the ballot paper was held at the election office following the close of nominations using the VEC's computerised ballot draw application.

See **Appendix 6** for the list of candidates in ballot draw order.

### Candidate statements and photos

In accordance with regulation 39 of the LG Regulations, candidates were able to submit a 200-word statement and a recent photograph for inclusion in the ballot packs sent to voters. The deadline for these items was 12 noon on Tuesday 17 September 2024.

See **Appendix 6.1** for a breakdown of submitted statements and photos and **6.2** for sample ballot material.

### Candidate questionnaires

In accordance with regulation 43 of the LG Regulations, candidates could also submit answers to a set of prescribed questions. The election manager accepted

questionnaires from 15 of the 15 candidates at the election.

Voters could read the completed questionnaires on the VEC website or access them by contacting the election office.

### Retirement of a candidate

In accordance with the LG Regulations, at any time after the close of nominations and before election day, a candidate may retire, or be retired by the VEC. A candidate can only retire if it will result in an uncontested election or if they are not qualified to be a Councillor. If the VEC believes a candidate was not entitled to nominate, it must formally query the candidate's qualification and invite written reasons why they are entitled. If the VEC remains satisfied that the candidate is not entitled, it must retire the candidate from the election.

When a candidate is retired from an election, the VEC is required to take all practicable steps to remove the retired candidate's name from ballot papers. If it is not practicable to do so, during the counting of votes the retired candidate's votes are passed on to other candidates according to voters' preferences.

There were no candidate retirements at the Benalla Rural City Council election.

## 10. Voting

### Ballot pack preparation and redirection

Artwork for ballot papers and candidate statements is generated using the VEC's automation tool. This tool selects from a range of pre-defined artwork templates and populates them with the relevant candidate information directly from the VEC's election management system database.

Following an extensive quality assurance process, print-ready artwork files were securely transmitted directly to the VEC's contracted ballot material printer ready for production. The VEC's contracted mail house directly printed the voters' addresses (mailing and entitlement address) and barcodes on the ballot paper envelopes in preparation for assembly and delivery of ballot packs. The VEC utilised multiple third party providers to assemble the ballot packs prior to the mail house lodging with Australia Post. The mail house allocated a secure area within its operations that was used solely for the printing, insertion, and dispatch of ballot material. This ensured the highest standards of security were met.

Electors could apply to have their ballot material redirected to an address other than their entitlement address. Voters had until the certification day for the voters' roll (also the day that nominations open) to apply for their ballot material to be redirected. The VEC arranged for ballot material to be delivered to any voter applying for redirection to the address specified in their request. For the 2024 local government elections, voters had until Monday 9 September 2024 to submit redirection requests.

The election manager received 4 requests for redirection of ballot packs for the election.

### Early votes

Voters could request an early postal ballot envelope (early vote) before the general mail out of ballot packs. The election manager processed requests and issued early votes where the request was assessed as reasonable. Requests for early votes could be processed from Wednesday 18 September 2024, the day after nominations closed, until the start of the general mail out of ballot packs on Monday 7 October 2024.

Due to the timing of early votes, some early voters may not have had access to the candidate statements, photographs or questionnaires.

The election manager issued a total of 47 early votes for the election.

### Mail-out of ballot packs

The VEC mailed 11,685 ballot packs between Monday 7 and Thursday 10 October 2024.

See **Appendix 7** for a breakdown of the packs sent on each day of the general mail out. The VEC did not mail ballot packs to voters who passed away between the close of roll and generation of the mail-out file.

This included 4 ballot packs which were redirected to alternative addresses for voters who had applied to redirect their ballot pack by Monday 9 September 2024.

In accordance with regulation 49(3) of the LG Regulations, no more than 35% of ballot packs were mailed or delivered to voters on any one day during the mail-out period. All ballot packs were lodged with Australia Post under the priority paid delivery timetable.

The VEC liaised closely with Australia Post during the mail-out period to confirm that ballot packs had been delivered to voters. Australia Post confirmed all ballot packs had been delivered by Tuesday 15 October 2024.

During the voting period, 299 ballot packs were returned to the election office by Australia Post as return-to-sender mail. In most cases, this was likely due to the addressee no longer residing at the address.

### Unenrolled votes

The election manager issued unenrolled votes to people whose names could not be found on the voters' roll but said they were entitled to vote at the election. The unenrolled ballot pack included a declaration for the voter to sign. The election manager assessed the declaration and decided to admit or disallow the vote.

The election manager issued 5 unenrolled votes and following relevant checks, one was admitted to the count.

### Replacement ballot packs

Following the general mail out of ballot packs, a voter who claimed that their ballot pack had not been received, or had been lost, spoilt, or destroyed, could apply for a replacement vote by completing an online application form or contacting the public enquiry service.

A centralised team processed applications and mailed replacement ballot packs to the postal address provided. Voters also had the option to attend the election office in the council for which they hold entitlement, to have a replacement vote issued over the counter.

465 replacement ballot packs during the voting period were issued. Please refer to **Schedule 1** for further information on replacement ballot packs issued.

## 11. Return of ballot paper envelopes

VEC provided voters with a priority reply paid envelope to return their completed ballot paper and ballot paper envelope. The return mail was delivered to the election office from local postal facilities or mail distribution centres. Voters could also put their ballot papers and envelope in a ballot box at the election office.

As ballot paper envelopes were returned, they were progressively checked by the election manager to ensure they had been signed by the voter. Additionally, processes were in place to ensure that only one returned ballot paper from any one voter could proceed to the extraction and count.

The election manager received a total of 8,342 returned ballot paper envelopes by the close of voting at 6 pm on Friday 25 October 2024.

In accordance with regulation 57(3) of the LG Regulations, the election manager could accept returned ballot paper envelopes until 12 noon on the Friday following the close of voting, if they thought the voter had signed the envelope before voting closed.

The election manager accepted 1,744 ballot paper envelopes during the extended postal vote receipt period.

The total returned ballot paper envelopes for Benalla Rural City Council was 10,086.

The election manager set aside 244 returned ballot paper envelopes that were not admitted to the extraction and counting process due to the voter not having signed the declaration envelope or, in the case of unenrolled declaration votes, an entitlement was not found for the person, or the declaration envelope was not returned with the vote.

Refer to **Schedule 1** for the total certified record of ballot papers and declaration envelopes for Benalla Rural City Council.



## 12. Results

### Extraction

The extraction process involved separating the declaration flaps containing voters' details from each admitted ballot paper envelope, and then extracting the ballot papers from the envelopes. This 2-stage process maintains anonymity and ensures the VEC can track the number of envelopes for ongoing reconciliation.

A total of 9,842 ballot paper envelopes were admitted to the extraction process.

Ballot papers were extracted at the election office from Tuesday 29 October 2024. The extraction of all admitted ballot paper envelopes was completed on Wednesday 6 November 2024, following the close of the extended postal vote receipt period.

