

Councillor Addresses: 2026/27 Budget

Cr Brett Moller: Division 1

Mayor, thank you for outlining all your vision in the next year's budget in respect to your campaign commitments.

As always, it is the whole Council that comes together to decide on the budget each year.

We look at what is available within our budget constraints and parameters and, as a well-considered and informed Council that we are, we will continue to do that into the future.

Councillors Vallely, Coghlan and I also had campaign commitments in the '24 election and I'll highlight three of them: the liveability of suburbs from Babinda to the northern beaches, fiscal responsibility, and the importance of a council working together. Never more important today as it was then.

I was disappointed to see some media leading up to the budget that I interpreted as certain people jockeying for position on narrative.

I think it only created uncertainty in how some would vote today, impacting public trust and confidence. I hope this trust can be restored in our meeting today by informed and well considered decision making.

Unashamedly, I am supporting projects in our suburbs over those large, big investment city centric projects, whilst planned for, have not been fully costed, but early indications show they are not within the budget parameters of what we can afford.

We did see big projects under the Manning-led Council 2012 to 2024, like the Cairns Performing Arts Centre, Munro Martin Parklands, the Esplanade Dining Precinct, Aplin St and Florence St upgrades, the strategic purchase of the Cairns Gallery precinct, and let's not forget the plethora of street upgrades in and around the CBD, where orange witches hats became part of the street scape.

In this term of Council, the CBD needed to breath, and it was time to focus in the suburbs on those projects that, in my view, have been pushed sideways and falling behind from where I would like to see today, particularly for Division 1.

I am talking about the Alley Park Masterplan with plans for lights going forward this year, and the finalisation of the Pyramid Parklands Gujura project.

And to say that we can have both, well we saw what happened with the Esplanade Dining Precinct, the \$9M for the Edmonton pool was redirected to the Esplanade dining precinct.

There was no criticism on that, it was the right time to do it and a very worthwhile project well loved by locals and visitors.

But it is time for a suburban focus in this budget.

We all have masterplans, in Redlynch, Smithfield, and Trinity Beach, and we all have divisional projects where our residents live and bring up their children and they want equal liveability for where they live.

We continue to invest in supporting our city centre, for example the subsidies for the Cairns Arts Gallery and Cairns Museum, along with the operational funding for the lagoon pool and Muddy's, which are significant.

I would like to point out that Cairns city has the lagoon pool, Muddy's and the Tobruk Pool, and here we are with our community of Babinda facing the decommissioning of its pool.

While we are waiting the results of the survey, they have anecdotally informed loud and clear that they want investment in an aquatic centre down there, as do our suburban pools of Gordonvale, Woree and Smithfield.

If we truly are a Mayor and Councillors for all our Cairns local government area, is that too much to ask?

I have more to say and I will talk to my community about what we have for Division 1 going forward.

I thank Lisa Whitton (Council CFO) and her team, and I want to thank all staff of Cairns Regional Council for what they do.

Thank you.

Cr Matthew Tickner: Division 2

This is the third budget I have delivered as a Councillor and I can tell you, they don't get any easier – balancing the wants, needs and vision of a city within the ever-tightening envelope we have.

Ensuring the rates we collect are being put to work where our community want to see them put to work, and always looking to improve the wellbeing and lifestyle of our residents by delivering the critical services required for as little financial take as possible.

In putting together this budget, I personally wanted to achieve a number of things, I can't speak on behalf of Council, but I know many of my goals were also shared by my colleagues:

- I wanted to deliver on the commitments I have made both in my division and to Cairns as a whole.
- I wanted to continue down the budget repair path we have travelled which would help households by keeping rates as low as possible even while suffering significant budget shocks throughout the year.
- I wanted to continue to deliver the best possible services for our community all over our Cairns LGA.
- And most importantly I wanted to ensure the budget was long-term-successful and would set our city up for many years to come.

This budget delivers on all of those targets, we planned for the shocks early, we put the budget into repair two years ago and when the shocks inevitably came, we had the wet blanket ready to dampen the impact.

And those shocks came hard and fast:

- A fire in our Bedminster Waste Facility.
- Millions of dollars in State Government waste levies.
- Four significant water reservoir projects with an upcoming over \$40 million investment in repairs and new builds to ensure Cairns has a secure water supply.

