

Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme

Community engagement
summary report

October 2022



Bayside
CITY COUNCIL

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1. Overview

A Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme (SCS) Policy was developed to provide a funding model and associated criteria to be able to proceed with projects that would improve the amenity of a select group of community members.

Community engagement on the draft Policy was undertaken from 1 August to 4 September 2022 to help Council to refine the Policy and understand community sentiment regarding any future initiation of a special charge.

There were 46 online contributions via 38 online survey submissions and 8 questions in the Q&A forum. The draft Policy was also discussed at the Bayside Healthy Ageing Reference Group and Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee meetings.

Agreement with statements

There was disagreement (74%) that the draft Policy *'sets out a consistent and fair approach'*, and respondents were divided as to whether the draft Policy *'explains the process in detail'* and is *'easy to understand'*.

Benefits

There were mixed responses to the question regarding the benefits of the scheme: some comments focused on the positive aspects of the scheme, such as funding underground powerlines or enabling projects to proceed that otherwise wouldn't be delivered; the majority of comments related to challenges.

Challenges

The main challenges identified were the cost, it not being affordable and concern about it being forced on residents, a lack of trust in Council, it being unfair and inequitable.

Reasons for responses

Reasons provided by participants for their responses were similar to the comments provided to the challenges question: needing more clarity, the cost, a lack of trust in Council and the scheme being unfair.

1.1 Next steps

Information gathered through the community engagement program will be considered by Council officers and amendments made to the draft Policy, as required.

Council will consider community feedback and whether to adopt a proposed Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme Policy at its November 2022 meeting.

2. Background

This document provides a summary of stakeholder and community feedback on the draft Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme Policy.

The Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme Policy initiative was put forward at the Council Meeting held in October 2021, as part of discussions relating to the prioritisation of undergrounding of powerlines.

The process of initiating a Special Rate or Special Charge Scheme project is strongly influenced by the Local Government Act 1989 and the Special Rates and Charges Ministerial Guidelines September 2004.

If the majority of residents in a street or area support the proposal as part of a Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme (SCS), this affects the dissenting residents as they will need to contribute to the SCS even if they oppose the initiative.

If the majority opposes the proposal, then the supporting residents lose the opportunity to go ahead with a project funded by this mechanism. Therefore, it is critical to ensure the community is provided the opportunity to input into the policy.

Full upfront costs will need to be paid by Council and administer the program to cover the costs from residents.

3. Definitions and scope

The level of influence for this engagement program was at the consult level, where Council seeks to obtain public feedback for analysis, alternatives, and/or decision-making.

The community consultation is able to influence the process and procedures which will feed into the policy, but not the format of how a Special Charge Scheme is initiated and carried out is governed by the Local Government Act and selected Ministerial Guidelines.

Within this document, reference is made to stakeholders. These stakeholders are:

- Bayside residents
- Developers
- Environmental groups

Related Council documents and consultations

- Undergrounding Powerlines Policy

4. Consultation process

4.1 Consultation purpose

The consultation was designed to provide stakeholders and the broader community with the opportunity to provide feedback on the Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme Policy. While related the Undergrounding Powerlines Policy, the policy was engaged separately as the policies are separate and adoption is not dependent on each other.

4.2 Consultation methodology

There are four stages to the project, the first was analysis and the second was drafting the policy. This report concludes the third stage, community consultation, to seek feedback on

the draft policy. The final stage will consider the feedback and make relevant amendments to the draft policy, with Council expected to consider the proposed policy in November 2022.



4.3 Consultation phase

Over 50 people participated in the engagement program from 1 August to 4 September 2022 via a variety of methods.

The following activities were undertaken:

Details	Activity
1 August to 4 September	Online survey Hosted on Council's Have Your Say digital engagement platform.
38 respondents	
8 contributions	Online Q&A Question and answer forum hosted on Have Your Say
28 participants	Reference Groups Presentation to Committees of Council and reference groups, including the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, and the Bayside Healthy Ageing Reference Group.

4.4 Communications tools

The following communication tools were used to encourage participation in the engagement:

- email notification to Have Your Say members (4,195)
- website news story and This Week in Bayside e-newsletter (11,000)
- Let's Talk Bayside magazine (41,000)
- Social media posts – organic and paid (50 likes, 59 comments, 2 shares)
- direct emails to key stakeholder groups
- Digital screens in Libraries and Corporate Centre
- Postcards and Corporate Centre (300).