If the VEC found any returned ballot paper envelopes that did not contain a ballot paper, contained more than one ballot paper, or did not contain the correct ballot paper, these were required to be rejected and not counted. There were 45 returned ballot paper envelopes rejected during the extraction activity.

Following the extraction of ballot papers from the ballot paper envelopes, a total of 9,797 ballot papers proceeded to the count.

### Computer count

A computer count information session explaining the process was recorded and available for online streaming from the VEC website from Friday 18 October 2024.

Following the extraction of ballot papers admitted to the count for Benalla Rural City Council, preferences on ballot papers were data entered into the VEC's computer counting application at the election office. The application distributes preferences using the proportional method once data entry of ballot paper preferences is complete. Results were calculated at the election office on Thursday 7 November 2024.

The VEC published provisional results on its website as they became available. Results were updated as finalised once declarations had taken place.

For a breakdown of first preference results, refer to **Appendix 8**.

### Recounts

At any time before a candidate is declared elected, the election manager or a candidate may initiate a recount. Election managers initiate recounts if margins in

a preference distribution are close or critical. Candidates must ask for a recount in writing, with the reasons for their request. The election manager and head office staff assess candidate recount requests and either accept or deny them.

The election manager did not receive any requests for a recount following the count.

### Scrutineers

Scrutineers help deliver fair and transparent elections by observing election activities. They contribute to electoral integrity and help build public trust. Scrutineers can observe all activities involved in ballot paper and envelope processing.

Candidates are not permitted in election venues during extraction and counting activities and instead appoint scrutineers. Each candidate could appoint one scrutineer per election official involved in an activity. To appoint scrutineers, candidates completed a hardcopy 'Appointment and declaration of scrutineer form', which the candidate signed and submitted to the election manager. All scrutineers then had to sign the form's formal declaration in front of an election official. The declaration meant the scrutineers committed to eligibility and legal requirements and the VEC's conditions of entry.

A *Scrutineer handbook* was made available to all candidates and scrutineers with information on the role and responsibility of scrutineers during election activities. It included overviews of the activities so that scrutineers could understand what to expect during election activities they may attend. When scrutineers attended election venues they were briefed on their responsibilities and the processes they would witness. Scrutineers were instructed when and how they could challenge activities when ballot paper formality was being decided and votes were being counted. Scrutineers were allowed to notify election managers if they disagreed with the decision made by an election official on ballot paper formality or whether votes were counted for the selected candidate. Election managers reviewed the challenge and made a final decision on the ballot paper.

### Declaration of results

In the Service Plan, the VEC committed to complete all results declarations by Friday 15 November 2024.

The results of the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election were declared at 2 pm on Friday 8 November 2024 at Benalla Visitor Information Centre, 14 Mair Street, Benalla.

The VEC website was updated following the declaration to reflect the elected candidates.

## 13. Election statistics

### Participation

Participation is measured by the number of voters marked off the roll as a percentage of the total enrolment and can vary from turnout. The overall participation rate in the Benalla Rural City Council election was 85.51%, which is higher than the state average of 83.79% (excluding Melbourne City Council) and lower than the 86.90% rate at the 2020 Benalla Rural City Council general election.

Analysis of voter participation for the different enrolment categories shows that participation is lower for voters who are enrolled on the EC's list (85.45%) compared to voters enrolled on the CEO's list (94.67%).

Refer to **Appendix 9** for further information on participation, including a breakdown by enrolment category.

### Turnout

Voter turnout is measured by the number of formal and informal ballot papers counted in the election as a percentage of voters on the voters' roll for the election.

The overall voter turnout for the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election was 83.85%. This is compared to the state average turnout of 81.46% (excluding Melbourne City Council). The voter turnout at the 2020 general election for the council was 84.67%.

### Informality

The overall informal voting rate recorded at the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council general election was 6.83%, compared with the State average of 3.47%. An informality rate of 4.27% was recorded at the Benalla Rural City Council general election held in October 2020.

## 14. Complaints

### Type of complaints

At local government elections, complaints generally fall into 2 broad categories:

#### 1. Election Administration

Complaints about the conduct of the election and services to voters.

#### 2. Election participation and conduct

Complaints about candidates and other participants in the election, at times alleging a breach of the LG Act or local laws.

Most complaints at the 2024 local government elections related to the second category, and often alleged inappropriate or illegal action by a person or group associated with the election.

### Complaints process

The VEC have a streamlined complaints process during elections, developed with local councils and enforcement agencies. Complaints must be lodged in writing, then processed at head office. For the 2024 local government elections, customers could provide feedback and complaints online.

Complaints alleging a breach of the LG Act are forwarded to the Local Government Inspectorate. Complaints relating to local laws are referred to council. Complaints about the VEC's services, or the behaviour or actions of VEC staff and election officials, are the responsibility of the VEC.

The VEC is committed to responding to each complaint within 5 working days.

### Complaints received

The VEC received 2 written complaints relating to the election for Benalla Rural City Council.

Please see **Appendix 10** for a description of complaints received by the VEC.

## 15. Post-election activities

### Storage of election material

The VEC will keep all records from the election safely and secretly in accordance with regulation 79 of the LG Regulations.

### Refund of nomination fees

Nomination fees were refunded to eligible candidates on Tuesday 17 December 2024. Eligible candidates include those elected or who received at least 4% of the first preference vote. Any forfeited nomination fees were remitted to the council on Tuesday 17 December 2024.

### Courts and tribunals

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) is responsible for hearing disputes on the validity of an election under section 311 of the LG Act.

Applications for a review of the declaration of the results of an election must be lodged within 14 days of the declaration and can be made by a candidate in the election, 10 persons who were entitled to vote at the election, or the VEC.

There were no applications to VCAT disputing the result of the Benalla Rural City Council general election.

## 16. Non-voter follow up

In accordance with section 267 of the LG Act, the VEC has commenced its compulsory voting enforcement program. Any person who was required to vote at the election and failed to vote will be issued with an 'Apparent failure to vote' notice in February/March. Apparent non-voters have 28 days to respond.

People who do not respond to the notice, or do not provide a satisfactory response, may be issued with an infringement notice in April/May that will incur a penalty. Further follow-up with a penalty reminder notice in July may also occur – this stage includes the original penalty and a penalty reminder notice fee. Penalties collected on behalf of council will be reimbursed at the end of the infringement and reminder notice stages.

Additionally, during the infringement and penalty reminder notice stages, non-voters may ask for their matter to proceed directly to the Magistrates' Court.

These requests will be actioned at the conclusion of the infringement and penalty reminder notice stages. The VEC will lodge the file of any remaining non-voters with Fines Victoria at the end of the penalty reminder notice stage.

## 17. Evaluating VEC services

The VEC is committed to providing high quality election services to its local government clients. Through a formal feedback and debriefing program, the VEC can gauge its performance and seek advice for future local government election projects.