These are some of the emerging issues we will be delivering on, all while we also continue to invest into the services and spaces that make living in Cairns unbeatable.

In Division 2, I'm excited for the next three years with over \$14 million of investment pouring into our little slice of paradise:

- The significant upgrade of Sugarworld Adventure Playground in Edmonton to make it a true destination playground.
- Upgrades to Fuller Park including a new community garden, new toilet block and a new carpark.
- Upgrades to Wilmot Park in Edmonton and Todd Park in Bentley Park.
- The start of the new Edmonton Library strategy and facility.

I made a promise to my community when elected that I would fight for better outcomes where the people live.

The ratepayers of Cairns wanted to see us deliver for them and improve the spaces they play in.

This was never an argument about one or the other – it was a strategic re-positioning to leverage off the immense amount of investment that has been poured into the Cairns CBD over successive Councils, to strategically focusing on city building infrastructure and asset management like our new water treatment plant, reservoir upgrades and the Mount Peter PDA, all while ensuring our suburbs see the facilities needed to support their continued growth and evolution.

Investment attracts investment, as the Mayor mentioned in her video the other day.

Well, this doesn't just apply to the CBD. It also applies to areas like Division 2 and its surrounds as we see private and public investment spike, the likes have never been seen before in this area.

Division 2 and its surrounding areas are pumping at the moment; \$300 million in State and Federal funding towards the PDA, a great big new Bunnings in Edmonton, new commercial developments all over the division. Our medium density area of Edmonton is a hive of densification rejuvenation and now the golden goose that is Manns' Farm has ignited a fire storm of opportunity in the south.

We need to think bigger and differently about what investing into our city looks like because, if we don't, the growing pains are not felt by the tourists who visit our beautiful city, it's felt by the residents not getting the services they deserve as their neighbourhoods get bigger and busier. This budget is steering us in the right direction and I'm happy to support it.

Cr Cathy Zeiger: Division 3

I want to thank, not only Ms Whitton and her finance team but also, every officer that has worked so hard to pull the belt in tightly in their relevant sections and maintain the standards that are expected.

Price rises are not only up at the petrol bowser and supermarket shelves, but across everything that Council purchases as well.

With this said, we have arrived at a base rate rise of 3.95% with additional increases in utility charges (including the State imposed Waste Levy), giving an overall figure of 7.5%.

There are horror stories around the country, with some Councils in NSW ranging between 29% - 52% increases.

Whilst no one wants an increase, in the current climate I believe we have done well.

In terms of good news for Division 3 this next financial year, it is great to see such investment in our suburbs which is so needed.

With this said, I feel I have the most exciting announcements to make.

Jeff Pezzutti Park is progressing well and will finish hopefully at the end of this calendar year. The skate park is massive and purpose-designed by our community; the playground (also chosen by community) will both be enjoyed along with the full-sized multi-purpose court.

And, all going well, soil will be turned very soon for our Cairns Community & Multicultural Centre in White Rock.

To say I am overjoyed is an understatement.

Thirteen years ago, I was conducting early intervention programs for youth.

At this time, I realised there was a huge need in not only White Rock, but on the southside for a large, purpose-built community centre.

I have been advocating for this community centre since before I commenced in my current role as Councillor.

It started with securing the 3.86 hectares behind White Rock State School for community use. After quite a battle, with help from previous Council Executive Manager for Community Life, Brett Spencer, and fellow Councillor at the time, John Schilling, we succeeded in obtaining a 30+ year lease from State Government.

This was to complement the future community centre to be built on the strip of Council land bordering this site.

Twelve years have passed, along with keeping this on the capex budget during different terms, and now it comes to fruition.

The 3.86 hectares bordering our site behind the school is about to be developed into recreational fields and toilets with a \$4.7 million Go For Gold grant from the State Government. A great collaboration with White Rock State School, Council and State.

This will coincide with the commencement of the Cairns Community & Multicultural Centre.

This centre has also been a recipient of the Federal Government's Growing Regions Program grant of \$4 million. The total cost for the Community Centre will be \$9 million.

Much community consultation has gone into this design, with Cred Consulting engaged initially to meet with community representatives and leaders from a diverse range of backgrounds to ensure the end-built product would serve their needs.

