Minutes
Council Meeting
Tuesday 23 June 2026 at 6.00 pm

Council Chambers (and by video conferencing)
East Gippsland Shire Council Corporate Centre
273 Main Street, Bairnsdale 3875

Councillors	Jodie Ashworth (Mayor), Tom Crook (Deputy Mayor), Arthur Allen, Sonia Buckley, Joanne Eastman, Bernie Farquhar, Ian Trevaskis, and John White

Attachments referenced in these minutes can be located in the meeting agenda on East Gippsland Shire Council's website, with summaries of Council Briefings also available under Council Briefings.

Vision

To foster inclusive, connected, communities and places where all East Gippslanders prosper, and endeavour not to leave anyone behind.

Our Strategic Themes

1. Community Wellbeing and Social Responsibility
2. Prosperity
3. Making the Most of What We've Got
4. Managing Council Well

Index

1 Procedural

1.1 Recognition of Traditional Custodians

Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth welcomed all to the Council meeting and acknowledged the traditional custodians.

Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land and pays deep respect to all First Nations peoples and communities with enduring cultural connections to East Gippsland, who have cared for and nurtured Country for tens of thousands of years.

We honour and celebrate the rich diversity, living cultures, and ongoing contributions of all First Nations peoples who live, work, visit, and play across East Gippsland.

We also acknowledge the many First Nations communities who, together, continue to shape and contribute to the region we know as East Gippsland. The place where we, as Local Government, delivered services and support to our community.

1.2 Apologies

Cr Barry Davis (Leave of Absence)

1.3 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer declared a conflict of interest in relation to item 7.1 *Personnel Matter*, as a material interest due to the matter relating to her employment at East Gippsland Shire Council.

1.4 Confirmation of Minutes

Motion

That the minutes of the Council meeting held Tuesday 9 June 2026 be confirmed.

Moved: ***Cr Tom Crook***
Seconded: ***Cr John White***

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr John White
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil

1.5 Next Meeting

The next Council Meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday 21 July 2026 at the Corporate Centre, 273 Main Street Bairnsdale commencing at 6.00 pm.

1.6 Requests for Leave of Absence

Nil

1.7 Open Forum

1.7.1 Petitions

Nil

1.7.2 Questions of Council

1.7.2.1 Council Budget 2026/27

Mr John Butler-Cole submitted the following questions which were read out on his behalf by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *"From the basis of transparency and accountability, why has Council decided to reduce the availability of the draft budget for community scrutiny to four days from the 28 days previously allowed?"*

Question 2: *"For clarity, can Council advise the split in capital funds allocated for expenditure in 2026/27 between carry forward funding and new funding, will all projects whose funding has been carried forward be fully completed by July 2027?"*

Sarah Johnston General Manager Business Excellence provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: The *Local Government Act 1989* required Council to give public notice and advertise its proposed budget. The *Local Government Act 2020,* however, provides Councils with flexibility to design engagement processes that are more appropriate to their community.

Engagement must still occur, but it must align with the principles-based approach to community engagement, as per Council's Community Engagement Policy.

In the past, Council has received feedback from community that the budget engagement process is not genuine, in that whilst the draft is put on public exhibition, there is limited time to adjust the budget based on community priorities because of this timing. Due to this, Council has moved to an early engagement model and commenced engagement between 22 January and 9 March 2026 with a significant campaign and various face to face discussions with key community groups.

The engagement included:

- YourSay survey
- 3 community pop-up sessions
- 3 stakeholder group meetings
- 5 meetings with specific groups (eg. East Gippsland Ratepayers and Residents Association, Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee, Business and Tourism)
- Targeted communications to specific user groups, service users and community groups

From this, we had 340 people fill in the budget engagement survey, 46 contributed at community pop ups and 16 individual submissions. This helped Council shape the budget and ensured several specific requests were able to be included in the budget.

Budget engagement is also now open year round, and is live now on YourSay, so Council can continue to hear from community about what they want us to invest in.