### Feedback from councils

The VEC invited feedback from councils on its services in December 2024. Additional feedback can be provided to the LG2024 Program Manager by emailing [LGProgram2024@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:LGProgram2024@vec.vic.gov.au)

### Internal debriefing program

After every electoral event, the VEC conducts an internal debriefing program that includes input from all areas of its workforce. Internal debriefing following the local government elections began in December 2024. The VEC will publish a consolidated report on its performance and key statistics from the elections. This will be tabled in Parliament and available on the VEC website.



# Appendices

## Schedule 1: Record of ballot papers and declaration envelopes

<b>Benalla Rural City Council election</b>	
<b>Ballot papers printed</b>	
Victorian Electoral Commission	14,004
Election manager	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,064</b>
<b>Ballot papers issued</b>	
General mail out	11,685
Early and replacement votes	512
Unenrolled declaration votes	5
Spoilt	3
Sub total	12,205
Unused	1,859
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,064</b>
<b>Declarations returned</b>	
General mail out admitted to the extraction	9,411
Early and replacement votes admitted to the extraction	430
Unenrolled declaration votes admitted to the extraction	1
Returned declarations unable to be admitted to the extraction	244
Declarations returned to sender	299
Sub total	10,385
Declarations not returned	1,820
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,205</b>

## Schedule 2: Certification statement

In accordance with Regulation 77, I certify that Schedule 1 of this report on the conduct of the 2024 Benalla Rural City Council local government election is a true and correct account of the number of ballot papers issued, returned and not used in this election and declarations not returned.



**Sven Bluemmel**  
Electoral Commissioner

## Appendix 1: Breakdown of the voters' roll

Benalla Rural City Council election	Voters enrolled through an entitlement under section 241 of the LG Act	Voters enrolled through entitlements under sections 242–245 of the LG Act	Total voters enrolled
Benalla Rural City Council	11,609	76	11,685

## Appendix 2: Public notices

### Schedule of public notices

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#### Close of roll notice

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VEC website/public notices	23 July 2024
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Benalla Ensign	24 July 2024
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#### Notice of election

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VEC website/public notices	12 August 2024
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Benalla Ensign	14 August 2024
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#### Voting details notice

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VEC website/public notices	20 September 2024
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Benalla Ensign	2 October 2024
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#### Reminder notice

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Benalla Ensign	16 October 2024
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#### Notice of result

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VEC website/public notices	8 November 2024
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Benalla Ensign	20 November 2024
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### Close of roll

A general election for Sample Council will be held in October 2024. To be able to vote in the election, you must be enrolled by the close of roll at **4 pm on Wednesday 7 August 2024**. Two categories of voters can be enrolled to vote in the Sample Council election: State-enrolled voters and Council-enrolled voters.

\* Arabic (Arabic) 9209 0100 • **ܐܪܡܝܐ** (Assyrian) 9209 0160 • **ဘမ္မေ** (Burmese) 9209 0161 • 简体中文 (Mandarin) 9209 0106 • 廣東話 (Cantonese) 9209 0101 • **Hrvatski** (Croatian) 9209 0102 • دري (Dari) 9209 0193 • **Туркмен** (Dinka) 9209 0119 • **Ελληνική** (Greek) 9209 0103 • **اَرَبِيّ** (Hazaragi) 9209 0162 • **Italiano** (Italian) 9209 0104 • **ខ្មែរ** (Khmer) 9209 0192 • 한국어 (Korean) 9209 0194 • **македонски** (Macedonian) 9209 0105 • नेपाली (Nepali) 9209 0163 • **فارسی** (Persian) 9209 0195 • **ภาษาไทย** (Thai) 9209 0164 • **Türkçe** (Turkish) 9209 0110 • اردو (Urdu) 9209 0165 • **Tiếng Việt** (Vietnamese) 9209 0111 • All other non-English languages 9209 0112

Authorised by S. Blumenthal, Electoral Commissioner, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.

State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

Voting details notice

## Sample Council postal election

My council, my vote

An election will be held for Sample Council.

**Check the mail for your ballot pack**

Ballot packs containing voting material will be mailed to enrolled voters from **Monday 7 October**.

This is a postal election only.

If you do not receive your ballot pack by **Tuesday 15 October** please visit **vec.vic.gov.au** to complete the online replacement form, or call **131 832** to arrange a replacement.

**Candidates**

Candidates who have nominated for election are listed in the ballot packs and at **vec.vic.gov.au**

A photo and candidate statement will also be included if provided by candidates. Responses to a candidate questionnaire, if provided, are available at **vec.vic.gov.au**

**How to vote correctly**

You must complete your ballot paper correctly for your vote to count. Put the number **1** in the box next to the candidate you want to see elected, then number all the other boxes in order of your choice. You must number **every box** and only use each number once.

**Sample Council logo**

**How to return your ballot pack**

Put your completed ballot paper in the ballot paper envelope, complete the declaration, then post it ASAP using the reply-paid envelope provided, or hand deliver it during election office hours to:

Sample election office address

**Voting is compulsory**

Voting is compulsory for all voters who were enrolled at 4 pm on Wednesday 7 August. This includes state-enrolled and council-enrolled voters.

If you don't vote and don't have a valid excuse, you may be fined.

Your completed ballot pack must be in the mail or hand delivered by **6 pm Friday 25 October**.

State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at **vec.vic.gov.au**




vec.vic.gov.au | 131 832


For enquiries in languages other than English:

\* Arabic (Arabic) 9209 0100 \* Azərbaycanca (Azerbaijani) 9209 0160 \* বাংলা (Burmese) 9209 0161 \* 简体中文 (Mandarin) 9209 0106 \* 廣東話 (Cantonese) 9209 0101 \* Hrvatski (Croatian) 9209 0102 \* דרום (Dan) 9209 0163 \* Thuzagila (Dinka) 9209 0119 \* Ελληνικά (Greek) 9209 0103 \* Azərbaycanca (Greek) 9209 0103 \* Italiano (Italian) 9209 0104 \* Kinyarwanda (Kinyarwanda) 9209 0162 \* 한국어 (Korean) 9209 0164 \* Македонски (Macedonian) 9209 0105 \* नेपाली (Nepali) 9209 0163 \* فارسی (Persian) 9209 0165 \* ไทย (Thai) 9209 0164 \* Türkçe (Turkish) 9209 0110 \* اردو (Urdu) 9209 0165 \* Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese) 9209 0111 \* All other non-English languages 9209 0112

Authorised by S. Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.