This centre will be a welcoming space for everyone, be used to deliver services and programmes in response to community need, be inclusive and accessible to all, safe, and well maintained.

Centacare has been awarded the Management Rights to run the centre and I cannot think of a better equipped and experienced organisation to hold the responsibility of managing this centre.

Highlights of the new build will be:

Large and medium sized multi-purpose spaces, meeting rooms, commercial kitchen, offices etc. The design of the building will lend itself to be internally adjusted with moving walls and good circulation for larger gatherings.

I could go on for 40 minutes plus, but I only have 4 minutes!

Cr Trevor Tim: Division 4

Thank you Madam Mayor,

Here we are, the budget for Cairns Regional Council 2026/2027.

There is an old saying: "You don't plan to fail, you just fail to plan."

Well, we have the budget Plan and firstly I would like to thank and congratulate our CFO – Chief Financial Officer – Lisa Whitton and her Team. A job well done.

And I extend thanks and congratulations to our ELT - Executive Leadership Teams – and the work they have done, and I acknowledge our team leader, our CEO – Ken Goldthorpe. Thank you Ken.

I will add that running our beautiful city is a huge job. Yes, it's more than potholes.

Our team is very hardworking, enthusiastic and very smart.

The team collates the information and brings the information to the table through workshops, and we all discuss and massage all the conversations. The conversations are robust, open and visionary.

The budget is not only for the next 12 months, but also there is a 10 year and long-term financial plan.

We are well aware that the funds are from the rate payers of Cairns, the beautiful people of our beautiful city, and we do not take that lightly.

Exciting to see the near completion of our Cairns Water Security Stage 1 by the end of the year, this huge project, the city's biggest project ever.

I also want to acknowledge the celebrations of Cairns 150 Years.

And I, as one of your Councillors, personally am enjoying the role and it's an honour to be serving you.

Thank you Mayor.

Cr Rob Pyne: Division 5

Resilience is a big thing for me in this budget.

We've been focused on getting ourselves in a position where we can respond to the "known unknowns" that are right around the corner.

The PDA and associated funding are welcome announcements however, we know they're going to bring with them the need for Council to deliver a significant amount of infrastructure in a relatively small amount of time – the cost of which is uncertain right now.

I would like to thank other Councillors for again supporting the Cairns CBD and Esplanade. I understand that commercial areas in other divisions don't receive the same high standards of investment and maintenance but, as our Mayor has pointed out in recent weeks, the CBD is our front door to the world and must be presentable, as indeed I believe it is.

In the 2026/27 Budget, indicatively, there is ~\$32.6M allocated to the CBD. This is made up of the following:

- \$9.5 million for city venues
- \$7.8 million for creative venues (CPAC, MMP, Gallery Precinct)
- \$5.2 million for City Safe CBD
- \$10.1 million for capex projects – see below
- \$32.6 million total

That includes:

- Muddies Renewal \$2.25 million
- Fogarty Park Soundshell Roof Rep \$350K
- Spence Street City Precinct \$1 million

- Abbott Street Pathway Renewal
- Spence Street to Wharf Street \$680K
- Shield Street to Aplin \$500K
- Lake Street Crossover \$625K
- Lagoon Renewal \$740K
- Lake Street LED Lighting \$770K

This list is not exhaustive and does not include works maintenance in the CBD.

However, based on 77,000 assessments, the \$32.6 million equates to \$423 per assessment across our region.

We all want shiny new things for the city but, for this, it is State and Federal funding that must be worked for and won.

Finally, thank you to Ms Whitton (CFO) and her staff for all their hard work.

Cr Kristy Vallely: Division 6

Before I begin, I would like to sincerely thank Deputy Mayor Brett Olds for your leadership and facilitating some robust and constructive discussions throughout this budget process.

Budgets are never easy. Every Councillor comes to the table with projects they are passionate about and communities they are fighting for.

There are always competing priorities, tough conversations and difficult decisions to make.

I appreciate the way the Deputy Mayor created an environment where Councillors could advocate strongly for their divisions, challenge ideas and work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for our region.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our incredible Council staff.

From our outdoor crews who are out there every day maintaining our parks, roads and facilities, often in challenging conditions, to our engineers, planners, customer service teams and our finance teams who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make sure every dollar is accounted for – thank you.

