

## **MAYOR NICK DAMETTO'S SPEECH, Wednesday 17 June 2026**

### **Check Against Delivery**

Councillors, CEO, Council staff, those in the gallery and watching online.

Today I stand before you as we endorse the guiding document that will shape the next twelve months and lay the foundations for the years ahead.

Months of hard work, more than 10 budget workshops and a strong level of healthy discussions have shaped the document before you – Townsville City Council's 2026/27 Budget and Operational Plan.

I won't sugarcoat it, this \$1 billion budget has not been an easy one, particularly as my first Budget as Mayor of this great city.

It has been developed against a backdrop of rising fuel costs, inflation and supply chain pressures impacting households, businesses and local government alike.

Despite that, this Budget balances financial sustainability with the ongoing delivery of the services, infrastructure, and investment our community relies on.

And what has remained constant throughout, is our commitment to delivering for our community and keeping Townsville moving through strong leadership and responsible decision-making.

### **KEEPING TOWNSVILLE MOVING**

It gives me no pleasure to say that in delivering this year's Budget – there will be an average rates and utilities increase of 6.8 percent for owner-occupiers – amounting to approximately \$5.48 a week.

And while I take no satisfaction in delivering that news, I think it's important that as a community we understand where that figure comes from, and what it could have been if not for the work undertaken across the organisation.

The reality is that inflationary pressures, fuel costs and supply chain issues driven by global uncertainty have had a multi-million dollar impact on Council's operations.

I want to assure the community that before we asked more of ratepayers, we looked inward first.

We brought together every part of the organisation and identified more than \$16 million in savings and efficiencies, from operational improvements through to contract reviews and smarter ways of delivering services.

Without that work, we would have seen an average rates and utilities increase of more than 11 per cent.

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That \$16 million in savings and efficiencies has lessened the brunt of what could have been the highest rate and utilities increase in at least a decade - by offsetting those rising costs that are having a real impact, like fuel, transport and asphalt prices.

In recent years, Council delivered significant operating deficits. Put simply, the organisation was spending way beyond its means.

This Budget sees Council balance the books and deliver a minor operational surplus for the first time in five years - reflecting a stronger commitment to fiscal responsibility.

I must give credit where credit is due to those in the executive and senior leadership positions who have worked with Councillors to set the right course.

At its core, our role as a local government is simple, to run an efficient organisation and make responsible decisions that keep the city running, without sacrificing the services people depend on.

Our community relies on the everyday services Council delivers - roads, water, waste, parks and public spaces. They're the services people expect to just work and that's exactly what this Budget is designed to protect.

To support that, Council will implement a carefully considered combination of rate adjustments and selected fee changes. Despite our best efforts, some increases are necessary, but every decision has been made to minimise the impact on residents while ensuring services remain reliable and sustainable.

The budget delivers more than \$17 million in direct community support, including \$4.7 million in early payment discounts, \$6.4 million in pensioner concessions and \$6.4 million for charities, not-for-profits and community organisations.

Importantly, we've ensured Townsville's residential water, sewerage and waste charges also remain lower than comparable councils.

Together, the measures reflect a steady, disciplined approach to keeping Townsville moving while delivering a balanced budget and a clear focus on getting back to basics and protecting the services our community relies on.

## **BASICS**

I've always been a believer that you need to do the little things right, in order to get the big jobs done.

That is why this budget delivers a back-to-basics approach prioritising the everyday services residents rely on and expect.

We're doubling down on the basics with \$486 million doing just that - delivering the core services that keep Townsville running day to day - the services people expect to just work.

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But it's more than that - our focus is on efficiency and prioritisation, making sure these services continue to be delivered to the standard our community deserves.

Supporting this approach is a \$415.5m capital works program, alongside the continued delivery of essential maintenance programs across the city.

This budget will see Council look to deliver 62 projects aimed at improving connectivity and safety across our city's roads and transport network at a cost of \$116.1 million.

From the city to the rural areas, these projects will include basic street renewals like the completion of the Murray Street reconstruction and upgraded active transport network along Hugh Street and Gulliver Streets, to significant upgrades to major growth corridors like the \$31.4 million Northern Beaches trunk road network to name a few.

Living in northern Australia we understand the importance of investing in our city's stormwater and drainage network, which is why Council will invest more than \$14.2 million in stormwater and drainage projects that will strengthen flood resilience and water management.

A significant investment will be made in upgrading and maintaining our city's essential water and wastewater services.

As Townsville ages, so too do these critical pipelines which is why we're undertaking major network upgrades and sewer rehabilitation works. These works include Stage two of the Wulguru Wastewater resilience project at a cost of \$4.5 million – giving affected residents of Wright Street and areas of Wulguru some much needed reprieve in wet weather events.

Our city's gems – Townsville's 370-odd parks and Open spaces will continue to receive the love and care they deserve through an \$9.8 million spend which includes irrigation renewal projects at \$700,000, lighting at Charles Maroney Park for \$220,000, Stage 3 of the Riverside Green project including a dedicated carpark at \$900,000 and an investment towards the design of the Ross River Dam Boat Ramp at \$270,000 opening up the recreational possibilities of this underutilised space.