5. Participant profile

The following table shows the 2021 Census data for the whole of Bayside, compared to the demographics of participants.

	Demographic	Bayside 2021 Census	Participants (%)
Gender	Male	47.8%	17 (47%)
	Female	52.2%	16 (44%)
	Unknown	-	3 (8%)
	Other identity	-	-
Age	18-24	7.8%	0
	25-34	7.8%	2 (5.5%)
	35-49	19.4%	6 (16.7%)
	50-59	15.7%	7 (19.4%)
	60-69	12.1%	12 (33.3%)
	70-84	12.2%	9 (25%)
	85+	3.4%	0
	Undisclosed	-	0
Suburb	Beaumaris	12.8%	5 (14%)
	Black Rock	6.2%	1 (3%)
	Brighton	23.7%	12 (33%)
	Brighton East	15.6%	5 (14%)
	Cheltenham	3.9%	1 (3%)
	Hampton	13.6%	3 (8%)
	Hampton East	4.9%	1 (3%)
	Highett	7.6%	3 (14%)
	Sandringham	11.8%	5 (14%)
	Outside Bayside	-	-

6. Consultation findings

The following section summarises the key themes which arose in community feedback on the Special Rates and Charges Policy. In the interest of stakeholder and community privacy, individual quotes have not been included within this public document. Where there was more than one mention of a topic or item, the number of mentions has been specified in brackets and italics.

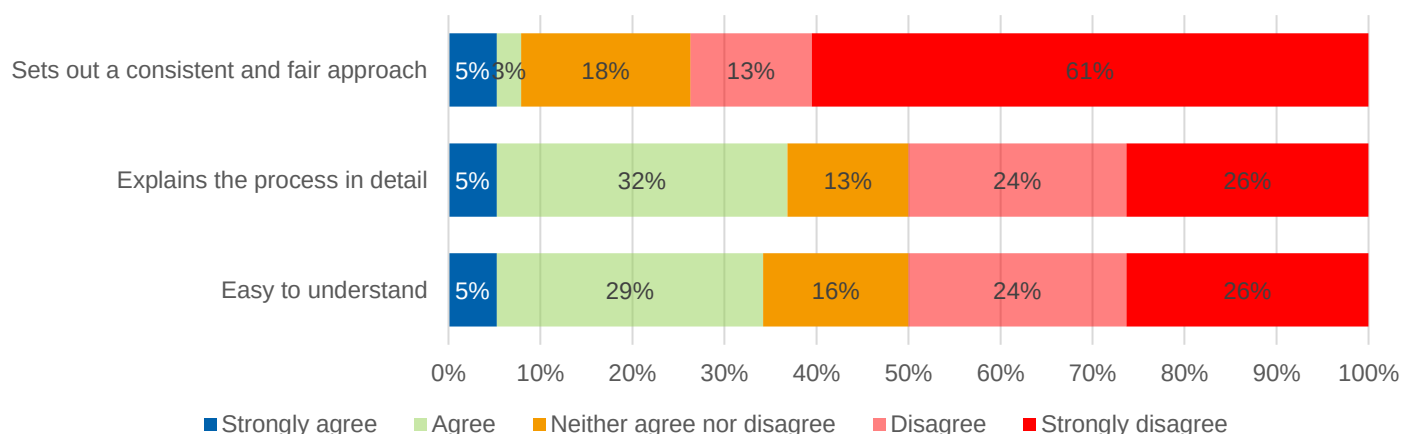
6.1 Main feedback

Agreement with statements about the draft Policy

All survey participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about the draft Policy, with 38 responses received.

There was disagreement (74%) that the draft Policy '*sets out a consistent and fair approach*', and respondents were divided as to whether the draft Policy '*explains the process in detail*' and is '*easy to understand*'.

Figure 1: Level of agreement with statements about the draft Policy



Benefits and challenges of a Special Rate and Charge Scheme

Survey participants were asked what they saw as the benefits of a Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme (SCS), with 33 participants providing comments as summarised in the table below.

Benefits	Comment themes (mentions)
Positive	Would like to see powerlines underground (4) More projects could be delivered (1) Fair way of ensuring those who benefit pay for works (1)
Negative	No benefits (13); Not many benefits (3) Over-reach of Council / cost shifting to ratepayers (8) Need to focus on other areas (footpaths, overhanging trees) (2) Benefits the wealthy to the detriment of others (2) Should be 100% support/approval for charge to proceed (1) Charge is a loan at the cost of other ratepayers (1) Rates are already high enough (1)

	No benefits to elderly or apartment owners (1) Underground powerlines are a waste of money (1)
Neutral	Need more information on costs (1) Infrastructure would need to be delivered in timely manner (1)

Survey participants were asked what they saw as the challenges of a Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme (SCS), with 33 participants providing comments, as summarised in the table below.