Every day, our staff turn up and do their jobs because they care about this city. They are the people who help turn the decisions we make around this table into real outcomes for our community.

We don't always see the work that happens behind the scenes, but it is incredibly valued and appreciated.

Council is a large and complex organisation, and managing it responsibly is no small task. Like households and businesses across our community, we have faced significant pressures: rising costs, inflation, increased demand for services and ageing infrastructure.

The reality is that every dollar counts.

This budget has been about making responsible decisions, prioritising what matters most and ensuring we continue to deliver for our community while protecting our financial future.

For me, as the Division 6 Councillor, the most rewarding part of this budget is seeing projects come to life that I have been advocating for over many years – projects that will make a genuine difference to people’s everyday lives.

The \$16 million investment into the Redlynch Sporting Precinct is a huge win for our community.

This isn’t just about buildings and fields, it’s about people. It’s about kids having somewhere to play, families having somewhere to gather, clubs having the facilities they need to grow, and creating a place that brings our community together for generations to come.

One of my biggest priorities has been the \$6 million pathway connection between Ryan Weare Park and Freshwater Christian College.

This project is something I have advocated strongly for because it’s about connection, safety and accessibility. It will provide a safer route for students, families, walkers and cyclists, and create a better link between two important parts of our community.

Alongside these major projects, we will also see a \$500,000 investment into the Goomboora car park.

These smaller projects matter too. They are about making everyday improvements that people notice and use. Our recreational spaces are where people connect, where families spend time together and where our community lifestyle is supported.

The restoration works at our reservoir and in Brinsmead are another important investment. These projects may not always be the most visible, but they are critical.

Looking after our existing infrastructure and protecting these important assets is about planning properly and ensuring they continue to serve our community well into the future.

I know many residents are feeling the pressure of increasing costs. I understand that because I live here too. I know families, seniors and businesses are making difficult decisions every day.

That’s why it is so important that Council remains focused on delivering value and making sure our investments provide genuine benefits for our community.

Cairns is a beautiful place to live because of the people who call it home. Our residents, our volunteers, our sporting clubs, our community organisations and our dedicated Council staff are what make this city so special.

It is an absolute privilege to represent Division 6 and to be part of shaping the future of this incredible city.

I will continue to advocate strongly for Division 6, but also for the broader Cairns community, because when our whole region succeeds, we all succeed.

Cr Anna Middleton: Division 7

This year's budget reflects the continued balance between delivering a high level of service, operational costs and funding capital works projects, while maintaining a sensible and sustainable fiscal position.

A guiding principle in this budget is the recognition that we are accountable to use public monies for public benefit.

We have achieved this with expert guidance from our financial team led by Lisa Whitton. Thank you.

The last financial year was a busy one in Division 7, and I am delighted to see residents actively engaged with our new Pease St Basketball Court, upgraded Red Arrow Walking Track and new shared pathways along McManus St, Greenslopes St, Mona St, Enmore St, and Fallon St just to name a few, with more paths on the horizon.

In Division 7, the 2026/27 year will see an ongoing investment in keeping Tanks as a top-class creative venue and this year we will see the start of the roll out of the Botanical Gardens Masterplan.

It's what residents don't see that is also important, the millions of dollars spent in Division 7 on reservoir refurbishments, a topic front and centre for this Council, but also the water pumps, electrical and sewer upgrades.

Division 7 is rich in sporting facilities, clubs and community groups and the one million dollars budgeted for community partnerships and Go Clubs funding will continue to help these organisations thrive.

This budget will mostly be about the running Cairns – the roads, the drains, the parks, water security, planning, waste and all those important facets that our incredible council teams manage on a daily basis.

At this point, I think it is important to address incorrect assumptions held by some in the community about this Council's budget approach.

The Mayor's recent pre-budget Facebook posts and commentary, including pictures from the proposed Cains City Precincts Urban Regeneration Project, implied that the planning had been done and this Council was somehow impeding this shiny new plan.

It is a great concept but here a few facts:

Council recently considered that plan in a pre-budget workshop but determined there was insufficient room in the budget this year.

The estimated cost of the project was approximately \$200 million or an additional \$2700 for every ratepayer.

I do not think our residents would thank us for that kind of rate increase during this cost-of-living crisis.

