

Public Question Time – Council Meeting – 20 May 2025

We received 16 questions without notice.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

A number of questions regarding the 2025-26 Budget have been grouped together and a combined response provided.

Dale Halstead, a resident of Mornington, asked the following question:

How does Council, without consultation with community affected, justify the significant cutting, as reported in our local paper of Shire services and staffing on the wellbeing of the environment – natural and human, which is the primary responsibility of Council members?

Susan McCulloch, a resident of Shoreham asked the following question:

The 2025 Council Vision statement says Council aims to foster "diverse culture" and is "committed to supporting community groups... ensuring a prosperous, safe, accessible and inclusive future for all." Can Council explain in what way defunding the performing and creative arts fosters culture, diversity, prosperity, and inclusivity?

Corey Hoogendoom, a resident of Dromana asked the following question:

Where will the funding taken from the cuts to the Arts and Creative Grants be directed, and will members of the arts communities be consulted before these cuts are made?

David Andrews, a resident of Shoreham asked the following question:

Why is the funding of arts and related organisations being cut?

James Farquharson, a resident of Mount Eliza asked the following question:

What were the criteria used by the Council to make the decision to cut the arts budget?

Joan Doyle, a resident of Dromana asked the following question:

Why are you taking away more than \$100,000 in funding from Willum Warrain, the only First Nations Gathering Place in the Shire and increasing funding for Australia Day and Anzac Day events to the amount of \$150,000?

Council advises that as part of the annual budget development process, Council reviews its services and programs to ensure resources are allocated in the best interests of the Mornington Peninsula community. Competing priorities are carefully assessed given the Shire's limited resources.

Council's budget consultation ran from December 2024 through to February 2025. The consultation invited the community to select their top five priorities from 15 key categories to help guide investment decisions. This process saw strong engagement, with over 3,500 submissions received. The feedback informed Council's funding decisions for the 2025/26 Budget.

At the Council Meeting on 6 May 2025, the Community Investment Fund was reviewed and adjusted accordingly. The overall Community Investment Fund total was \$3,249,750. The increase reflects targeted support for tourism grants, local area community infrastructure grants, and events.

These changes were made within the allocated budget for community investment and did not impact any other capital or operating projects. In fact, the Fund saw a slight overall increase, ensuring continued support for key community initiatives.

Sally Baillieu, a resident of Cape Schanck asked the following question:

I am seeking clarification regarding the figures referenced in Agenda Item 4.4 of the April 22, 2025, meeting. Specifically, could you please explain how the data from approximately 3,000 contributors in 2021, combined with fewer than 700 responses from the 2024 Vision Pulse Check, can be considered a representative and accurate basis for assessing and guiding the Community Vision Plan and related budget decisions-particularly in the context of a population of 170,000 residents and over 8 million annual visitors?

Council advises that while 3,700 responses may not capture every individual voice, it represents a statistically significant and diverse cross-section of our community. For a population of 170,000 residents, this is a robust sample size that provides reliable insights, especially when responses are gathered from a broad range of ages, neighbourhoods, and stakeholder groups. The Vision Pulse Check is not intended to be the final word, but rather a meaningful snapshot of community values and priorities that helps guide long-term planning and budget decisions. Importantly, it is used alongside other tools like deliberative panels, advisory committees, and tourism impact data to ensure balanced and informed decisions that reflect both resident needs and visitor considerations.

Jane Carnegie, a resident of Somers, asked the following question:

Can the Mayor and Councillors who voted for each and every cut please provide a detailed written explanation to the residents of the Mornington Peninsula Shire for their actions including:

- 1. The rationale for each policy change and funding cut.*
- 2. The specific process undertaken to determine the policy changes and cuts.*
- 3. Whether a business case or other analysis was undertaken for the changes.*
- 4. The community consultation process.*

This paper must be written and submitted to the next Meeting of Council for debate in the name of good governance and due process.

Council advises Each Councillor is individually responsible for undertaking their own due diligence prior to voting on matters before Council. This includes reviewing all available documentation, seeking clarification from officers where required, considering community feedback, and applying their judgment in line with their obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020*.

All decisions of Council are made by majority vote and are recorded transparently in the meeting minutes, which are publicly available. Council as an organisation does not document or report on the personal decision-making process of each individual Councillor.

As part of the Budget process, we asked the community to help shape and guide the Shire's programs, projects and services. The Budget portal closed on 16 February 2025, with 3,676 contributions and 1,522 comments received. All results and comments were shared with Councillors.

The top five community priorities were:

- Road safety and maintenance
- Protection of our rural green wedge
- Coastal infrastructure and access
- Caring for our natural environment
- Aged, family and youth services

Key themes from comments included roads, vegetation management, paths/pedestrian access, planning and economic development.