Response 2: The total allocation for new works is $31.4 million, this can be seen on page 114 of the Council Agenda or page 79 of the Council Budget. The carry forward amount is $23 million, which can be found on page 116 of the Council Agenda or page 81 of the Budget.

Of the total proposed investment in capital for 2026/27, $22.7 million is grant funded.

Councillors adopted a set of project management principles in November 2025, this has formed the basis of a new project management framework that will assist in ensuring the capital program is delivered with minimum carry forwards. However, a capital program typically has some component of carry forward and some of this is outside of Council's control, for example environmental approvals, emergencies and large weather events.

1.7.2.2 Council Budget 2026/27

Mr Harry Barton asked the following questions:

Question 1: *"What proportion of that community feedback on aquatic and recreation facilities called for funding to provide for the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool?"*

Question 2: *"What financial provision has been made to support the implementation of the strategy, in particular for designs and costings of works, including of a new 50 metre Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool and toddler pool as suggested by the Built Environment Collective (BEC) report?'*

Sarah Johnston General Manager Business Excellence provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1**:** Council had 340 people respond to the online budget engagement survey released in January and running through to March, complemented by the community pop ups. There were four areas where community could provide comments, of these comments 14% mentioned the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (BOP).

Targeted engagement is part of the development of the Aquatic Strategy which will inform the future of our aquatic facilities, including the BOP.

Response 2: At this stage the strategy is still being developed to be presented to Council for consideration in December 2026, so there have been no decisions made by Council on future investment at this stage. When Council considers the final Strategy and adopts it, if funding is required, this will be considered and allocated in accordance with our Project Management Framework.

1.7.2.3 Council Budget 2026/27

Ms Stephanie Buckland asked the following questions:

Question 1: "*As the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool has been in a state of disrepair since at least 2015, and community told Council this was a reason for not wanting to use the pool, how will Council measure expected future pool attendance for a refurbished pool?*"

Question 2: "*Can Council now allocate funding to obtain design and costings for a new 50m outdoor pool and a toddler's pool as suggested by report tabled from Built Environment Collective (BEC) to ensure future consultation, discussion and decisions about Bairnsdale's future outdoor pool can be appropriately informed?*

Secondly, is there a budget line to support schools holding school carnivals in other towns while the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool is being built?"

Sarah Johnston General Manager Business Excellence provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1**:** Attendance potentially would be reassessed through the Aquatic Strategy and feasibility works, using community engagement, user group input, demographic analysis and demand testing to understand likely future use of a new facility.

Response 2**:** At this stage the strategy is still being developed to be presented to Council for consideration in December 2026, so there have been no decisions made by Council on future investment at this stage. When Council considers the final Strategy and adopts it, if funding is required, this will be considered and allocated in accordance with our Project Management Framework.

Council helped schools last summer and will continue to work with schools as to what they need for the upcoming summer. As to what those arrangements will look like, will depend on the individual schools' preferences**.**

1.7.3 Public Submissions

1.7.3.1 Raymond Ferry Passes

Mr Warrick Hall spoke on behalf of Mr Willam Monfries and addressed Council on the revised Raymond Ferry Pass approach and spoke at item 5.1.1.

1.7.3.2 Council Budget 2026/27

Mr Peter Jones addressed Council on the Council Budget 2026/27 and spoke at item 5.2.1.

1.8 Items for Noting

Nil

2 Notices of Motion

2.1 Advocacy for the use of Rail Freight

Motion

That Council

1. ***calls for a report to establish a position of East Gippsland Shire Council on new businesses or business expansions that will generate considerable freight movement either into or out of East Gippsland, and with this report to specifically set guidance on the mode of transport that Council prefers to see utilised; and***

2. ***once this position is established, notes that it will be applied informally to business attraction matters, consideration of planning matters, and participation in Victorian State Government led processes where Council may be a referral authority.***

Moved: ***Cr Arthur Allen***
Seconded: ***Cr Sonia Buckley***

Spoke for the motion: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr Tom Crook
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil
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3 Deferred Business

Nil

4 Councillor Delegate Reports

4.1 Cr Arthur Allen

11/06/26 - I accompanied the Mayor to a performance of “My Story” at the Forge Theatre and Arts Hub sponsored by Gippsland Lakes Complete Care. It was a very thought provoking play acted by people with disabilities that explored the challenges disabled people have navigating bureaucracy in particular and life in general.

