



Ararat Rural City

Community Consultation Report

Draft Budget 2026/27

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Introduction

As part of its budget development processes, Ararat Rural City Council undertakes community engagement in a manner that is designed to maximise engagement across the municipality. This engagement is also done in accordance with its Community Engagement Policy and Section 96 of the Local Government Act 2020. Several mechanisms of engagement were used to provide a range of options for feedback to be provided, these include:

- Use of the Engage Ararat website
- Distribution of plain language budget summaries across the municipality
- Face to face "town hall" meetings
- Social media posts to encourage community engagement
- Summaries be placed in local newspapers, and
- Mainstream media engagement around major budget initiatives

For the Draft Budget 2026/27, the following community engagement sessions were held:

Location	Date and Time
Ararat Town Hall	5:30pm, Monday 23 March 2026
Buangor Cobb & Co	10:30am, Wednesday 25 March 2026
Elmhurst Mechanics Institute	3:30pm, Wednesday 25 March 2026
Lake Bolac Info & Business Centre	1:30pm, Monday 23 March 2026
Moyston Community Hall	1.00pm, Tuesday 24 March 2026
Pomonal Community Hall	11.00am, Tuesday 24 March 2026
Tatyoan Hall	12:00pm, Thursday 26 March 2026
Willaura Memorial Hall	3.00pm, Tuesday 24 March 2026

A drop-in session was also held at the Ararat Rural City Council offices at 59 Vincent Street, Ararat on Friday 27 March 2026, from 9:00am-2:00pm.

This report provides a record of the feedback received for the Draft Budget 2026/27. There were 9 online submissions, 27 attendees to the community engagement sessions and 2 letters received. Council wishes to thank everyone who participated in the engagement process and took the time to provide feedback.

Feedback Submitted Online via Engage Ararat

#	Submission	Response
1	<p>Generally the budget appears sound. I am glad there is emphasis on the community assets and cultural activities. I am concerned that the Ararat fitness centre are currently trying to reduce the deficit through cutting heating which will reduce membership and end in a less vibrant community. Have you considered making the facility more sustainable though renewable energy for heating? Or trying to make it appeal to more people?</p> <p>Love the continued focus on bringing quality entertainment to the town hall.</p>	<p>Council recognises the importance of the Ararat Fitness Centre to community health and wellbeing and has allocated an additional \$35,000 in funding from rates revenue in 2026/27. Council also supports the use of renewable energy for the Ararat Fitness Centre and there is already an extensive solar panel system installed. The Centre has been and will continue to find innovative new programs to appeal to more people, for example, the new Play Gym program delivered during the Easter 2026 school holidays. Thank you for your feedback on entertainment at the Town Hall.</p>
2	<p>Could Council please consider a "Changing Place" be incorporated into the new Fitness Centre? - where a hoist system can be used by carers to place people with a disability onto a toilet or adult size changing bench. It would allow people with severe disabilities and their families and carers to travel safely, stay out longer and participate fully in community life :)</p>	<p>Thank you for this suggestion, this will be considered as part of the development of the new indoor sports facility and aquatics facilities projects.</p>

3	Public and private investments in renewable energy microgrids for businesses and neighbourhoods to keep Ararat's energy zero emissions and independent from shockwaves	Council are open to innovative models that support emissions reductions and the use of renewable energy in Council operations.
4	<p>Upon reading the budget, I was disappointed to read that economic and demographic growth does not have a sustainable base. To sum it up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sustainable and affordable housing through north facing passive solar designs with a 60 cm eaves to let the winter sun but keep off the summer heat. Garden space for growing vegetables and fruit and nut trees and rain water roof collection for watering. Sustainable and affordable housing also translates into social safety and cohesion and food security. - more tree green spaces where people can gather helps not only to mitigate the climate but also with mental health. 	Thank you for your feedback. Ararat Rural City Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2024-34 includes goals for all new homes to have a minimum 7-star building standard under National Construction Code, reductions in potable water usage, and increases in canopy cover within all townships. Preserving our environment is also a key strategic objective of the Council Plan 2025-29, which directly guides the development of the Draft Budget and in Council's operations.
5	<p>I am writing to provide feedback on the current draft budget, specifically regarding the allocation of funding for our local indoor pool and its associated facilities.</p> <p>I would like to highlight the importance of prioritising ongoing maintenance and ensuring adequate funding for consistent heating of both the pool and the surrounding facility. The indoor pool is a valuable community asset that supports a wide range of users, including families, older residents, swimming groups, group fitness and individuals who rely on it for regular exercise and rehabilitation.</p> <p>In its current state, any shortcomings in maintenance or inconsistent heating can significantly impact usability, comfort, and overall community satisfaction. A well-maintained and properly heated facility encourages greater participation, supports public health outcomes, and maximises the return on the council's investment.</p> <p>I strongly encourage the council to consider increasing the budget allocation for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular and preventative maintenance of the pool and amenities - Reliable and consistent heating of the pool water - Adequate climate control within the indoor facility <p>Ensuring these aspects are properly funded will help maintain the pool as a safe, accessible, and welcoming environment for all members of the community.</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft budget. I appreciate your consideration of this matter.</p>	Council recognises the importance of the Ararat Fitness Centre to community health and wellbeing and has allocated an additional \$35,000 in funding from rates revenue in 2026/27. This will support the ongoing maintenance and operation of the facility until plans for potential future aquatics facilities are confirmed.

