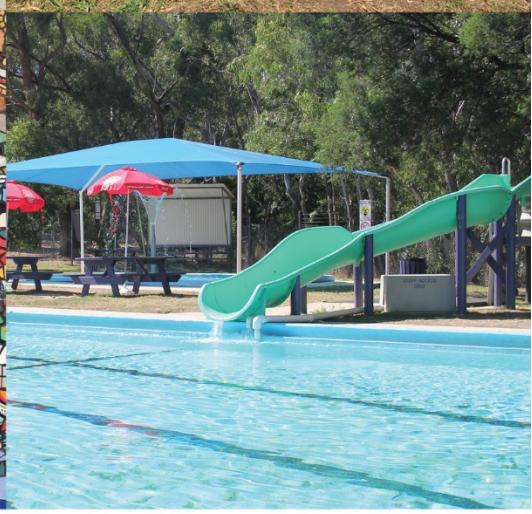
MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL
DRAFT REVENUE AND RATING PLAN
2021/22 – 2024/25







MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL

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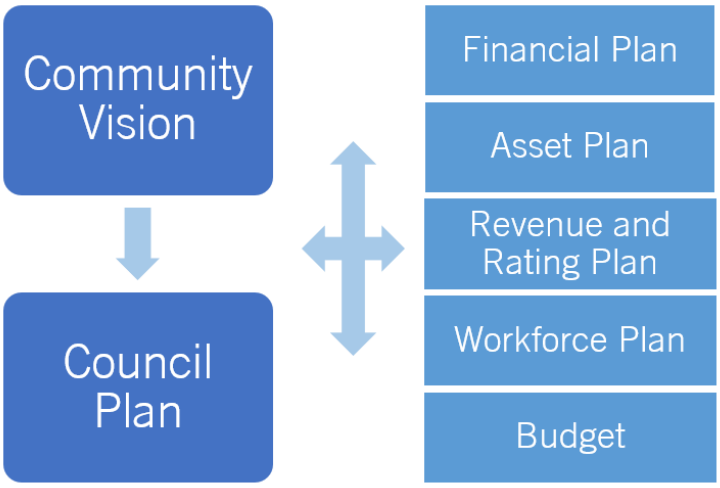
1 PURPOSE

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 Mitchell Shire 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 of "Together with the Community, creating a sustainable future"

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 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.

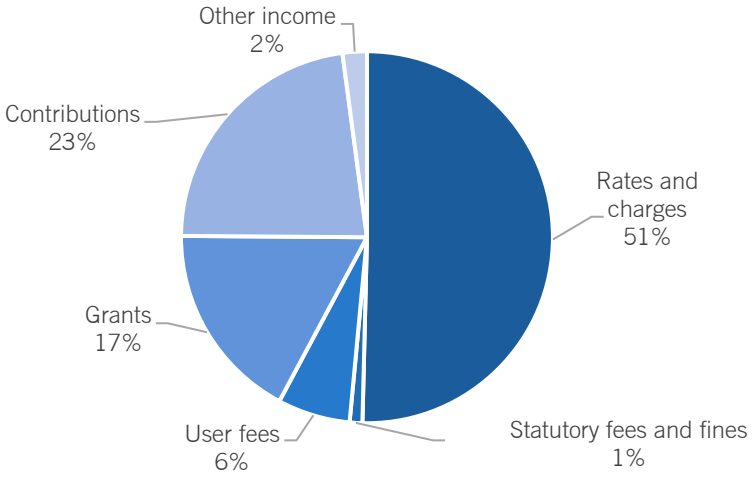
2 INTRODUCTION

Council provides several 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 (inclusive of waste charges)
- Statutory Fees and Fines
- User Fees
- Grants – Recurrent and Nonrecurrent
- Cash and non-cash contributions from other parties (i.e. developers, community groups)
- Interest from investments
- Sale of Assets

The graph below illustrates Council's revenue from the 30 June 2020 results.



Rates and charges are the most significant revenue source for Council and make up roughly 51% of its annual income.

The introduction of the Fair Go Rates System (rate capping) has provided substantial financial challenges to Council's long-term financial sustainability and continues to restrict Councils ability to raise revenue to maintain service delivery levels and invest in community assets. This strategy will address Council's reliance on rate income and provide options to actively reduce that reliance.

Council 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 can set a fee or charge and will set that fee based on the principles outlined in this Revenue and Rating 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 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Revenue and Rating Plan outlines Council's decision-making process on how revenues are calculated and collected.

Council is undertaking extensive engagement in the development of the Community Vision and Council Plan and has conducted past engagement on the Budget, Strategic Resource Plan, Revenue Strategy and other strategies and plans and outcomes from these engagements have informed the development of this plan.

