

Public Question Time

Question from Trevor White

Many ratepayers and residents of the City of Port Phillip have either lost money in their business, been put on job keeper or lost their job and now on job seeker. These people need support from the City. Will Council support ratepayers, businesses and community groups who are experiencing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic by giving rate waivers, rate relief or deferrals? Business and landlord rate relief should be extended to tenants, who do not directly pay rates, with the agreement of their landlord that any deferral or rebate will be directly passed on to the tenant. It is suggested that, to be eligible, ratepayers (direct or indirect, such as tenants) must be a Commercial and Community group ratepayers who have been required to close due to COVID-19 and are eligible for the Job Keepers payment. Residential ratepayers should be eligible for the Job Seeker or Job Keeper payment. Any other ratepayer experiencing financial hardship due to income dropping by 15 per cent or more. It's easy, Council can use existing documentation which has already been verified by the ATO, hence it's easy to implement. Many in the community were disappointed that the majority of Councillors voted against having a budget option prepared for review based on a no rate increase option. This is an opportunity to support ratepayers and tenants who have lost income in their business, on Job Keeper or lost their job and on Job Seeker. An example of this rate support can be found at the City of Mitcham in Adelaide which have adopted such support for residents and businesses.

Response

Most Victorian councils do not propose a rates freeze due to the impact on Council's long term financial sustainability. For CoPP this is estimated to be \$30m over a 10-year period.

A rates freeze is equivalent to a \$35 discount for an average ratepayer and \$32 for an average residential ratepayer which is about 67 cents a week and 62 cents a week respectively. Therefore, a rates freeze will not be impactful to the average ratepayer but will have a significant impact to Council's long-term financial sustainability.

Council believes the proposed \$4.2m economic and social support package, which is greater than the revenue raised from proposed rates cap increase of \$2.7m, will be targeted to those parts of the community most impacted by COVID-19. The package targets several initiatives towards stimulus and recovery measures to enable people and business to reconnect with our public spaces and commercial precincts and return to normal social activities. The proposed package builds on the \$2.8m emergency relief package provided in 2019/20 Financial Year."

**Please note: answers to any questions in Public Question Time which were answered at the meeting are included in the minutes of that meeting.*