Continuing our investment into community facilities remains critical through an \$8.9 million investment, ensuring they remain safe, functional and fit for purpose.

This includes \$214,000 for a lighting renewal at the Kalynda Chase Tennis Centre courts, \$200,000 security improvements and upgrades, and \$1.5 million for Council's Energy Transition Project.

A dedicated renewal program will ensure The Strand, now more than 25 years old, remains fit for purpose - supporting its ongoing revitalisation while keeping it at its best today and planning for the future.

These investments focus on maintaining and renewing the essential infrastructure and public spaces that residents use every day, from local roads and drainage to parks, playgrounds and major community precincts.

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This Budget also responds to community feedback, with the return of tip vouchers after almost ten years - supported by a new, more flexible system for residents.

A new online system will roll out in the months to come, giving residents the option of either a kerbside collection, or two tip vouchers, per eligible property.

The costs of dealing with our city's waste continues to rise and Council is investing in not only our facilities - making sure we get longevity out of them, but in diverting resources from landfill to not only give them a new lease on life, but cut down on expensive airspace at our facilities.

Council will continue to play its part in crime prevention alongside the State Government – investing in community safety and local facilities, including expanded CitySafe patrol coverage on weekends, increased cleaning in high-use public areas within the CBD and Strand precinct, extended lifeguard hours at Riverway Lagoon, and targeted after-hours patrols to address illegal dumping.

We know people want to feel safe and proud of their city, and this investment ensures Council is doing everything we can from a local government perspective to ensure our public spaces remain safe, clean and welcoming.

Our people are out there every day making sure the city runs smoothly and looks its best. It's that everyday work, that keeps the city running and makes a real difference to how people experience Townsville.

Maintaining these everyday services, and delivering them to the standard our community expects, is the backbone of this Budget.

## **OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

At the same time, this Budget sends a clear signal that Townsville is open for business.

We are continuing to invest in the infrastructure and opportunities that drive our economy and position Townsville for the future.

Because you can't grow a city without the right foundations.

This Budget maintains momentum, delivering the projects that support growth, unlock development and create opportunity.

Council's capital works program includes significant investment in enabling infrastructure, with \$86.8 million committed to Lansdown Eco-Industrial Precinct for road and water infrastructure - supporting industrial development, and creating long-term economic benefits and jobs for our region.

We're getting on with the job of unlocking thousands of homes in our key growth corridors, delivering projects like the Northern Beaches Trunk Road network – that opens up and links the

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northern beaches through the Svensson Road and Bruce Highway intersection, thanks to funding through the Residential Activation Fund

In anticipation of the Residential Activation Fund Round 2, Council has progressed advanced planning and design of the Lionel Turner Drive extension, trunk sewage and water infrastructure for the Upper Ross and major infrastructure to unlocking further housing opportunities around Mount Louisa.

Investment in critical infrastructure remains a key focus, ensuring Townsville has the essential services needed to support a growing city.

Further investment includes an allocation of \$20.5 million to the Houghton Pipeline project for the next stages of design of the future Burdekin Pump Station.

This highlights our commitment to completing this important project in the years ahead, securing the city's long-term water security as Townsville grows.

Council is investing in infrastructure to support future demand, including \$84.5m million in water treatment and storage, as well as a \$23.8 million investment in waste facilities at Stuart Landfill to cater for our growing population.

These investments are critical to maintaining momentum and enabling future growth, supporting the services needed to support a growing population.

Investment in community infrastructure will also continue, supporting recreational spaces and public assets that contribute to a liveable city.

If we want people to not just visit Townsville, but choose to live here, we need both - strong infrastructure and great lifestyle opportunities.

Alongside the Budget, Council is actively advocating to all levels of government to support upgrades to the Rockpool and Townsville Entertainment and Convention Centre, while advancing projects such as recreational use at Ross River Dam, activating the CBD, and delivering other initiatives that enhance lifestyle and facilities across the city.

The Budget also continues to support the visitor economy through investment in major events and tourism.

"We're investing \$3 million in major events acquisition across the city, and \$1 million in destination marketing through Townsville Enterprise, our region's peak tourism and advocacy body, to continue bolstering Townsville as the events capital of Northern Australia.

Council is driving visitation to our region, supporting local jobs and business activity, and building confidence in Townsville as an open, investment-ready destination.

No matter which way you look at it, Townsville is open for business.

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## **SUMMARY**

While putting this budget together, I knew it wouldn't be an easy one, and that was before global prices skyrocketed almost overnight.

Council services are intertwined into the daily lives of everyone in our community, through the water people drink, the roads they drive on, the parks they visit and the services they rely on every day.

Those services matter, and I understand that.

Despite these pressures, Council cannot afford to stand still. This Budget is about balancing financial responsibility with growth ensuring we continue to deliver for our community both now and into the future.

We have absorbed costs where we can, and identified efficiencies where possible, so that ratepayers are not left to shoulder the burden alone.

Maintaining financial discipline in this environment is essential to continue delivering the services, infrastructure and investment our community relies on.

This Budget reflects a disciplined and balanced approach, focused on getting back to basics, maintaining momentum and ensuring Townsville continues to move forward with confidence.