Following draft adoption during March 2021 this document will be available through public display and members of the community may make submissions for further consideration. All submissions will be considered, and a final plan will be presented at the June 2021 Ordinary Council Meeting for endorsement.

Community Consultation for the 28-day public display period will include the plan being available online and at Customer Service Centres, and promotion through;

- Engaging Mitchell
- Facebook
- Council Newspaper Column
- Website
- General Media

4 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 utilise 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; and
- Municipal Charge - A 'fixed rate" portion per property to cover some of the administrative costs of Council.

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

Council makes a further distinction when administering 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, considering the benefits those properties derive from the local community.

The Mitchell Shire Council rating structure comprises six 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:

Differential Category Ratio	Differential Category Ratio
General Land	1.00
Vacant Residential Land	2.00
Vacant Commercial or Industrial Land	2.50
Agricultural Land (40ha-100ha)	0.90
Agricultural Land (greater than 100ha)	0.80
Subdivisional Land	2.00

From 2021-2022 the Subdivisional Land rate will increase by 0.10 each year for the term of the plan.

Year	Differential Category Ratio
2020/21	2.00
2021/22	2.10
2022/23	2.20
2023/24	2.30
2024/25	2.40

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 Council. In applying the municipal charge, Council ensures that each ratable property in the municipality contributes.

Council has determined that the amount raised by the municipal charge will continue to reduce each year over the life of this plan.

Year	Municipal Charge (%)
2020/21	15.00
2021/22	13.75
2022/23	12.50
2023/24	11.25
2024/25	10.00

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.

Rates and charges are an important source of revenue, accounting for over 50% of operating revenue received by Council. The collection of rates is an important factor in funding Council services.

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 utilises a service charge to fully recover the cost of Council's waste services and provides for future landfill rehabilitation costs. The waste 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.

4.1 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 Mitchell Shire 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 the recommended changes have not yet been implemented, and timelines to make these changes have not been announced.

4.2 RATING PRINCIPLES

4.2.1 Taxation Principles:

When developing a rating strategy, with reference to differential rates, a Council should consider 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.

4.2.2 Rates and Charges Revenue Principles:

Property rates will:

- be reviewed annually;
- not change dramatically from one year to next; and
- be enough 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.

4.3 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% 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 farmland, urban farmland 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 considers 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 and has reduced the level of objections resulting from valuations.
- 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. CIV allows council to apply higher rating differentials to the commercial and industrial sector that offset residential 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 Mitchell Shire Council context would cause a shift in rate burden from the industrial/commercial sectors onto the residential 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 Victorian 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 farmland 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. Farmland and residential use properties). Large landowners, such as farmers for example, are disadvantaged using 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.
- The community may have greater difficulty in understanding the SV valuation on their rate notices, as indicated by many inquiries from ratepayers on this issue handled by council's customer service and property revenue staff each year.

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 were to choose the former, under the *Local Government Act 1989* it must adopt either of the CIV or NAV methods of rating.
Mitchell Shire Council applies Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to consider the fully developed value of the property. This basis of valuation considers the total market value of the land plus buildings and other improvements.
Differential rating allows (under the CIV method) 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 based on whether 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.

Property Valuations

The *Valuation of Land Act 1960* is the principal legislation in determining property valuations. Under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*, the Victorian Valuer-General conducts property valuations on an annual basis. Mitchell Shire Council applies a Capital Improved Value (CIV) to all properties within the municipality to consider the full development value of the property. This basis of valuation considers the total market value of the land including buildings and other improvements.
The value of land is always derived by the principal of valuing land for its highest and best use at the relevant time of valuation.
Council needs to be mindful of the impacts of revaluations on the various property types in implementing the differential rating strategy outlined in the previous section to ensure that rises and falls in council rates remain affordable and that rating 'shocks' are mitigated to some degree.

Supplementary Valuations

Supplementary valuations are carried out for a variety of reasons including rezoning, subdivisions, amalgamations, renovations, new constructions, extensions, occupancy changes and corrections. The

Victorian Valuer-General is tasked with undertaking supplementary valuations and advises council on a monthly basis of valuation and Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) changes. Supplementary valuations bring the value of the affected property into line with the general valuation of other properties within the municipality. Objections to supplementary valuations can be lodged in accordance with Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960.* Any objections must be lodged with Council within two months of the issue of the supplementary rate notice.