@electionsvic

 Victorian Electoral Commission

Reminder notice

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**Sample Council logo**

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State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at **vec.vic.gov.au**




vec.vic.gov.au | 131 832


For enquiries in languages other than English:

\* Arabic (Arabic) 9209 0100 \* Azərbaycanca (Azerbaijani) 9209 0160 \* বাংলা (Burmese) 9209 0161 \* 简体中文 (Mandarin) 9209 0106 \* 廣東話 (Cantonese) 9209 0101 \* Hrvatski (Croatian) 9209 0102 \* דרום (Dan) 9209 0163 \* Thuzagila (Dinka) 9209 0119 \* Ελληνικά (Greek) 9209 0103 \* Azərbaycanca (Greek) 9209 0103 \* Italiano (Italian) 9209 0104 \* Kinyarwanda (Kinyarwanda) 9209 0162 \* 한국어 (Korean) 9209 0164 \* Македонски (Macedonian) 9209 0105 \* नेपाली (Nepali) 9209 0163 \* فارسی (Persian) 9209 0165 \* ไทย (Thai) 9209 0164 \* Türkçe (Turkish) 9209 0110 \* اردو (Urdu) 9209 0165 \* Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese) 9209 0111 \* All other non-English languages 9209 0112

Authorised by S. Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.

@electionsvic

 Victorian Electoral Commission



Sample Council election		Sample Council logo
Declaration of results		
The following candidates were elected to Sample Council at the general election held in October 2024:		
<b>Sample Ward 1</b>	Sample elected candidate 4	<b>Sample Ward 8</b>
Sample elected candidate 1	<b>Sample Ward 5</b>	Sample elected candidate 8
<b>Sample Ward 2</b>	Sample elected candidate 5	<b>Sample Ward 9</b>
Sample elected candidate 2	<b>Sample Ward 6</b>	Sample elected candidate 9
<b>Sample Ward 3</b>	Sample elected candidate 6	
Sample elected candidate 3	<b>Sample Ward 7</b>	
<b>Sample Ward 4</b>	Sample elected candidate 7	
Further details about the results are available at <b>vec.vic.gov.au</b>		
<b>Sample Election Manager name</b>		
Election Manager		
Sample declaration date		

## Appendix 3:

# Schedule of media releases and advisories

### Benalla Rural City Council council-specific media releases and advisories

Enrol now for the Benalla Rural City Council election	Monday 29 July 2024
Call for candidates for Benalla Rural City Council election	Thursday 22 August 2024
Ballot packs mailed for Benalla Rural City Council election	Monday 7 October 2024
Voting closes soon for Benalla Rural City Council election	Tuesday 15 October 2024
New councillors for Benalla Rural City Council	Friday 8 November 2024

### Statewide media releases and advisories

Victorians urged to enrol for upcoming local council elections	Monday 22 July 2024
Media advisory: 2024 local council elections briefing	Monday 22 July 2024
Last chance to enrol for Victorian council elections	Friday 2 August 2024
News alert: Enrolment closes tomorrow for October's council local elections	Tuesday 6 August 2024
Nominations open soon for Victorian local council elections	Monday 26 August 2024
Media advisory: Accessing candidate information for the 2024 Victorian local council elections	Friday 6 September 2024
Nominations for the 2024 Victorian local council elections now open	Monday 9 September 2024
Over 4.6 million enrolled for local council elections	Tuesday 10 September 2024
Time is running out to nominate for this year's local council elections	Monday 16 September 2024
Electoral Commissioner calls for transparency in the use of AI in upcoming local council elections	Tuesday 17 September 2024
Media advisory: Media attendance at local council election ballot draw	Tuesday 17 September 2024
Nominations are in for October local council elections	Wednesday 18 September 2024
Democracy ambassadors help community voices 'Be Heard'	Thursday 19 September 2024
VEC retires 16 local council election candidates	Monday 30 September 2024
Voting starts next week for Victoria's local council elections	Friday 4 October 2024

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**Statewide media releases and advisories**

Police investigate break-in at the Ballarat election office	Thursday 10 October 2024
Voters urged to request a replacement ballot pack following van theft	Friday 18 October 2024
Local council elections voting deadline looms	Monday 21 October 2024
Voters urged to request a replacement ballot pack following theft	Thursday 24 October 2024
Final day of voting	Friday 25 October 2024
Media advisory: Results timelines for Victorian local council elections	Friday 25 October 2024
Media advisory: Media attendance at results declarations	Wednesday 6 November 2024
Suspected postal vote tampering in 2 local council elections referred for inquiry	Wednesday 13 November 2024
Didn't vote in the 2024 local council elections?	Monday 17 February 2025
Non-voters asked to explain why they didn't vote in the 2024 local council elections	Friday 7 March 2025
Infringements sent to 2024 local council election non-voters	Scheduled for Monday 14 April 2025
Act on penalty reminder notice or risk enforcement action	Scheduled for Thursday 1 July 2025

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## Appendix 4: VoterAlert advisories

### Appendix 4.1: SMS alerts

#### Close of roll – sent from Wednesday 17 July to Wednesday 31 July 2024

VoterAlert: Vic council elections will be held by post this Oct. Make sure your details are correct before 4pm Wed 7 Aug. More info <https://vec.vic.gov.au/LG24>. If you'd rather not open links in this message, look up the VEC website or call 131 832 to check. Unsubscribe <https://vec.vic.gov.au/voteralert>

#### Uncontested election – sent from Wednesday 25 September to Tuesday 1 October 2024

VoterAlert: the election in your area is uncontested, as only one person nominated per vacancy. You do not need to vote. More info: <https://vec.vic.gov.au/LG24>. If you'd rather not visit links in this message, look up the VEC website or call 131 832. Unsubscribe: <https://vec.vic.gov.au/voteralert>

#### Mail-out of ballot packs – sent from Monday 7 October to Monday 14 October 2024

VoterAlert: ballot packs for the local council elections are on their way, arriving by 15 Oct. Complete and return before 6pm on Fri 25 Oct. For more info visit <https://vec.vic.gov.au/LG24>, look up the VEC website or call 131 832. Unsubscribe: <https://vec.vic.gov.au/voteralert>


#### Reminder close of voting – sent from Tuesday 22 October to Wednesday 23 October 2024

VoterAlert: return your council election ballot pack by 6pm Fri Oct 25. If your ballot pack hasn't arrived, find out how to get a replacement at <https://vec.vic.gov.au/LG24>. Ignore if you've already voted or asked for a replacement. If you'd rather not visit links in this message, look up the VEC website or call 131 832. Unsubscribe: <https://vec.vic.gov.au/voteralert>

## Appendix 4.2: Email alerts

### Close of roll email

Do not reply to this email. Replies go to an unmonitored inbox. [Contact us](#) with any questions.

**VoterAlert** 

Hi

Victorian local council elections are being held by post this October. You must be correctly enrolled by **4 pm on Wednesday 7 August**.

#### What you need to do

Not sure if your enrolment details are up to date? You can check online at [vec.vic.gov.au/enrolment](http://vec.vic.gov.au/enrolment)

If you've changed your address or name since you last voted in an election, you should update your details. Please also check the postal address listed on your enrolment, as this is where we will send your ballot pack.

[CHECK MY DETAILS](#)

If your details **haven't changed** since the last time you voted, get ready to vote. All voting in this election is by post. We will start posting ballot packs out from Monday 7 October.

The full list of candidates will be available on our website from 12 noon on Tuesday 17 September.

[Find out more about your council election.](#)

Voting is compulsory – don't risk a fine.

