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Mayor's Comments

The Southern Downs Regional Council today handed down its first Annual Budget, with a 7.04 per cent overall rise in rate revenue across the region.

Mayor Ron Bellingham believes that whilst the 2008/09 budget represents a commitment to continued progress, maintenance and enhancement of the Southern Downs lifestyle, he acknowledges that the absorption of amalgamation costs including massive computer and financial system costs, along with soaring fuel prices, has created a significant hole in this year's budget.

"This year, Council's focus has primarily been on pulling together a budget which maintains core services," Mayor Bellingham said.

"In the current tough economic climate, councillors are aware that rate increases will add to already tight business and family budgets and have therefore approached their first budget with responsibility in mind.

"Council has looked long and hard at what we can deliver back to the community despite having to pay increases for goods and services that are often in excess of the CPI.

"Frankly, I'm surprised that we've managed to keep the budget to a very limited increase in overall percentage terms," Mayor Bellingham said.

At 7.04 per cent, the rate rise is quite low compared with industry expectations. Recently, LGAQ President Paul Bell was touting double figure rises as the norm for Queensland Local Government budgets for the 2008/09 year.

"I am well pleased that we have delivered a rate rise below industry expectations, particularly in light of the additional expenditure incurred in the process of amalgamating the two shires and maintaining the same number of employees for the next three years," he said

Mayor Bellingham indicated that every aspect of the budget was examined closely for potential savings and he is hopeful in the future that further avenues will be found for more efficient operations.

In a win for both former communities, all of the capital works identified by the two previous shires for commencement in 2008/09 have been carried forward and will be implemented.

Mayor Bellingham highlighted that many of the challenges to be faced were hinged around water and water infrastructure and costs.

"Council will continue to try and progress the Emu Swamp Dam project however I am concerned with the lack of commitment by State Government departments towards this project," he said.

"It is imperative that a secure water supply be established for the Stanthorpe community and we will continue to work toward this end."

According to Mayor Bellingham, a great deal of this budget is about consolidating two sets of everything... waste strategies, planning schemes and local laws.

"Council has allocated funding to prepare a revised waste strategy for the two councils, funding to provide a review of local laws and funding for the review of heritage matters, with the most extensive of these being \$250,000 for commencement of the process to implement a new planning scheme," he said.

This money has been specifically allocated for various studies that need to be prepared to assist with preparation of scheme.

Cr Bellingham said that he and councillors hoped that the 2008/09 Budget was viewed as responsible. "As a team we will continue to strive to build strong partnerships with the community and business, and on the community's behalf, responsibly manage the change and growth ahead."

ENDS

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Expenditure highlights

- \$13.57 million for road maintenance and construction including bridges, footpaths, signs etc.
- \$1.445 million for sewerage capital works
- \$3.861 million for sewerage and CED operations
- \$1.665m for water capital works
- \$5.521m for water operations
- \$800,000 for parks, gardens and public spaces programs
- \$3.187 million for plant replacement (Grader \$375,000, five trucks \$530,000, two rollers \$355,000, two tractors \$160,000 and an excavator \$240,000)
- \$2.297 million for library programs across the region
- \$2.352 million for new and carryover waste management facilities capital works for the Stanthorpe Resource Recovery Centre and Allora, Killarney & Wallangarra transfer stations
- \$2.181 million for operating waste management facilities
- \$2.182 million for refuse collection
- \$1.21 million for Information Technology – including \$847,000 for consolidation of core business systems due to amalgamation (includes Finance, Property & Content Management systems, and communications and data link)
- \$326,000 for the noxious weeds control program
- \$289,000 Rabbit Board
- \$384,000 for tourism
- \$565,000 for economic development including \$100,000 for Morgan Park Masterplan, \$30,000 for Commercial & Industrial Land Strategy, \$10,000 for Equestrian Centre Study and \$10,000 for Cunningham Rail Link

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BUDGET

2008/09

Budget briefs

\$389,000 in donations to community groups

Council has again committed its support to local groups and organisations by way of rate relief, monetary donations, in-kind support, plant hire relief and grant application support. In 2008/09 Council will make \$320,000 donations available and \$69,000 in plant hire to support community groups and events.

\$70,000 Cemeteries

Council has budgeted \$70,000 for improvements to the Warwick and Stanthorpe cemeteries as part of continuing upgrades to both those community facilities.

\$566,000 towards Tourism & Events

The Southern Downs Regional Council will continue to work closely with the area's peak tourism organisations to create a vibrant tourism industry and events calendar for business operators and residents of the Shire. The current operational model has proved to be extremely successful in our region and Council will accordingly continue their support as follows:

\$113,690 to Warwick Shire Tourism & Events, \$120,000 to Granite Belt Tourism, \$127,323 to the Southern Downs & Granite Belt Tourist Association, as well as \$182,000 to Council festivals and events.