Objections to property valuations
Part 3 of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* provides that a property owner may lodge an objection against the valuation of a property or the Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) within two months of the issue of the original or amended (supplementary) Rates and Valuation Charges Notice (Rates Notice), or within four months if the notice was not originally issued to the occupier of the land.
A property owner must lodge their objection to the valuation or the AVPCC in writing to the Mitchell Shire Council. Property owners also can object to the site valuations on receipt of their Land Tax Assessment. Property owners can appeal their land valuation within two months of receipt of their Council Rate Notice (via Council) or within two months of receipt of their Land Tax Assessment (via the State Revenue Office).

4.4 RATING DIFFERENTIALS

Council believes each differential rate will contribute to the equitable and efficient delivery 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 below.

4.4.1 General Rate

Definition:
The General Land Differential Rate is the default rate in instances where land does not meet the characteristics of any other differential rate.

Objectives:
To ensure that Council has adequate funding to undertake its strategic, statutory, service provision and community services obligations and to ensure that the differential rate in the dollar declared for defined general rate land properties is fair and equitable, having regard to the cost and the level of benefits derived from provision of Council services.

Types and Classes:
Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

a) used primarily for residential, commercial and Industrial purposes; or
b) any land that is not defined as Vacant, Agricultural or Subdivisional Land.

Use of Rate:
The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:
100% of General Rate.

Use of Land:
Any use permitted under the Mitchell Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:
Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:
Any zone within the Mitchell Planning Scheme.

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

4.4.2 Vacant Residential Land

Definition:
The Vacant Residential Land Differential Rate applies to land situated in a planning zone in which residential development is encouraged and supported

Objectives:
As vacant residential land valuations are typically one-half of developed land, the ratio applied to this rate represents an equalisation factor between the Vacant Residential Land Differential Rate and General Land Differential Rate. The objective of the Vacant Residential Land Differential Rate is to ensure that land makes an equivalent contribution towards the services and facilities invested in by the Council, as there is an expectation that these services and facilities will be immediately available upon development of the land.

Types and Classes:
Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

a) vacant land to be used primarily for residential purposes; or
b) any land that is not defined as Agricultural, Commercial/Industrial or Subdivisional Land.

Use of Rate:
The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:
200% of General Rate.

Use of Land:
Any use permitted under the Mitchell Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:
Anywhere within Council's municipal district, which is wholly or partially within one or more of the planning zones listed below.

Planning Scheme Zoning:
Land which is wholly or partially within one or more of the following planning zones under the Mitchell Planning Scheme:

- CDZ1 Comprehensive Development Schedule 1
- CDZ2 Comprehensive Development Schedule 2
- LDRZ Low Density Residential
- MUZ Mixed Use R1Z Residential 1
- RLZ Rural Living

Types of Buildings:
There is no dwelling constructed on the land or any dwelling located on the land is considered by Council's municipal building surveyor or other council officer authorized for this purpose to be unfit for human habitation.

4.4.3 Vacant Commercial or Industrial Land

Definition:
The Vacant Commercial or Industrial Land Differential Rate applies to land situated in a planning zone in which commercial or industrial development is encouraged and supported.

Objectives:
As vacant land valuations are typically one-half of developed land, the ratio applied to this rate represents an equalisation factor between the Vacant Commercial or Industrial Land Differential Rate and General Land Differential Rate, this is in addition to a factor then applied to encourage development of vacant commercial or industrial land and to discourage land-banking.
The objective of the Vacant Commercial or Industrial Land Differential Rate is to ensure that land makes an equivalent contribution towards the services and facilities invested in by the Council, as there is an expectation that these services and facilities will be immediately available upon development of the land.

Types and Classes:
Rateable land having the relevant characteristics described below:

a) vacant land to be used primarily for commercial or industrial purposes; or
b) any land that is not defined as Residential, Vacant Residential, Agricultural, Commercial/Industrial or Subdivisional Land.

Use of Rate:
The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:
250% of General Rate.

Use of Land:
Any use permitted under the Mitchell Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:
Anywhere within Council's municipal district, which is wholly or partially within one or more of the planning zones listed below.

Planning Scheme Zoning:
Land which is wholly or partially within one or more of the following planning zones
under the Mitchell Planning Scheme:

- BZ1 Business 1
- B2Z Business 2
- B4Z Business 4
- IN13Z Industrial 1
- IN1Z Industrial 1
- IN3Z Industrial 3

Types of Buildings:
There is no building constructed on the land that requires an occupancy certificate or any buildings located on the land are considered, by Council's municipal building surveyor or another officer of Council authorized for this purpose, to be unfit for use for the purpose for which it was originally constructed.