18/06/26 - The Mayor, Cr Farquhar, Cr Eastman and I attended a very uplifting Citizenship Ceremony at the WORLD Sporting Precinct, where 31 candidates took the oath and became Australian Citizens.

4.2 Cr Jodie Ashworth

10/06/26 - Victorian Local Governance Association Webinar - Your Role, Your Impact - Essentials for Local Government Councillors
10/06/26 - Distinctive Options Employment Support Afternoon Tea
10/06/26 - East Gippsland Ratepayers and Residents Association June Meeting
11/06/26 - My Story - Forge Theatre and Arts Hub
12/06/26 - Presented John Waller with 50 Years of Service Volunteering Certificate
14/06/26 - Official Opening - Buchan Recreation Reserve Update
14/06/26 - The Butterfly Effect - Women’s Fitness Competition
15/06/26 - Presented Allan Pappin with Volunteering Certificate
16/06/26 - Councillor Briefing Session
17/06/26 - Presented Geof Basset with Volunteering Certificate
18/06/26 - Citizenship Ceremony
18/06/26 - Mallacoota Stakeholder Meeting

4.3 Cr Bernie Farquhar

18/06/26 - Citizenship Ceremony. It was great to see such a diversity of countries being represented, some people have been living here for 50 years plus, others less than five years. The excitement in the room was quite high as people pledged their oath to Australia.

5 Officer Reports

5.1 Assets and Environment

5.1.1 Raymond Island Ferry Passes

Authorised by Manager Council Enterprises

Public Submission

Mr Warrick Hall

Motion

That Council:

1. ***notes the outcomes of community consultation undertaken in response to Council's resolution at the Council Meeting held on 16 September 2025 (Item 5.1.1 Raymond Island Ferry Pass Review) and the findings of early investigation into ferry access and technology options;***

2. ***adopts a revised approach to the Raymond Island Ferry resident pass system as follows:***

   a) ***owners of developed land on Raymond Island will continue to have access to one portable resident pass (currently in circulation) as a baseline level of access, with no expiry date;***

   b) ***eligible residents and owners of developed land on Raymond Island, including renters, may apply for one additional portable pass per eligible driver with suitable evidence, with passes valid for three years; and***

   c) ***additional portable passes may be issued upon application in defined circumstances to support carer arrangements, subject to provision of suitable evidence;***

3. ***subject to Council's approval of recommendation 2, notes that the revised Raymond Island Ferry resident pass system will be implemented to coincide with the scheduled renewal of passes in September 2026;***

4. ***notes residents and owners of developed land on Raymond Island who, from time to time, may not have a portable pass available at the point of boarding the Raymond Island Ferry, may access the Raymond Island Ferry through presentation of valid photo identification, supported by appropriate verification of eligibility;***

5. ***notes emergency services and eligible not-for-profit organisations providing regular services to Raymond Island continue to be exempt from fees for access to the Raymond Island Ferry;***

6. ***notes the intent to update the Raymond Island Ferry Service Charter to reflect the changes outlined in this report;***

7. ***notes Officers will further investigate voluntary or donation-based contribution models for walk-on passengers on the Raymond Island Ferry; and***

8. ***notes Officers will further investigate more contemporary approaches to managing Raymond Island Ferry access, including opportunities to digitalise and automate access.***

Moved: ***Cr Sonia Buckley***
Seconded: ***Cr John White***

Spoke for the motion: Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr John White, Cr Joanne Eastman and Cr Tom Crook
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil

5.2 Business Excellence

5.2.1 Adopt Council Budget 2026/27

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Public Submission

Mr Peter Jones

Motion

That Council:

1. ***adopts the Budget 2026/27 as provided at Attachment 1 (including the schedule of fees and charges) in accordance with section 94 of the Local Government Act 2020;***