Our youth are important

Southern Downs Regional Council recognises the importance of youth to the future of our community and the value of considering young people when planning and developing services, activities, infrastructure and facilities for the region. Council has allocated \$174,000 in its 2008/09 Budget for this purpose, including \$8,500 to support the re-establishment of the Stanthorpe Youth Council and to support Stanthorpe youth projects.

Libraries

Council's commitment to operating Libraries in 2008/09 is \$2.297m. A further allocation of \$208,000 has been earmarked for capital works including \$185,000 for books and materials.

Supporting the Arts

The Southern Downs Regional Council is encouraging of the wonderful work the arts community does within the region and in 2008/09 has committed \$342,000 toward operation of Regional Art Galleries. Council also supports the Regional Arts Development Fund, which assists the professional development and employment of arts and cultural workers in regional Queensland, and this year has allocated \$38,000 to the fund, along with the State Government's commitment of \$63,000, thereby injecting \$101,000 into community arts projects over the coming year.

Saleyards

Council will continue its support of the Warwick & District Saleyards complex with an allocation of \$395,000 towards operating expenses. It is anticipated that the Saleyards will return a net profit in 2008/09 of \$49,000.

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Rates to increase \$2.00/week

The Southern Downs Regional Council has faced a challenging task in formulating its 2008/09 budget by having to utilise two different rating systems – one a flat rate system (Warwick) and the other differential with a number of different categories (Stanthorpe).

Stanthorpe residents, who previously received a 12½ per cent discount for payment of rates within 30 days and 5 per cent for payment of rates within 60 days, will no longer have two discount periods. Instead they will receive a 10 per cent discount for payment of rates within 30 days, similar to Warwick.

In a move to compensate the Stanthorpe community for this change, Council has elected not to raise Stanthorpe general rates as highly as Warwick's. Stanthorpe general rates will rise by 6 per cent, with Warwick's rising 8 per cent.

Mayor, Ron Bellingham said that overall the bottom line increase will be fair.

A rate increase in the urban areas (on minimum general rate) of roughly \$100.00 per annum for Warwick and Stanthorpe ratepayers is the bottom line after the 2008/09 Budget was handed down by Mayor Ron Bellingham today. These figures are based on sample urban properties in each centre on the minimum general rate, with some residents set to experience larger rises and some smaller rises.

"In the current tough economic climate, councillors are aware that rate increases will add to already tight business and family budgets and have therefore approached their first budget with responsibility in mind," Mayor Bellingham said.

"We have looked long and hard at what we can deliver back to the community despite Council having to pay increases for goods and services that are often in excess of the CPI.

"As I see it, the alternative to responsible increases is to cut back on the level of local services and infrastructure, which I have no doubt the community would find unacceptable" he said.

ENDS

A comparison with last year

Warwick	2008/09	2007/08
Dwelling Minimum		
General Rates	510.00 <i>(Up 8%)</i>	472.50
<i>Rate in the \$</i>	<i>0.8215</i>	<i>0.935</i>
Water Access	365.40	348.30
Sewerage	386.76	368.40
Garbage collection and recycling	200.00	191.00
Road Levy	95.00	90.00
Waste Facilities Levy	171.00	160.00
Fire Levy	116.40	111.20
Gross Total	1844.56	1741.40
Discount	172.82	163.02
Net Total	1671.74	1578.38
Annual Rise	\$93.36	
Stanthorpe	2008/09	2007/08
Dwelling Minimum		
General Rates	472.50 <i>(Up 6%)</i>	445.00
Water Access	242.00	230.00
Sewerage	354.10	336.60
Garbage collection	122.60	116.50
Landfill Charge	84.00	80.00
Urban Fire	72.40	69.20
Gross Total	1347.60	1277.30
Discount	127.52	151.01
Net Total	1220.08	1126.29
Annual Rise	\$93.79	

Note:

General rates have gone up 8 per cent in Warwick and 6 per cent in Stanthorpe.

This will help compensate for the reduction of discount (from 12.5% to 10%) in the former Stanthorpe Shire area.

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Rates and Charges: What will you pay?

The overall effect of increases to Southern Downs Regional Council's rates and charges for average urban ratepayers on the minimum general rate will be around \$2.00 a week in Warwick and Stanthorpe.

Southern Downs Mayor Ron Bellingham said that within the discount period, the average ratepayer (with water, sewerage and garbage collection services) in Warwick can expect to pay a net amount of \$1671.74 (\$1578.38 in 2007/08), in Killarney \$1646.68 (\$1554.20), in Allora \$1124.95 (\$1057.40) (no sewerage), and in Stanthorpe \$1,220.08 (\$1,126.29).