Regarding arts funding, the Community Investment Fund was adjusted to support a broader range of priorities. While this resulted in reduced direct arts allocations, the overall fund increased. While arts-specific funding decreased, Council remains committed to supporting the arts through other channels.

Paul Grage, a resident of Mount Eliza, asked the following question:

What are Councillors plans to develop, enhance, further, promote and support residents who love the arts to engage residents who participate in the arts, to attract arts tourism to develop our creative economy to provide modern, flexible and accessible venues for performances and to support the 1,000 + sole traders, associations, companies, organisations, volunteers and associated industries whose core business and motivation is the creative and performing arts?

Council remains committed to supporting the arts through strategic planning, partnerships, and available resources. We value the contributions of our creative communities and will continue to work towards inclusive and sustainable outcomes across the Shire.

As part of the annual budget development process, Council reviews its services and programs to ensure resources are allocated in the best interests of the Mornington Peninsula community. Competing priorities are carefully assessed, given the Shire's limited resources.

At the Council Meeting on 6 May 2025, the Community Investment Fund was reviewed and adjusted accordingly, bringing the total to \$3,249,750. The adjustment of priorities reflects targeted support for tourism grants, local area community infrastructure grants, and events.

These changes were made within the allocated budget for community investment and did not impact any other capital or operating projects.

There are a number of grant programs available for Arts and Culture-based projects applications to be considered for funding, including Community Events Grants, Placemaking Grants, Community Support Grants, Flexi Grants and sponsorships.

Nathan Woods, a resident of Rye asked the following question:

How was the community notified of what they wanted? Shouldn't there be a poll sent out in the mail to see what the actual community wants, rather than making a decision on the cuts on a small amount of people's views. I don't know a single person of the community or arts community that had a say.

Council's budget consultation ran from December 24 through to February 25. The consultation asked the community to choose their top five priorities from 15 key categories to help council understand where to prioritise investment. The consultation realised significant engagement with over 3,500 community submissions. This feedback was used by council to inform their decision on funding allocations for the 25/26 budget.

James Farquharson, a resident of Mount Eliza asked the following question:

What due diligence was carried by each councillor before casting their vote to cut the arts funding?

Each Councillor is individually responsible for undertaking their own due diligence before casting a vote and had the opportunity to seek clarification from Shire officers before making their decision.

Councillors consider the information available to them at the time, apply their judgement and vote in accordance with what they believe to be in the best interests of the community.

Max Johnson, a resident of Rosebud asked the following question:

Who specifically was consulted regarding the removal of over \$300,000 in Creative and Performing Arts funding from the 2025-26 draft budget, and when? Given its \$9.1 million return on investment and proven

community impact, why was this stream excluded from the budget, CIF program, and grant guidelines review?

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Footpath Repair

Kat Moran, a resident of Rosebud asked the following question:

When is the footpath near the corner of Bondi Road and the Freeway entrance going to get fixed. It's been broken for more than 3 months.

Thank you for your enquiry. Delays to the broken section of footpath were due to an extensive investigation to determine the offenders who cause the damage to the path. The Shire's maintenance contractor (Fulton Hogan) has begun their June scheduling and are anticipating the works to be completed before the end of the financial year. If you have further questions, please contact the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council on 1300 850 600.

Domestic Animal Management Plan

Ross Sbisa, a resident of Hastings asked the following question:

When is the Domestic Animal Management Plan questionnaire being published, where will it be published, and will it have questions relating to pound operators? E.g. open hours/days walk-ins without appointments that suit the needs of ratepayers.

Council advises that the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan community consultation will open on Monday 16 June 2025 at 9am. The survey and draft Plan will be available on Council's 'Shape Our Future' page shape.mornpen.vic.gov.au Whilst there is not a specific question about the operation of the Community Animal Shelter and Pound, question six provides an opportunity for respondents to let us know if there is anything else Council should consider in the draft Plan.

Ross Sbisa, asked a follow up question:

Why isn't there subsidised pet desexing for Centrelink recipients in our Shire? The shelter estimates a profit of \$1.1 million from 2023/2024. Other Councils have subsidised pet desexing e.g. Golden Plains, Morwell, Whittlesea, Ballarat, Baw Baw, Casey, Banyule, Merri-Bek, Hepburn, Mansfield, Wangaratta, Mitchell, Bendigo, Frankston, Brimbank and Melton

Council does not have a profit of \$1.1 million dollars from the Shelter operations as it runs at a loss and is subsidised through animal registrations. Currently, Council have a desexing program for the elderly. Other desexing programs could be considered from the DAMP process.