2. ***in accordance with the Local Government Act 2020 and the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2020, declares the following:***

   (a) an amount of $78,012,732 be declared as the amount that Council intends to raise by general rates, municipal charge and waste collection charges, which is calculated as follows:

CATEGORY	***INCOME $***
General Rate	42,805,985
Commercial / Industrial	6,189,545
Farm Rate	6,205,147
TOTAL RATES	**55,200,678**
Municipal charge	8,704,053
Waste levy	1,903,392
Waste Charges:	
Kerbside Waste/recycling collection (120 litre bin)	1,464,512
Kerbside Waste/recycling/green waste collection (120 litre bin)	9,575,424
Additional household waste bin	120,064
Additional Green/Recycling bin	60,096
Rural Waste Collection Charge	114,513
Total Waste Charges	**11,334,609**
TOTAL Rates & CHARGES	**77,142,732**
Supplementary Rates & Waste Charges	870,000
TOTAL RATES AND CHARGES	**78,012,732**

(b) the general rate be declared for the period commencing 1 July 2026 and concluding on 30 June 2027:

i) It be further declared that subject to paragraph (iv) of this Part, the general rates be raised through the application of differential rates.

ii) the following rates in the dollar apply to property classifications:

Category	*% of General rate*	*Rate in the $*
General/Residential Rate	100%	0.00275605
Commercial/Industrial Rate	127%	0.00348662
Farm Rate	75%	0.00205792

iii) differential rates apply to rateable properties with the following characteristics:

(a) General
General land is any land that is:
- ***used primarily for residential purposes; or***
- ***unoccupied but zoned Residential, Township or Rural Living under the East Gippsland Shire Council Planning Scheme; or***
- ***any land that is not defined as Farmland or Commercial/Industrial Land.***
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(b) Commercial and Industrial
Commercial and Industrial Land is any land used primarily for:
- ***the manufacture, or production of, or trade in, goods or services; or***
- ***obviously adapted for the primary use of commercial or industrial purposes; or***
- ***occupied primarily for the purpose of service delivery for tourism leisure and/or accommodation; or***
- ***unoccupied but zoned Business, Industrial, Mixed Use, Special Use or Comprehensive Development Zone under the East Gippsland Shire Council Planning Scheme; or***
- ***conforming to East Gippsland Shire Council guidelines for the classification of property as Commercial/Industrial Land.***

(c) Farmland
Farmland is defined as any land which:
- ***is used primarily for a farming or agricultural business; and,***
- ***conforms to the definition of "farmland" as specified within the Valuation of Land Act 1960; and,***
- ***conforms to East Gippsland Shire Council guidelines for the classification of property as "farm land" as stipulated within East Gippsland Shire Council's "Application for Farm Rate"; and***
- ***the ratepayer has Primary Producer status with the Australian Taxation Office and be located in a Farm Zone in accordance with Council's planning scheme, or have a permit from Council to operate a farming business.***

iv) Council has determined that the application of a differential rate for Farm and Commercial/Industrial Land will contribute to the equitable and efficient carrying out of its functions.

v) Council has determined that the differential percentage applied to Commercial/Industrial properties for the Economic Development Discretionary fund be 5 percent.

vi) Council has determined it will provide a rate rebate equivalent to $67.11 levy to eligible properties in the ownership of pensioners who qualify for a Victorian Government approved pension rebate. This rebate is provided in accordance with section 169(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1989 and supports the development of the municipality in that it helps support pensioners to keep and stay in their own homes.

(c) Municipal Charge

i) a municipal charge be declared for the period commencing 1 July 2026 and concluding on 30 June 2027.

ii) a municipal charge be declared for the purpose of covering some of the administrative costs of Council.

iii) the municipal charge be the sum of $263.40 per each rateable property in respect of which a municipal charge can be levied.