"In Warwick, the minimum general rate will increase from \$472.50 to \$510.00 and in Stanthorpe from \$445.00 to \$472.50," he said.

Under the former Warwick Council's flat rate system, the rate in the dollar in Warwick has reduced from 0.935 cents to 0.8215 cents.

In order to achieve the overall objectives of the former Warwick Waste Management Strategy, Council has maintained a separate charge of \$171.00 on all rateable land in the former Warwick Shire for 'Waste Facilities'. This Strategy, which was adopted in 2005 to comply with the Queensland Government's Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Policy 2000, requires the systematic closure of landfills and installation of strategically placed waste transfer stations.

Stanthorpe residents will also incur a Separate Landfill Charge, which will rise from \$80 to \$84. Revenue from this charge is used to offset costs associated with Stanthorpe's new Resource Recovery Centre.

In Warwick, garbage collection charges will rise from \$191 to \$200 (including kerbside recycling collection), with Stanthorpe's garbage service rising from \$116.50 to \$122.60 (no kerbside recycling pick-up).

Council has also increased the Roads Levy from \$90 to \$95 in the Northern area of the region (Warwick) to assist with the impact the fuel price increases have had and will continue to have on operations and the increase in road maintenance and construction costs.

ENDS

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Roads levy for Northern residents rises to \$95

The Southern Downs Regional Council has maintained its separate charge on all rateable land in the former Warwick Shire for "Roads" for the 2008/09 financial year.

The Roads Levy will increase from \$90 to \$95.

The Roads Levy will continue to finance road construction and maintenance in the Northern Region of the shire, in lieu of funding from government programs and will enable Council to maintain services and facilities, rather than lose them.

Mayor Ron Bellingham said that the major impact on operational costs of plan and the purchase of quarry products in the coming year will be increased fuel costs.

"All up, Council's fuel budget will rise by \$1.045m," he said.

Mayor Bellingham said the Roads Levy would generate funds to be used specifically towards roads, thereby freeing up general revenue to help sustain regional services and facilities.

"Councils must strike a balance between the community's ideal road network and what the community can afford to pay to retain and develop that network."

ENDS

Waste Facilities

The Southern Downs Regional Council is continuing to work towards the implementation of waste management initiatives in both the former Warwick and Stanthorpe areas and will maintain waste levies to help meet strategic goals.

In the former Warwick Shire, the Waste Facilities levy will remain and will rise from \$160 to \$171. Garbage collection charges will rise from \$191 to \$200 (including kerbside recycling collection).

Stanthorpe residents will still incur a Separate Landfill Charge, which will rise from \$80 to \$84, whilst their garbage collection service will rise from \$116.50 to \$122.60 (no kerbside recycling pick-up).

Mayor Bellingham said that in addition to funding increased waste management costs, the levies will ensure several major projects are completed within the current financial year. The capital cost for new and carryover waste management projects in 2008/09 is \$2.352m, with Council confirming construction of the Killarney Transfer Station with a reallocation of \$655,000, and confirming \$960,000 for the Resource Recovery Centre at Stanthorpe.

In progressing the former Warwick Shire's Waste Management Strategy (approved by Council in 2005), which complies with the Queensland Government's Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Policy 2000, Council has allocated a further \$350,000 for a new Waste Transfer Station at Allora. This will be in addition to last year's \$350,000 allocation, bringing the project total to \$700,000.

Work is continuing on the Stanthorpe Resource Recovery Centre, which was budgeted for in the 2007/08 year by the former Stanthorpe Shire at a \$1.0m cost to Council. Tenders closed last Friday, with four tenders received, with a decision on the successful tenderer to be made in coming weeks.

Mayor Bellingham said that the construction of Stanthorpe's Resource Recovery Centre and new waste transfer stations at Allora and Killarney would ensure environmentally sound waste disposal methods are being practiced in the region, in line with contemporary waste disposal practices.

In good news for the Stanthorpe community, the Southern Downs Regional Council has reintroduced on a bi-annual basis, a kerbside clean-up during Clean-Up Australia week. The campaign will run alternatively in the towns of the northern and southern regions on alternative years, with Warwick scheduled to receive the service this year. **ENDS**

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Better roads

The 2008/09 Budget provides \$6.28 million for work on Council-owned roads with \$2.5 million allocated for Operational Works and \$4.3 million for Capital Works. This amount includes \$1.5 million from the State Government's Main Roads/Local Government Alliance and the Australian Government's Roads to Recovery Program.