#### If you own properties in more than one Victorian council

Some people are eligible to enrol in more than one council. If you own or pay rates on a property in a Victorian council other than where you normally live, you can apply to enrol with that council. This is known as council enrolment.

Contact the council directly for more information about council enrolment.

[Find out more about council enrolment.](#)

You **must** vote for all councils you are enrolled in.

#### Electoral structure changes

Over half of Victoria's local councils have new electoral structures or have changed internal ward boundaries. You may be voting in a new ward this October.

You can check your council's ward boundaries on our [interactive map](#).

#### Information in your language

You can find election information in 20 languages other than English on our website.

[Find in-language information.](#)

#### Security

If you would rather not click any links in this email, all this information and more is on our website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au). You can also hover over links to confirm they go to a [vic.gov.au](http://vic.gov.au) website before you click them.

Be aware of scams: all emails we send you will have 'Victorian Electoral Commission <[voteralert@info.vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:voteralert@info.vec.vic.gov.au)>' as the sender. We will never ask you to enter credit card details or make payments through a website.

#### More information




Visit [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) or call us on [131 832](tel:131832) between 8:30 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday.

*Authorised by S. Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.*

**Our mailing address is:**  
Level 11, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

This message was sent to you by the Victorian Electoral Commission because your contact details are listed on the Victorian electoral roll. Responses are not monitored.


[UNSUBSCRIBE](#)

[VEC website](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Legal](#)

### Uncontested election email

Do not reply to this email. Replies go to an unmonitored inbox. [Contact us](#) with any questions.

**VoterAlert** 

Hi

The , Ward election is uncontested as there were the same number of candidates as vacancies at the close of nominations.

You are not required to vote this October.

#### If you own properties in any other Victorian councils

You will still get a ballot pack for any other councils you are enrolled in. Please complete and return all ballot packs you receive before **6 pm on Friday 25 October**.

If you don't vote you may risk a fine.

Check your enrolment online or contact the council directly to check your enrolment details.

[Check my enrolment](#)

#### Security

If you would rather not click any links in this email, all this information and more is on our website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au). You can hover your mouse over links to make sure they go to a [vic.gov.au](http://vic.gov.au) website before you click them.

Be aware of scams: all emails we send you will have 'Victorian Electoral Commission <[voteralert@info.vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:voteralert@info.vec.vic.gov.au)>' as the sender. We will never ask you to enter credit card details or make payments through a website.

#### More information




For more information visit [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) or call us on [131 832](tel:131832) between 8:30 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday.

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[UNSUBSCRIBE](#)


  

[VEC website](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Legal](#)

Ballot pack mail-out email

Do not reply to this email. Replies go to an unmonitored inbox. Contact us with any questions.

VoterAlert

 Victorian Electoral Commission

Hi

You are enrolled to vote in the 2024 local council elections.

Your vote matters. Local council elections are your chance to vote on who represents you on the local community issues that you care about.

**How to vote**

Voting in these elections is by **post**.

We have started posting ballot packs to all enrolled voters. They will arrive by **Tuesday 15 October**.

Please follow the instructions in your ballot pack to complete your vote and mail it back to us as soon as possible.

If you're unsure, you can learn [how to fill out a ballot paper](#) on our website.

Voting closes at **6 pm on Friday 25 October**, but your local mail collection times may be earlier than this. We recommend you return your completed vote as soon as possible.

You can also drop your vote off at your local election office.

**If you don't get a ballot pack**

Ballot packs are in the mail and will arrive by **Tuesday 15 October**.

If you don't get a ballot pack by then, you can ask us to send you a replacement by calling [131 832](tel:131832) between 8:30 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday.

**Moved house or away from your address**

If you are away from your mailing address you can request a replacement ballot pack. You can:

- call us on [131 832](tel:131832) between 8:30 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday
- visit the election office of your **old address** to get a replacement on the spot. If you will be away during the election, you can fill in your vote there and return it straight away.

Find my election office

**Find candidates**

Information about candidates, including statements and candidate questionnaire responses are on our website.

Find candidates

**Information in your language**

Our website has information in more than 20 languages. There are also videos explaining how to vote in 10 different languages.

Find information in your language

**Security**

If you would rather not click any links in this email, all this information and more is on our website: [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au). You can hover your mouse over links to confirm they go to a [vic.gov.au](http://vic.gov.au) website before you click them.

Be aware of scams: all emails we send you will have 'Victorian Electoral Commission <[voteralert@info.vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:voteralert@info.vec.vic.gov.au)>' as the sender. We will never ask you to enter credit card details or make payments through a website.

**More information**




For more information visit [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) or call us on [131 832](tel:131832) between 8:30 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday.

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Level 11, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

This message was sent to you by the Victorian Electoral Commission because your contact details are listed on the Victorian electoral roll. Responses are not monitored.

UNSUBSCRIBE




[VEC website](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Legal](#)

Last week to vote email

Do not reply to this email. Replies go to an unmonitored inbox. Contact us with any questions.

VoterAlert

 Victorian Electoral Commission

**Reminder:** voting for the 2024 local council elections closes at 6 pm this Friday 25 October.

Please ignore this email if you've already voted or asked for a replacement ballot pack.

**How to vote**

Voting in these elections is by **post**.

Please follow the instructions in your ballot pack to complete your vote and mail it back to us as soon as possible. You can find instructions on [how to fill out a ballot paper](#) on our website.

Voting closes at **6 pm on Friday 25 October**, but your local mail collection times may be earlier than this. We recommend you return your completed vote as soon as possible.

You can also drop your vote off at your local election office.

Find my election office

**If you don't get a ballot pack**

If you haven't received your ballot pack in the mail yet, you can ask us to send you a replacement by:

- visiting your election office\* to get a replacement on the spot. You can fill in your vote there and return it straight away.
- calling us on [131 832](tel:131832) between 8:30 am and 6 pm, Monday to Friday
- filling in our [online form](#).

\*This must be the election office for your enrolled address. [Check your enrolment details](#) if you've recently moved.

Find my election office

**Information in your language**

Our website has information in more than 20 languages. There are also videos explaining how to vote in 10 different languages.

Find information in your language

**Security**

If you would rather not click any links in this email, all this information and more is on our website: [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au). You can hover your mouse over links to confirm they go to a [vic.gov.au](http://vic.gov.au) website before you click them.

