

Budget engagement – what you told us and how we are responding

June 2026



We deliver a wide range of services across a large rural shire, including libraries, emergency management, roads, waste and recycling, sport and recreation, health, and local laws.

This year, we changed our budget engagement approach to an ongoing year-round model, with early engagement undertaken from January to March to help shape the 2026/27 Budget before the draft was prepared.

Engagement included an online survey, community pop-up sessions across the shire, and targeted discussions with key stakeholder groups.

A total of 340 people responded to the online survey, 46 contributed through a survey at community pop-ups, and 16 individual submissions were received.

We heard that the community's main priorities were managing cost-of-living pressures, focusing on core services, maintaining roads and other infrastructure, and making financially responsible decisions.

Community was asked to rank what services are most important to them with the top five being:

- Roads, footpaths and drainage
- Aquatic and recreation centres
- Community facilities
- Parks and playgrounds
- Environmental management and sustainability

These five services aligned directly with what community said also needs improvement.

Roads, footpaths and drainage

What's important - you told us:

- Improved roads, drainage/stormwater systems, and better-connected footpaths and bike/shared paths to support safer, more accessible movement across the shire.
- Improved pedestrian safety measures (crossings, traffic controls)

- Reliable, responsive maintenance services and improved overall amenity and cleanliness of streets and public areas.

2026/27 expenditure:

- \$15m of capital funding for renewal, upgrade or new roads, bridges, footpaths and drainage.
- \$17.3m allocated in the operational budget to continue our investment in maintaining roads (sealed and unsealed), road reserves, off-street carparks, signage, bridges, culverts and footpath and kerb repair.
- \$1.2m for a drainage upgrade at Eastern Beach Road, Lakes Entrance, and \$500,000 in Lucknow, to reduce flooding impacts. Significant further drainage works are planned in Lucknow over coming years to support growth.

Aquatic and recreation centres

What's important - you told us:

- Restore the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool, deliver a new 50m pool and upgrade local pools.
- Expand courts at the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre (especially basketball / badminton) and upgrade the gym, amenities and capacity.

2026/27 expenditure:

- \$390,000 for Stage 2 of re-roofing the BARC.
- \$6.2m to provide facilities for soccer at the WORLD as our fastest growing sport in East Gippsland.

We're also:

- Developing an Aquatic Strategy to inform the future of our aquatic facilities, including the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool.

Community facilities

What's important – you told us:

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- Better sport and recreation facilities, libraries, neighbourhood houses, halls, arts/cultural spaces, and permanent Coast Guard facilities.
- Clean, accessible public toilets and improved maintenance and safety of foreshore assets (boardwalks, jetties, marinas).

2026/27 expenditure:

- Provision of building insurance coverage for a wide variety of Council-owned and State-managed community facilities.
- \$320,000 to support over 77 Committees of Management to maintain sportsgrounds, recreation reserves and halls.

We're also:

- Working with the Bairnsdale Senior Citizens to secure a new space for them to call home in future years with the support of a \$500,000 grant.
- Undertaking a \$9.68m upgrade of the Bairnsdale Airport runway and lighting which is part funded through a grant.
- Developing Place Plans for local areas.

Parks and playgrounds

What's important - you told us:

- Parks and playground safety and accessibility, with upgraded equipment and more options in underserved areas.
- Play spaces being well maintained and equipped with shade, seating, amenities and dog-friendly areas to support everyday use.

2026/27 expenditure:

- \$5.2m in parks, open spaces and streetscapes. Projects include the continuation of the Krauatungalung Walk, Lakes Entrance, Metung boardwalk and the Johnsonville play space.
- \$5.6m to maintain and operate our parks, gardens and open space including the cost of

landscaping supplies, fuel, plant and equipment, and the ongoing care of reserves and streetscapes.

Environmental management and sustainability

What's important – you told us:

- Protecting and enhancing vegetation, waterways and biodiversity, with more trees, shade and proactive land and bushland management.
- Improve waste services and recycling, and supporting climate resilience, energy initiatives and environmental protection.

2026/27 expenditure:

- \$608,000 to address a range of environmental issues like the management of native flora on Council land and energy efficiency programs.

We're also:

- Implementing energy efficiency upgrades.
- Managing pest weed control on Council managed reserves and roadsides.

Other actions

Community feedback has also shaped several specific actions we will deliver over the coming year. These include:

- Implementing new features on our website to make it easier to access Council information.
- Updating how goods on footpaths are managed for hospitality businesses to better support local businesses and activate our town centres.
- Reviewing all our services to ensure our approach is business friendly.
- Using a grant we have secured to reform our Local Law which will commence with community feedback in 2026/27 with the overall aim to reduce red tape, remove regulatory burden and allowing for online permits.

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How we spend \$100 in the 2026/27 budget.