Operational costs in the new budget have been increased in line with the Local Government Index however the cost of fuel will continue to impact on it. To counter that effect, gravel sheeting has increased – more gravelling, less sealing compared to other years.

As part of the Capital Works Program, \$1.36 million has been allocated for bitumen resealing across the entire area, \$850,000 for gravel resheeting, and \$25,000 for kerbing replacement as part of a long term program to rejuvenate Council's ageing infrastructure. Other funding has been set aside for:-

Roads

- Rabbit Road – Sealing highway to Pink Gum Lane (\$100,000)
- Winkler Road – Extend bitumen seal to Winkler access (\$150,000)

Projects 50% funded by Main Roads/Local Government Alliance

- Willowvale Road – Reids Road to Kirklands Road (\$66,000)
- Inverramsay Road Bridge – Replacement with culvert (\$338,000)
- O'Dea's Road (\$220,000)
- Freestone Road reseal (\$132,000)
- Inverary Road (\$116,000)
- Eukey Road – Stage 2 (\$240,000)
- Davadi Street – widen existing seal (\$140,000)

Roads to Recovery 2

- Tummaville Road – replace with culvert (\$200,000)
- Inverramsay Road Bridge – replace with culvert (\$100,000)
- Jack Smith Gully Road – rehabilitation (\$100,000)
- Upper Wheatvale Road (\$200,000)

Drainage

- Red Bridge Court – stormwater modification (\$12,500)
- Refurbish/replace stormwater in Stanthorpe area (\$80,000)

ENDS

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\$1.665m for Water Supply Capital Works

A total of \$1.665m has been allocated to water replacement works and new water infrastructure under the 2008/09 Water Supply Capital Works program.

Reticulated mains and fittings maintenance will be carried out over the region at a cost of \$282,000.

Water Treatment Plants will be getting the treatment with \$222,000 allocated for replacement works at Killarney, Stanthorpe, Wallangarra and Warwick Water Treatment Plants. A further \$115,000 will be spent on new works at the Warwick Water Treatment Plant.

There is good news for Killarney residents with the Killarney off-stream storage facility planned to be constructed and completed this year.

\$500,000 has been allocated for studies to progress the planning for increased urban water supply for Stanthorpe. Mayor Bellingham has indicated his concern with the lack of commitment by State Government departments towards this project.

“It is imperative that a secure water supply be established for the Stanthorpe community and we will continue to work toward this end,” he said.

Due to problems as a result of a blackout in the Leslie Dam area recently, Council has allocated \$100,000 for the purchase of a back-up generator for the Leslie Dam pump station. This automatic back-up will ensure water continues to flow to the Treatment Plant for treatment and distribution.

Other water capital works to be completed this financial year include:

- New reticulated main in Amosfield Road Stanthorpe (\$10,000)
- Fire-fighting Tanker's standpipe in Pratten (\$10,000)

ENDS

\$1.445m for Sewerage Budget

Sewerage works in the coming year will include:

- \$400,000 for sewerage reticulation for the Kenilworth Street area for the first time.
- \$175,000 for Stage 2 of sewer extension work into the Rangers Road area. Residents in the Stage 2 area will be charged sewerage rates from the issue of 2008/09 rate notices.
- \$120,000 to control odours from three pump stations in the region. Officers have investigated other local government areas that have implemented measures to control the odour from hydrogen sulphide and will carry out similar works at the three pump stations.
- Sewerage pumps replaced in Stanthorpe at Tyrell Street and Torrisi Terrace
- \$230,000 allocated to the Stanthorpe Waste Treatment Plant for inlet work and modification of existing equipment

ENDS

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Beautifying the region

With a win in the regional Tidy Towns Awards under its belt, the Southern Downs Regional Council will continue its outstanding work on providing beautiful and useable recreation areas in the coming financial year.

Notably, Warwick's Leslie Park play equipment will benefit from a major upgrade. Director of Technical Services, Peter See, said that the upgrade will include development of a master plan and Stage 1 of the replacement of playground equipment. Mr See however was quick to point out that Leslie Park's famed boat swings will be retained after modifications to ensure they comply with current safety standards.

Council's 2008/09 Budget allows for the following works to be carried out in parks and gardens:-

- Leslie Park play equipment replacement (\$100,000)
- Maryvale Park equipment including rubber soffall (\$40,000)
- Lighting at Browns and Daggs Falls in public areas for safety (\$10,000)
- Replacement of park furniture (\$20,000)
- Tree planting (\$10,000)
- Sheahan Oval Fencing Contribution (\$10,000)
- Walkway Fencing Diamondvale Road (\$10,000)
- General park lighting (\$10,000)
- Replacement of garden bed edging (\$5,000)

ENDS

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