What we did allocate was over \$1 million dollars to commence planning around the Spence St Spine, a priority component of this proposal and which sensibly aligns with the Barlow Park upgrade, Cowboys investments and 2032 Olympics.

This is being strategic and smart with ratepayers' money.

Sadly, the Mayor choose not to attend that pre-budget meeting, otherwise, she would have been aware of the reasoning behind our decision to take a more measured approach to this CBD project. Perhaps the learning here is you need to be at the table to be part of the decision making.

This budget already commits circa \$32 million to the CBD in both maintenance and capital works projects.

Council has been exceptional in managing its budget in a financial year where significant infrastructure projects were required including securing Cairns's water security and unplanned urgent reservoir remediations.

It can be challenging during budget discussions when the project you are supporting doesn't get majority support but that is part of navigating budget deliberations.

In my view it is much more effective and professional to advocate for projects within Council by turning up rather than trying to influence a council decision with media announcements.

I personally take the responsibility of spending ratepayers' money seriously and will continue to use my vote in Council to make fiscally responsible decisions in the best interests of Cairns.

Thank you.

Cr Rhonda Coghlan: Division 8

While I am very proud that this is my seventh Budget, it certainly does not get any easier to find that delicate balance between providing the services and infrastructure our broader community expects, while at the same time keeping any rate increase as minimal as possible.

We understand the cost-of-living pressures our residents are facing, and many families are doing it tough.

Council faces many of these same challenges. Rising wages, increasing material costs, and inflation across the board continue to place significant pressure on our budget.

Collectively, at the beginning of this Council term, we made a conscious decision to focus on delivering a consistently high level of service, funding the ever-growing costs of our capital works program, and maintaining a sustainable operational budget.

Most importantly, we committed to investing in the projects Cairns needs, rather than simply pursuing the "nice to haves".

Along the way, we have taken many hits, with Division 8 suffering more than its fair share.

We have endured Cyclone Jasper, followed by Cyclone Narelle, and then the unexpected failure of our reservoirs during this financial year – each one a major challenge in its own right.

As a result in Division 8, we are still delivering vital recovery works, including beach replenishment, parkland renewal, and the restoration of critical community infrastructure.

I am pleased that the Casuarina Street Bridge will be delivered in the coming financial year, while works on the Redden Creek Bridge will also commence.

We will also see the finalisation of works at Lake Placid, and Barron Gorge Road will once again reopen to traffic, with additional works continuing as required.

This Council is currently undertaking the largest infrastructure program in our city's history.

The Water Security Project, valued at almost half a billion dollars, is moving towards completion. At the same time, we continue to support the development of the Mount Peter Priority Development Area and work towards a long-term solution to replace the ageing Bedminster facility at our waste management centre.

Across Cairns, we continue to invest in roads, pathways that connect people and places, parks, and essential community infrastructure, while maintaining the high standard of services our residents rightly expect.

And while this budget is very much about meeting the challenges before us, there are also some bright spots for Division 8.

Despite the setbacks, we continue to see positive investment and progress, with projects that will strengthen our communities, improve connectivity, and enhance the liveability of our region for years to come. This includes:

- Completion of work at Tom Dooley Park and southern end of O'Shea Esplanade public toilets:
 - Upgrades to meet contemporary standards for accessibility in line with Council's Public Toilet Strategy
 - Tom Dooley Park - \$350K at completion
 - O'Shea Esplanade (south) - \$377K at completion
- Holloways Beach Community Hall:
 - Construct 1 x all abilities unisex toilet with shower, baby change table at the hall - \$250-300K
 - 100% funded by Queensland Government Election Commitment following TC Jasper
- Yorkey's Knob Community Hall:
 - Install new generator for resilience during weather events, including a secure and weatherproof compound - \$100K
 - 100% funded by Qld Government Election Commitment following TC Jasper
- Barron Waters / Burrawungal Park:
 - Kickstarting a multiyear project to improve this much-loved district park in Caravonica with over \$2 million investment in the adopted budget
 - Project deliverables include:
 - Carparking
 - Public toilet
 - Pathway
 - BMX/ pump track

Before I finish, a few thank you's are in order.

Firstly, my Councillor colleagues, who, strive for the very best value for every rate payer dollar. Backing each other and just being a great support for the highs and lows that are part and parcel of the job. Thankyou

The CEO, you've been our rock. Thank you.