4.4.4 Agricultural Land (40ha – 100ha)

Definition:
Land used primarily for grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig-farming, poultry farming, fish-farming, tree-farming, beekeeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit-growing or the growing of crops of any kind or for any combination of those activities; and

- that is used by a business
    - that has a significant and substantial commercial purpose or character;
    - that seeks to make a profit on a continuous or repetitive basis from its activities on the land; and
    - that is making a profit from its activities on the land, or that has a reasonable prospect of making a profit from its activities on the land if it continues to operate in the way that it is operating.
- cumulatively across all agricultural land owned by the ratepayer within the shire, not less than 40 hectares and not greater than 100 hectares in area

Objectives:
The agricultural land (40ha to 100ha) rate is lower than other classes because farming operations involve large properties which have significant value, and which are often operated as family concerns.

Types and Classes:

Land having the relevant characteristics described below:

a) used for primary production purposes; or
b) any land that is not defined as General Land, Vacant or Subdivisional Land.

Use of Rate:
The differential rate is generally used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:
90% of the General Rate.

Use of Land:
Any use permitted under the Mitchell Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:
Anywhere within Council's municipal district, which is wholly or partially within one or more of the planning zones listed below.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

- FZ Farming Zone
- UGZ Urban Growth Zone

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

4.4.5 Agricultural Land (greater than 100ha)

Definition:
Land used primarily for grazing (including agistment), dairying, pig-farming, poultry farming, fish-farming, tree-farming, beekeeping, viticulture, horticulture, fruit-growing or the growing of crops of any kind or for any combination of those activities; and

- that is used by a business
    - that has a significant and substantial commercial purpose or character;
    - that seeks to make a profit on a continuous or repetitive basis from its activities on the land; and
    - that is making a profit from its activities on the land, or that has a reasonable prospect of making a profit from its activities on the land if it continues to operate in the way that it is operating.
- cumulatively across all agricultural land owned by the ratepayer within the shire, not less 100 hectares in area

Objectives:
The agricultural land (40ha to 100ha) rate is lower than other classes because farming operations involve large properties which have significant value and which are often operated as family concerns.

Types and Classes:
Land having the relevant characteristics described below:

a) used for primary production purposes; or
b) any land that is not defined as General Land, Vacant or Subdivisional Land.

Use of Rate:
The differential rate is generally used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:
80% of the General Rate.

Use of Land:
Any use permitted under the Mitchell Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:
Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:

- FZ Farming Zone
- UGZ Urban Growth Zone

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

4.4.6 Subdivisional Land

Definition:
Subdivisional Land by definition is the originator of land before it becomes subject to other Differential Rates. It is considered Subdivisional Land should make a higher contribution towards the services and facilities invested in by the Council than the other categories of Differential Rate.

Objectives:
The objective of the Subdivisional Land Differential rate is to ensure that an equitable financial contribution is made towards direct and indirect costs attributable to land development within Council's municipal district, including increases in:

- utilisation of Council road infrastructure; and/or
- noise, dust and environment monitoring; and/or
- local law compliance; and/or
- provision of services and facilities by Council; and/or
- administration costs for rateable properties created by the Subdivisional Land.

Types and Classes:
Subdivisional Land is rateable land for which:

a) a planning permit to subdivide the land into three (3) or more lots has been issued and has not lapsed and a separate certificate of title has not been issued for any of those lots, and
b) any land that is not defined as General Land, Vacant or Agricultural Land.

Use of Rate:
The differential rate will be used to fund items of expenditure described in the Budget adopted by Council. The level of the differential rate is the level which Council considers is necessary to achieve the objectives specified above.

Level of Rate:
200% of the General Rate increasing by 10% each year for the term of this plan. 2021-2022 will be 210%.

Use of Land:
Any use permitted under the Mitchell Shire Council Planning Scheme.

Geographic Location:
Wherever located within the municipal district.

Planning Scheme Zoning:
The zoning applicable to each rateable land within this category, as determined by consulting maps referred to in the relevant Mitchell Shire Council Shire Planning Scheme.

Types of Buildings:
All buildings which are already constructed on the land or which are constructed prior to the end of the 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. (i.e. Vacant Commercial properties still attract the commercial differential rate)

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.

Other relevant criteria:

In order for the category of Agricultural Land, landowners will be periodically requested to provide information to Council to confirm their land fits the eligibility criteria listed above. If no response is received, or Council determines that the land use no longer meets the requirements, the property will revert to being assessed as general land or any other category as identified.

4.5 MUNICIPAL CHARGE

Another principal 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.

The application of a municipal charge represents a choice to raise a portion of the rates by a flat fee for all properties, rather than sole use of the CIV valuation method.
Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, a council's total revenue from a municipal charge in a financial year must not exceed 20 per cent of the combined sum of the Council's total revenue from the municipal charge and the revenue from general rates (total rates).
The municipal charge applies equally to all properties and is 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.