Challenges	Comment themes (mentions)
Enormous fees / not affordable / cost / should not be forced (18)	Given current circumstances, this places burden on residents (10) Residents should not be forced to pay (3) Cost people money for something they don't want or cannot afford (2) Non-residents will benefit from amenity and should contribute (1)
Lack of trust in Council (12)	Belief that Council mismanages current projects and wastes money (10) Questioning Council's role in lending (2)
Inequitable / Unfair (6)	Proposal is unfair (2) May be divisive between neighbours (2) Unfair for landowners, having to pay more than unit owners (2)
100% of residents should agree (4)	100% of the street should agree to the works and cost (4)
Cost shifting	Cost shifting to ratepayers (3)
Other	Considers regarding implementation (2) Considers regarding risk (1) Referendum needed (2) Multi-level government buy in needed (1) Long-term savings from works (underground power) should be passed on to residents (1) Reducing ratepayers ability to make other improvements eg solar (1) Construction impacts - noise, cost escalation etc (1) Outside scope of Council (2)

6.2 Item-specific feedback

Reasons for responses

Participants were asked to provide reasons for their responses, 33 participants provided a response with the highest theme mentioned was further clarity needed, followed by the cost eg. residents being unable to afford the scheme. Other comments included a lack of trust in Council and believing the policy is unfair.

Topic	Community feedback
Clarity	Need more clarity / more detail / more information on cost and risk (6) Statements are vague and generalised (3) No specific examples given (1)
Cost / Can't afford	Forcing unreasonable costs on rate payers /Should not expect residents to pay (4) Already pay South East Water and Council rates, why pay more? (2)

	Families will have little time follow through to VCAT ad will have to “just pay” (1)
Don't trust council / fiscal responsibility of Council	Fiscal responsibility and accountability needed from Council (2) Cost shifting (1) Do not trust Council / Council is self-serving (4)
Unfair	Unfair to force residents to pay (3) User-pay system is inherently unfair (1) No indication of fairness to rate payers impacted by decision (1)
Other	100% agreeance needed (2) Not a priority (2) No means testing (1) Long term roll out (1)

Further comments

Participants were given the opportunity to provide further comments, with 27 responding.

Topic	Community feedback
Don't introduce the Special Rate and Special Charge Scheme	Don't do it / Would like project stopped (5) Question the timing with current economic climate (3) Belief that the vast majority would oppose the policy (1) Council to focus on projects that will benefit the wider community (1)
Don't trust Council	Distrust in Council / Belief the policy is a “money grab” / (6)
Other	Not affordable (4) More consultation needed (4) Importance of built in timelines and quality assurance (1) 100% agreeance needed (1) Unfair (1)

7. Project evaluation

This report presents the findings from the analysis of the community feedback gathered during community engagement from 1 August to 4 September 2022.

The engagement program received a total of 46 direct responses, including 38 surveys completed via Have Your Say and 8 questions via a Q&A forum.

Communications to encourage participation attracted 861 unique visitors to the project page, and were sent to every household via an article in Let's Talk Bayside magazine, as well as to over 11,000 community members via email newsletters or notifications.

The community engagement project was not a random sample survey of the community, and the results reflect the views of those in the community sufficiently engaged with both Council and undergrounding powerlines issues to choose to participate in the consultation.

Engagement targets for the Have Your Say webpages were that:

- 20% of visits would last at least one active minute (exceeded, 36%)
- 10% of visits would have at least two actions performed, such as moving around the project page or clicking on links (exceeded, 25%)

- 5% of visits had at least one contribution made (not achieved, 4%)

Satisfaction with engagement process

Survey participants were generally satisfied with the consultation process and materials, with a majority of participants selecting they had the required information to participate, and it was very (31%) or mostly (41%) easy to find/understand. It is noted that a quarter of participants found the information mostly hard (16%) or very hard (11%) to find/understand.

Engagement plan

The Engagement Plan Overview for this project was published and is available to view at: yoursay.bayside.vic.gov.au/special-charge-scheme/engagement-plan-overview