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**More information**




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UNSUBSCRIBE



[VEC website](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Legal](#)



## Appendix 5: Voter engagement program and initiatives

Program	Program details
Be Heard Democracy Ambassador program	This program provides free peer-led electoral education and information sessions to those under-represented in the electoral process. This includes people with disability and their carers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people experiencing homelessness and young people. A total of 238 sessions were provided across the state reaching over 10,000 participants.
Specialist mobile enrolment	This program delivered peer-led enrolment sessions in prisons, homeless services, schools and tertiary education settings to reach young people and Aboriginal community settings across Melbourne and regional Victoria.
CALD in-language social media videos	This project produced a series of videos in 11 different languages including Auslan. Languages were chosen to reach language groups most in need of additional support. The videos provided electoral information on how to enrol, how to vote by post, and how to respond to an Apparent Failure to Vote Notice. These were widely distributed and shared through the VEC's social media platforms, community networks, and partner organisations.
Active Citizenship program	Electoral and civics education workshops were delivered to CALD community leaders in 3 locations across regional Victoria.
Aboriginal engagement	This program delivered information and engagement sessions across the greater Melbourne area and regional Victoria. These were designed to raise awareness that voting was compulsory and taking place via post. Culturally appropriate resources were produced to provide information on how to respond to an Apparent Failure to Vote Notice, including a video which was distributed and shared through the VEC's social media platforms and partner organisations.
Easy English guide	This was produced for people with low English proficiency and designed as a co-read product where a person supports the reader. These were distributed by Democracy Ambassadors as a key resource, and also available for download from the VEC's website.

# Appendix 6: Final list of candidates in ballot paper order

The candidates, in ballot paper order, were as follows:

<b>Benalla Rural City Council election</b>
HEWA GUNARATNE, Puna
HEARN, Bernie
MURPHY, Philip Leo
JONES, Mark
DAVIS, Peter
TOLLIDAY, Nathan
MERKEL, Jillian
BORRADALE, Annette
BRANIGAN, Vincent Michael
KING, Justin R
PEARCE, Suzie
HAUPTMANN, Philip
O'BRIEN, Gail
BLORE, David George
SMITH, Kevin

## Appendix 6.1: Candidate statements and photographs

Benalla Rural City Council election	Total number of candidates at close of nominations	Number of candidates that lodged a candidate statement	Number of candidates that lodged a candidate photograph
Benalla Rural City Council	15	15	15

Appendix 6.2: Sample ballot material

Outer envelope

Sample Council


If undeliverable, return to  
Locked Bag 0000  
LOCALITY VIC 0000

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA  
PRIORITY

STAT-ENVM938 06/24

Local council elections 2024  
Postal ballot pack



Voting closes 6 pm  
Friday 25 October

 Victorian  
Electoral  
Commission


Reply-paid envelope

Sample Council  
Sample Ward

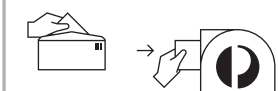
Delivery address:  
Locked Bag 0000  
LOCALITY VIC 0000




No stamp required  
if posted in Australia



Sample Council  
Sample Ward  
STAT-ENVM937 07/24








Post your completed ballot pack  
before 6 pm on Friday 25 October  
  
Local post box collection times vary. Check the  
collection time on your post box to make sure your  
vote is in the mail on time.



Election Manager  
Sample Election Office  
Sample Ward  
Reply Paid 00000  
LOCALITY VIC 0000

Ballot paper envelope


Ballot paper  
envelope



How to vote  

1. Complete your ballot paper/s.
2. Put your completed ballot paper/s inside this envelope and seal it.
3. Sign the declaration on the back of this envelope.  
We remove it before counting to keep your vote secret.
4. Put this ballot paper envelope into the reply-paid envelope and seal it.
5. Post it straight away.

Voters unable to sign: Blind or low vision voters, or voters with low literacy or limited English can ask someone to sign for them. The authorised person must sign and write their name on the back of this envelope.

 Victorian  
Electoral  
Commission

STAT-ENV-LG-003 06/24

Candidate leaflet

Voting closes

6 pm Friday

25 October 2024

All voting in this election is by post.

Post your vote before voting closes.

We cannot accept late votes.

Local post box collection times vary. Check the collection time on your post box to make sure your vote is in the mail on time.

You can also drop your vote off during business hours to:

Address line 1

Address line 2

Address line 3

For more information, visit [vec.vic.gov.au](#) or call 131 832 during business hours.

Voting is compulsory

You are enrolled to vote in this election.


Voting is your right. By voting, you get to have a say in who represents you on your local council.

Voting is also a responsibility. If you don't vote, you may get a fine.

If your enrolment details have changed, it is your responsibility to update them. Visit [vec.vic.gov.au/update](#) for more information.

Sample Council

Sample Ward




Candidate leaflet

Sample Council

election 2024

Sample Ward

Sample Ward




Notice

The contents of candidate statements are provided by the candidates. Any enquiries about candidate statements should be directed to the relevant candidate.

Candidate statements are not verified or endorsed by the election manager.


Candidate statements are also available at [vec.vic.gov.au](#)

Candidates may also provide answers to a questionnaire. Responses are available at [vec.vic.gov.au](#)

 Victorian Electoral Commission

How to vote multi-language leaflet  
*If applicable*


How to vote leaflet

 Interpreter

Language support

Visit [vec.vic.gov.au/languages](#) for more information in your language.

For interpreter assistance, call us. See the phone numbers on the next page.

 Victorian Electoral Commission

Ballot paper

Sample Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 4 in the order of your choice.

Number every box to make your vote count.

You must not use any number more than once.

☐

CANDIDATE, Name

☐

CANDIDATE, Name

☐

CANDIDATE, Name

☐

CANDIDATE, Name

Appendix 6.3: Sample uncontested ward leaflet


**Sample Council election 2024**  
Sample Ward

At the close of nominations for the Sample Council, Sample Ward election, one nomination was received for one vacancy. Therefore, Candidate Name will be elected unopposed.

**You are not required to vote.**

**Election Manager Name**  
Election Manager

For more information call 131 832



Victorian  
Electoral  
Commission

## Appendix 7:

### Daily breakdown of the general mail out

Benalla Rural City Council election	7 October 2024	8 October 2024	9 October 2024	10 October 2024	Total general mail out
Benalla Rural City Council	3,973	3,973	1,870	1,869	11,685



## Appendix 8: Result information

### Benalla Rural City Council count summary

Enrolment	11,684
Formal votes	9,128
Informal votes	669 (6.83% of the total votes)
Voter turnout	9,797 (83.85% of the total enrolment)

Candidates (in ballot paper order)	First preference votes	Percentage
HEWA GUNARATNE, Puna	653	7.15%
HEARN, Bernie	728	7.98%
MURPHY, Philip Leo	353	3.87%
JONES, Mark	256	2.80%
DAVIS, Peter	1,223	13.40%
TOLLIDAY, Nathan	1,119	12.26%
MERKEL, Jillian	483	5.29%
BORRADALE, Annette	196	2.15%
BRANIGAN, Vincent Michael	530	5.81%
KING, Justin R	1,072	11.74%
PEARCE, Suzie	386	4.23%
HAUPTMANN, Philip	496	5.43%
O'BRIEN, Gail	506	5.54%
BLORE, David George	778	8.52%
SMITH, Kevin	349	3.82%

### Successful candidates

DAVIS, Peter (1st elected)
TOLLIDAY, Nathan (2nd elected)
KING, Justin R (3rd elected)
BLORE, David George (4th elected)

---

**Benalla Rural City Council count summary**

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HEARN, Bernie (5th elected)

---

MERKEL, Jillian (6th elected)

---

HEWA GUNARATNE, Puna (7th elected)

---

## Appendix 9: Election participation statistics

Participation is measured by the number of marks on the roll as a percentage of total enrolment and can vary from turnout (total ballot papers counted as a percentage of total enrolment).