Council has determined that the amount raised by the municipal charge will continue to decline each year.

Year	Municipal Charge (%)
2020/21	15.00
2021/22	13.75
2022/23	12.50
2023/24	11.25
2024/25	10.00

4.6 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 rate or special charges may be declared based on any criteria specified by the council in the rate (Section 163 (2)). In accordance with Section 163 (3), council must specify:

a) the wards, groups, uses or areas for which the special rate or charge is declared; and
b) the land in relation to which the special rate or special charge is declared;
c) the way the special rate or special charge will be assessed and levied; and
d) details of the period for which the special rate or special charge remains in force.

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 proof “special benefit” applies to those being levied. For example, they could be used to fund co-operative 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.

4.7 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) The provision of a water supply;
b) The collection and disposal of refuse;
c) The provision of sewage services;
d) Any other prescribed service.

Council currently applies a service charge for the collection and disposal of refuse in urban areas and some rural areas 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.

4.8 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, or alternatively a payment in full can be made by 30 September.

- 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),
- online via Council's ratepayer portal, direct debit (on prescribed instalment due dates or monthly),
- BPAY,
- Australia Post (over the counter, over the phone via credit card and on the internet),
- by mail (cheques and money orders only).

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 whose property is their sole place of residency, 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.

Deferral of rates and charges are available to all ratepayers who satisfy the eligibility criteria and have proven financial difficulties. Where Council approves an application for deferral of rates or charges, interest will continue to be levied on the outstanding balance of rates and charges but at an interest rate fixed annually by Council. This deferred interest rate will typically be well under the penalty interest rate levied by Council on unpaid rates and charges.

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

Rates Assistance

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 several difficulties that may be faced. The purpose of rates assistance 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 Hardship Application form or a Rate Arrangement Application which is available at the council offices, website 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.

If an account becomes overdue, Council will issue an overdue reminder notice which will include accrued penalty interest. If the account remains unpaid, further action will be taken in line with those outlined and allowed for in Council's Debt Management Policy. 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 act to sell the property in accordance with Section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Debt recovery actions are inline with Council's Debt Recovery Policy.

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 the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Country Fire Authority (CFA), and all levies collected by Council are passed through 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.

For further information please refer to the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012*.

5 OTHER REVENUE ITEMS

5.1 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
- Leases and facility hire fees
- Local Laws 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 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 based on 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 where a service provided by council benefits individual customers specifically, rather than the community. 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.

Council has developed specific policies for Community Fees and Charges and Kindergarten Fees as well as a general fees and charges guidance document. These documents outline the process for setting fee prices and includes such principles as:

- Both direct and indirect costs to be considered when setting prices; and
- Accessibility, affordability and efficient delivery of services must be considered.

Council develops a schedule of fees and charges as part of its annual budget each year. Proposed pricing changes will be included in this schedule 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.

5.2 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 describe the amount of a fine or a fee.

Penalty units

Penalty units are used to define the amount payable for fines for many offences. For example, the fine for selling a tobacco product to a person aged under 18 is four penalty units.

One penalty unit is currently $165.22, from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

The rate for penalty units is indexed each financial year so that it is raised in line with inflation. Any change to the value of a penalty unit will happen on 1 July each year.

Fee units

Fee units are used to calculate the cost of a certificate, registration or licence that is set out in an Act or Regulation. For example, the cost of depositing a Will with the supreme court registrar of probates is 1.6 fee units.

The value of one fee unit is currently $14.81. This value may increase at the beginning of a financial year, at the same time as penalty units.

The cost of fees and penalties is calculated by multiplying the number of units by the current value of the fee or unit. The exact cost may be rounded up or down.

5.3 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, both operational and capital in nature.

Council 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 priorities, advocacy priorities, upcoming grant program opportunities, and co-funding options.

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

5.4 CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions represent funds or assets 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 (monetary contributions) or asset handovers (non-monetary contributions).

Examples of contributions include:

- Monies collected from developers under planning and development agreements for specific requirements
- 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 in trust or reserves separately for the specific works identified in the agreements.

5.5 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 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 and are included in the adopted annual budget and long-term financial plan.

All borrowings are in accordance with Council's endorsed Borrowings Policy and 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.

7 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Annual Budget
- Long Term Financial Plan
- Borrowing Policy
- Community Fees and Charges Policy
- Investment Policy
- Kindergarten Fees Policy
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Financial Hardship Policy
- Special Charge Scheme Policy

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