(d) Waste Levy Charge

i) an annual service charge Waste Levy of $57.60 be declared for the period commencing 1 July 2026 and concluding 30 June 2027 to cover the increased costs levied by the Environment Protection Authority on the operation of landfills as well as the increased compliance costs required for the operation of landfills.

ii) the charge to be levied on each property to which a municipal charge is applied.

(e) Waste Collection Charge

i) A charge for kerbside collection of waste with recycling, and for kerbside collection of waste with recycling and green waste, and a rural waste collection charge be declared for the period commencing 1 July 2026 and concluding on 30 June 2027 as follows:

Kerbside Waste/recycling collection (120 litre bin)	*$448.00*
Kerbside Waste/recycling/green waste collection (120 litre bin)	*$512.00*
Additional household waste bin	*$256.00*
Additional Green/Recycling bin	*$192.00*
Rural Waste Collection Charge	*$287.00*

(f) authorises the Chief Executive Officer to levy and recover the general rates, municipal charge, waste levy, kerbside waste with recycling collection charge, kerbside waste with recycling and green waste collection charge and rural waste collection charge as per section 167 of the Local Government Act 1989.

(g) ***Council allows the following payment options in accordance with section 167 of the Local Government Act 1989, as well as options outlined in Council's Financial Hardship Policy and other options available for individual circumstances:***

In Full	***Four Instalments***
15 February 2027	***30 September 2026***
	30 November 2026
	28 February 2027
	31 May 2027

(h) ***interest on unpaid rates and charges will be charged in accordance with section 172 of the Local Government Act 1989.***

Moved: ***Cr Tom Crook***
Seconded: ***Cr John White***

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook, Cr John White, Cr Arthur Allen and Cr Ian Trevaskis
Spoke against the motion: Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Sonia Buckley and Cr Bernie Farquhar
Closed the debate: Cr Tom Crook

CARRIED

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Cr Joanne Eastman and Cr Bernie Farquhar
Abstained: Cr Sonia Buckley

Procedural Note

In accordance with section 61(5)(e) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, a Councillor who is present at a meeting and abstains from voting is to be counted as a vote against the motion.

5.2.2 Adopt 10-Year Financial Plan 2026/27 - 2035/36

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council adopts the 10-Year Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2035/36, as provided at Attachment 1.

Moved: Cr Sonia Buckley
Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook and Cr Joanne Eastman
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil

5.2.3 Adopt Four-Year Revenue and Rating Plan 2026/27 to 2029/30

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council adopts the Four-Year Revenue and Rating Plan 2026/27 - 2029/30, as provided at Attachment 1.

Moved: Cr Tom Crook
Seconded: Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Arthur Allen
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil

5.2.4 Endorse Draft Revised Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council:

1. endorses the draft revised Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy, provided at Attachment 1;

2. notes that the endorsed Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy will be published on Council's website; and

3. notes that the Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Committee has fulfilled its responsibilities in accordance with and having regard to the Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy in this matter.

Moved: Cr Tom Crook
Seconded: Cr Bernie Farquhar

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Bernie Farquhar
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil

6 Urgent Business

Nil

Motion

That Council resolves to move into confidential business pursuant to section 66(2) of the Local Government Act 2020.

Moved: Cr Sonia Buckley
Seconded: Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke for the motion: Nil
Spoke against the motion: Nil
Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Bernie Farquhar, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White
Against: Nil
Abstained: Nil

Conflict of Interest

Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer, having declared a conflict of interest in relation to item 7.1, left the Council Chamber at 8.05 pm and was absent during the discussion on this item.

The meeting was closed to the public at 8.05 pm.

7 Confidential Business

7.1 Personnel Matter

The information contained in this report is confidential under section 3(1) of the *Local Government Act* 2020 because it relates to: (f) Personal Information, being information which if released would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs.

Pursuant to section 66(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act* 2020, if released, the information discussed or considered in relation to this agenda item would unreasonably disclose personal information about the Chief Executive Officer, including performance expectations and employment related matters.

8 Close of Meeting

Attendance

Fiona Weigal Chief Executive Officer returned to the Council Chamber at 8.23 pm.

Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth declared the Council Meeting closed at 8.24 pm.