Benalla Rural City Council election participation	2020	2024	Statewide LG 2024 – excluding Melbourne City Council
18–19	84.75%	80.86%	86.64%
20–24	77.88%	74.88%	80.02%
25–29	75.51%	72.02%	74.09%
30–34	77.86%	71.58%	73.31%
35–39	81.42%	77.68%	76.18%
40–44	81.39%	77.26%	78.99%
45–49	83.29%	83.43%	81.92%
50–54	86.71%	85.24%	84.69%
55–59	90.94%	88.20%	87.46%
60–64	93.19%	91.51%	89.16%
65–69	92.35%	92.35%	90.41%
70+	91.70%	92.17%	88.77%
Voters enrolled through section 241 of the LG Act	87.84%	85.45%	86.27%
Voters enrolled through sections 243–245 of the LG Act	67.82%	94.67%	60.96%
Total voters enrolled	86.90%	85.51%	84.12%

## Appendix 10: Complaints

### Written complaints received by the VEC

Where an outcome is a follow-up response, the customer may have replied to the VEC's response and the VEC has therefore replied to that follow-up email.

Where an outcome has no action taken, this could be an anonymous submission that doesn't contain feedback and therefore can't be passed on to another team.

Date	Nature of complaint	Action taken by the VEC
Tuesday 15 October 2024	VEC Complaint - Enrolment processes generally	Follow-up response provided
Tuesday 15 October 2024	VEC Complaint - Postal vote receipt delayed	Response provided







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Level 11, 530 Collins Street  
Melbourne Victoria 3000  
**T** 131 832  
[info@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@vec.vic.gov.au)  
[vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

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**4.7 Appointment of Councillor Representatives on the *Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group***

Ref: 36167913-9355  
Robert Barber – General Manager Corporate  
Jess Pendergast – Governance Coordinator

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The report discusses the appointment of a Councillor Representative to the *Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group*.

**BACKGROUND**

A report was presented to the Council at its meeting on 18 December 2024 appointing Councillor representatives to various committees, peak industry bodies and regional and community organisations for the 2024/25 Council Year.

The Councillor representative appointed to the *Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group* was Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne.

**DISCUSSION**

Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne has recently stepped down as the Councillor representative on the *Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group* and a replacement councillor is required.

***COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025* IMPLICATIONS**

**Leadership**

- *Good governance.*
- *Effective and responsive advocacy.*

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In accordance with the Council’s *Community Engagement Policy*, it is proposed that community engagement be undertaken at the ‘inform’ level under the International Association for Public Participation’s IAP2 public participation spectrum as detailed in the table below:

Level of Public Participation	Promise to the community	Techniques to be used
Inform	We will provide information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Report presented in a public report to the Council.</li><li>▪ Report published on Councils website.</li></ul>

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no material financial implications with appointing a Councillor representative to the *Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group*.

## **LEGISLATIVE AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

It is considered that the report is consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

## **OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any general or material conflicts of interest in this matter.

### **Recommendation:**

**That Cr .....be appointed as the *Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group* Councillor representative for the balance of the 2024/25 Council Year**

## 4.8 Mayor and Councillors' Attendance At Conferences and Events

Ref: 36167913-9115

Tracey Beaton – Executive Coordinator

The Mayor and Councillors, listed in alphabetical order, attended meetings and events as detailed below during the period from 19 May 2025 to 15 June 2025.

<b>Mayor Councillor Bernie Hearn</b>	
21 May	Conflict of Interest Workshop – Maddocks Lawyers
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
23 May	Start of the Benalla Historic Winton Tour
25 May	Benalla and District Junior Football's First Gather Round
28 May	Councillor Only Time
	Communications Advisory Committee Meeting
	Council Meeting
29 May	Interview with Edge FM
2 June	National Reconciliation Week BBQ at Waminda
	Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership Meeting
3 June	National Reconciliation Week Celebration
4 June	Additional Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
5 June	Hume Region Local Government Network Mayors Meeting
	Hume Region Local Government Network CEO and Mayor Meeting
10 June	Benalla Airport Advisory Committee Meeting
11 June	Benalla P-12 College Opening Ceremony of Administration and Food Technology Building
	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
	Benalla and District Fire Brigades Group Meeting
	Volunteers Years of Service Celebration
12 June	Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee
	Interview with 3NE
	Benalla Rotary Club Dinner
13 June	Devenish Biggest Morning Tea for Cancer
	Molyullah Hall Committee Fish and Chip Night

<b>Deputy Mayor Councillor Justin King</b>	
21 May	Conflict of Interest Workshop – Maddocks Lawyers
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
25 May	Benalla and District Junior Football's First Gather Round
28 May	Councillor Only Time
	Benalla Festival Advisory Committee Meeting
	Council Meeting
11 June	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review

<b>Councillor David Blore</b>	
20 May	Benalla Family Research Group Committee Meeting
21 May	Conflict of Interest Workshop – Maddocks Lawyers
	Benalla Family Research Group AGM Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
26 May	North East Local Government Waste and Recycling Forum
28 May	Councillor Only Time
	Communications Advisory Committee Meeting
	Council Meeting
2 June	National Reconciliation Week BBQ at Waminda
	Accessibility Reference Group Morning Tea
3 June	National Reconciliation Week Celebration
4 June	Benalla Historical Society Committee Meeting
	Additional Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
5 June	Tomorrow Today 2025 Grants Presentation
11 June	Benalla Business Network Coffee Connections
	Benalla P-12 College Opening Ceremony of Administration and Food Technology Building
	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
13 June	Devenish Biggest Morning Tea for Cancer
	Molyullah Hall Committee Fish and Chip Night
14 June	Official Opening of Rossmore House (Cooinda)



<b>Councillor Peter Davis</b>	
20 May	Audit and Risk Committee Meeting
21 May	Conflict of Interest Workshop – Maddocks Lawyers
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
28 May	Councillor Only Time
	Communications Advisory Committee Meeting
	Council Meeting
4 June	Additional Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
10 June	Benalla Airport Advisory Committee Meeting
11 June	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
12 June	Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee
14 June	Official Opening of Rossmore House (Cooinda)

<b>Councillor Puna Hewa Gunaratne</b>	
20 May	Audit and Risk Committee Meeting
21 May	Conflict of Interest Workshop – Maddocks Lawyers
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
24 May	North East Sri Lankans Association Vesak Lantern and Light Festival
28 May	Councillor Only Time
	Council Meeting
3 June	Accessibility Reference Group Morning Tea
	Benalla Art Gallery Advisory Committee Meeting
4 June	Additional Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
11 June	Benalla P-12 College Opening Ceremony of Administration and Food Technology Building
	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
13 June	Molyullah Hall Committee Fish and Chip Night
14 June	Official Opening of Rossmore House (Cooinda)