Ms Whitton and your team, no words describe your patience and support for us while we dissect the budget and consider the effects of any changes we considered. Thankyou.

To the executives and every single officer, you are the lifeblood of council. Every day I am impressed by the amount of passion and loyalty I see within the organisation. Thank you.

I look forward to seeing our projects delivered and to continuing to work with my fellow councillors and the community to build a stronger, more resilient Cairns.

Cr Brett Olds: Division 9

I agree with what my fellow Councillors have said today, going last means you've got to repeat a few things, but I couldn't agree more with what you all said, especially about the staff at Cairns Regional Council.

From everyone down, Council is bigger than any one person and delivering the Budget, this is the most important thing we do.

We're making decisions on how to spend other people's money, and we've got to be fiscally responsible.

This year we celebrate our 150th year as a city. We are maturing as a city and we need to be ready to keep our vision and to facilitate all that's coming our way, because there is a lot over the coming years of great stuff, not just the issues we've talked about with some of the shocks that we've had of late.

It's an exciting time to be a leader of the city and it's an honoured position, so I take my hat off to every single person in here and across the organisation, as Cr Coghlan said.

We're a big organisation and we're living in a 'user pay' system and environment.

There's been a few, as has been mentioned by a few of my colleagues, unexpected shocks this year.

Our kerbside collection, that's the waste pickup, it's going to cost 25% more than it used to. That was a shock.

There's extra costs associated with the water treatment plant of course.

The fuel cost, with the Strait of Hormuz, going up – it affected every single person in Australia and the world and we weren't immune to that. We use a lot of fuel.

And the waste levy. Thanks State Government for the waste levy, that's about 1.35% of our rate rise issue! It is just 100% us collecting tax to go to the State Government!

And then a few others that have been mentioned too...

But even with all of this, I'm going to be interested to see how the benchmarking against the other neighbouring councils, and any similar size councils in Queensland, how they come up.

Because this is my 11th Budget that I've worked on, and we've had a track record of being – we don't say cheapest – we say the best value rates in the state of Queensland.

So, I'm very interested with everything going on in the world, everything going on across the state, if we're still coming out and batting above our weight as we have year after year.

I think this year will be no different.

And as I said, with an organisation the size of ours, the budget is bigger than any one person.

It's a collective, across the entire organisation, and I've been proud to be part of this collective and witness how close we all worked together.

Out of the eleven budgets I've been a part of, this one probably went the smoothest that I've ever seen, and it's because we all have mature conversations.

Sure, we've had debates, we prosecuted our cases for different things, but when we worked together and collaborated, all of us with respect, I've got to say, I'll take my hat off to all you guys.

Thank you Lisa (Whitton), you head up the financial department, the CEO was a rock and to all the executives, it's a huge burden that you have to deal with and working with us can be challenging at times, I bet. But thank you for that.

All ideas should be brought up in the appropriate place, which is in workshops and in different meetings.

I don't think in the chamber, with social media, or regular media is the place to prosecute cases.

And when it comes to mandates, maybe we have a different understanding of what that is - when 7 of 10 people vote for another person, I don't know if that's quite a mandate, three of the 10?

But we can talk about that next year, and in the appropriate location back there, because at the end of the day, as a Council, we've only got a few levers at our disposal.

We've got our levels of service, and again, travel all around in Australia and look at our roads, look at our parks – I know we had some issues this year because we had an extended wet season, it was huge. I put Cairns up against any city of Australia, when you look at the levels of service, I don't think the locals want us messing with them, and that's the feedback that we get every election and when I'm down the shops.

Debt, we can take on debt, we can go and borrow some money if we want, but someone has to pay that back and that someone is the rates payers – with interest, so it's not always the best option.

And then there is what we are doing today, delivering the rates. That's how we control, how we pay for things and how we balance it all out.

I've got to say that while this Budget has been tough, I'm proud to be a part of it, and I think the suburbs are really going to like some of the projects in there.

There's a lot of projects that have been pushed back for years and years. One of them is the Trinity Beach Sports Precinct that was adopted in 2017. The Master Plan has been pushed out for a best part of the decade, but it is set to start in this budget and be completed in this term of Council.

Thank you to everyone involved, thank you Mayor Eden, have a happy Wednesday and go Queensland!