<b>Councillor Jillian Merkel</b>	
21 May	Conflict of Interest Workshop – Maddocks Lawyers
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
26 May	Benalla Street Art Advisory Committee Meeting
28 May	Councillor Only Time
	Benalla Festival Advisory Committee Meeting
	Council Meeting
3 June	Benalla Art Gallery Advisory Committee Meeting
4 June	Additional Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
11 Jun3	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
13 June	Devenish Biggest Morning Tea for Cancer
	Molyullah Hall Committee Fish and Chip Night
14 June	Official Opening of Rossmore House (Cooinda)

<b>Councillor Nathan Tolliday</b>	
21 May	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
28 May	Benalla Festival Advisory Committee Meeting
	Council Meeting
3 June	National Reconciliation Week Celebration
4 June	Additional Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
5 June	Tomorrow Today 2025 Grants Presentation
11 June	Live4Life Benalla Partnership Meeting
	Finance and Planning Committee Meeting
	Assembly of Councillors - Business Review
13 June	Devenish Biggest Morning Tea for Cancer
14 June	Official Opening of Rossmore House (Cooinda)

### **Recommendation:**

**That the report be noted.**

## 4.9 Council Actions Pending

Council Actions Pending are detailed in **Appendix 1**.

**Recommendation:**

**That the report be noted.**

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## Council Actions Pending

Action No.	Meeting Name	Item	Action	Officer	Status/notes
1.	F&P Committee 11-June-2025	2	<b>2024/2025 Quick Response Grant</b> That \$500 grants from the 2024/2025 Quick Response Grant program be awarded to the Benalla Yarn Bombers Incorporated, Benalla Swimming Club Incorporated and U3A Benalla.	MC	Completed
2.	Additional F&P Committee 4-June-2025	1	<b>Draft Benalla Rural City Destination Management Plan 2025-2029 - Hearing of Submissions</b> That the submissions be received.	MEDAS	Completed
3.	Additional F&P Committee 4-June-2025	2	<b>Proposed Benalla Rural City Council 2025/26 Budget – Hearing of Submissions</b> That the submissions be received.	MF	Completed
4.	Additional F&P Committee 4-June-2025	3	<b>Draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 – Hearing of Submissions</b> That the submissions be received.	MF	Completed
5.	Council Meeting 28-May-2025	4.1	<b>Benalla Festival Advisory Committee Terms of Reference</b> That the <i>Benalla Festival Advisory Committee Terms of Reference</i> , as amended, be adopted.	MEDAS	Completed
6.	Council Meeting 28-May-2025	4.3	<b>Draft Councillor Internal Resolution Policy</b> 1. That <i>Councillor Internal Resolution Policy</i> be adopted. 2. That <i>Councillor Internal Resolution Policy</i> be reviewed in May 2029.	GMC	1. Completed 2. Noted
7.	Council Meeting 30-April-25	2	<b>Draft Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029</b> 1. That the draft <i>Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029</i> be endorsed for public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days from 1 May 2025. 2. That submissions relating to the draft <i>Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029</i> be heard at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 4 June 2025. 3. That the Council consider submissions relating to the draft <i>Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029</i> at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 18 June 2025. 4. That the Council consider the adoption of the <i>Benalla Rural City Council Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029</i> at a meeting of the Council on Wednesday 25 June 2025.	MF	1. Completed 2. Completed 3. Completed 4. In progress

Action No.	Meeting Name	Item	Action	Officer	Status/notes
8.	Council Meeting 30-April-25	1	<b>Proposed 2025/26 Budget</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That the amended proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> be endorsed for public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days from 1 May 2025.</li> <li>That submissions relating to the proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> be heard at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 4 June 2025.</li> <li>That the Council consider submissions relating to the proposed <i>2025/26 Budget</i> at an additional meeting of the Finance and Planning Committee on 18 June 2025.</li> <li>That the Council consider the adoption of the <i>2025/26 Budget</i> at a meeting of the Council on Wednesday 25 June 2025.</li> </ol>	MF	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed</li> <li>Completed</li> <li>Completed</li> <li>In progress</li> </ol>
	Council Meeting 24-April-24	4.1	<b>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That the Council give in principle support for the Benalla P-12 College Barkly Street Campus as the preferred site location for the <i>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment project</i>.</li> <li>That the Chief Executive Officer negotiate with the Department of Education for the Council to acquire crown land at 51-54 Barkly Street, Benalla.</li> <li>That the <i>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee</i> be established.</li> <li>That the amended <i>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee Terms of Reference</i> be adopted.</li> <li>That Cr Don Firth and Cr Bernie Hearn be appointed as the Councillor representatives on the <i>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee</i> for the remainder of the 2023/24 Council year.</li> <li>That invitations to join the <i>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee</i> be extended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hume Region Community Infrastructure, Place, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Basketball Victoria, President Benalla Basketball Association, Chair of the Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Committee of Management.</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>That an expression of interest process be undertaken to obtain two community member <i>Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Redevelopment Project Steering Committee</i> representatives.</p>	MAI	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed</li> <li>In progress</li> <li>Completed</li> <li>Completed</li> <li>Completed</li> <li>Completed</li> <li>Completed</li> </ol>
9.	Council Meeting 13-Dec-23	4.4	<b>Benalla Sports and Equestrian Reserve Committee</b> <p>That the debate on this matter be deferred until the Council Meeting on 14 February 2024 to allow the <i>Benalla Sports and Equestrian Reserve</i> user groups to endorse their representative on the <i>Benalla Sports and Equestrian Reserve Committee</i> and the <i>Instrument of Sub-Delegation from the Chief Executive Officer to Community Asset Committees</i> be updated.</p>	CEO	Report to be presented to the Finance and Planning Committee 23 July 2025.



## **5. Reports by Councillors**

### **Recommendation:**

**That the report(s) be noted.**

## **6. Notices of Motion**

## **7. Notices of Rescission Motion**

## **8. Urgent Business**

Business can only be admitted as urgent business by resolution of the council, and only then if it:

- relates to or arises out of a matter which has arisen since distribution of the agenda; and
- cannot be deferred until the next Council Meeting without having a negative impact on the Council, the municipality or the local community; and
- cannot be addressed through the Customer Request Management System.

A Councillor proposing that a matter be admitted as urgent business must lodge it in writing with the Chief Executive Officer by 4pm on the day of the meeting.

The Chief Executive Officer will advise the Mayor of any matter that the Chief Executive Officer determines appropriate for the Council to consider admitting as urgent business.

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## Confidential Business

It is 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 Confidential Reports by Councillors

### 9.2 Confidential Council Actions Pending

#### **Recommendation:**

**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*.**

## **10. Reopening of the meeting to the public**

### **Recommendation:**

**That the meeting be reopened to the public.**

## **Closure of the meeting**