6	<p>Overall, the draft budget is quite timid. While I'm pleased to see there is solid, conservative financial management in place, which is needed, we shouldn't be operating to such a big surplus and there needs to be more spend on dressing up both Ararat and our other towns. A balanced budget needs to cover major cap works, and a whole range of services. We are not doing enough to support tourism, our youths (eg we should have more playgrounds, skate parks, street murals etc), the arts is pretty bereft, and even our Christmas decorations are bare minimum and don't show our towns off at all.</p> <p>I was pleased to see our Eastern signage upgrade mentioned in recent council meeting minutes, but again, it's overdue and bare minimum. I'd love to see some small creative projects in the mix. That said, I'm excited to see things like the Pomonal Walking track included. I'd love to know what happened to the planned mountain bike track.</p>	<p>The comprehensive operating result is an accounting measure that shows the overall financial position, and it includes non-cash and asset value changes. The comprehensive operating surplus of \$4,624,000 does not unfortunately mean that Council has this amount available in cash to spend. A better indicator of whether the budget provides enough funds for capital works is the 'Asset renewal and upgrade compared to depreciation', which is 140% for 2026/27. Asset renewal indicators above 100% mean that we are renewing our assets faster than they are degrading, and Council aims for an asset renewal ratio of at least 110% each year. Budgets for services are provided for each strategic objective of the Council Plan. E.g. the budget for Enhancing Community Life, which includes community support grants, youth, and recreation projects, is provided in section 2.5.1. with over \$4 million worth of expenditure in the 2026/27 financial year.</p>
7	<p>It's disappointing there isn't any budget allocation to at least start addressing the lack of parking at the Ararat Hospital. It's a problem that has been publicly acknowledged by council and directly impacts both staff and patients. Limited parking is also a problem at the railway station. More people are now using the train, even prior to the current free travel period, and the significant number of services now provided will only make train use even more popular. It would be relatively simple and inexpensive to extent the current Birdwood Avenue parking further along the Avenue. Another area that should receive at least some funding is planting and maintaining more, preferably deciduous, street trees. Even just a few trees planted and nurtured each year would provide a significant benefit over time.</p>	<p>Council is continuing to work with East Grampians Health Service on the parking needs of their patients, visitors, volunteers and employees.</p> <p>Council recognises that more and more people are using the train services. Much of the land around the Ararat Railway Station is owned by VicTrack. Council will advocate for more parking at the train station.</p>
8	<p>The Main Street needs much improvement particularly around the post office area and the pedestrian crossing. New colourful plants and improved landscaping please</p>	<p>This area will be inspected and possible upgrades will be considered as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.</p>
9	<p>It all sounds good but what about a walking track to Halls Gap?</p> <p>The council need to know that there are a couple of roads (under Ararat council) beyond Tunnel Road in Pomonal. If there are any vouchers for waste to be given out, or roadside clean-ups... it usually stops at Tunnel Road, what about Haiges Court! We pay rates too.</p>	<p>The walking track is noted for future engagement with VicRoads for a roadside path on Ararat-Halls Gap Road. There is an informal trail in the Grampians National Park from the Tunnel Road car park to the Boronia Trail via Long Gully, these will connect you to Halls Gap and are managed by Parks Victoria. The Victorian Fire Risk Register map is used to identify properties that are in a high to extreme bushfire area where green waste vouchers were issued. At that time of vouchers being issued, Haiges Court was not included in the highlighted area, however this map has since been updated to include Haiges Court</p>

Summary of Discussions from the Community Engagement Sessions

There were a range of matters raised during the engagement sessions that were not related to the Draft Budget 2026/27. The non-budget matters have been summarised in the Community Engagement Program reports presented at Council Meetings. Below is a summary of feedback, queries and discussions related to the Draft Budget.

#	Query or Discussion	Response
	Ararat	
10	Asked if the slope on the lake side of the cafe in Alexandra Gardens can be improved.	Suggestion has been reviewed. The existing path follows the existing fall of the land. Changing the slope would require a significant redesign of the area and considerable cost, making this financially unfeasible.
	Buangor	No matters raised
	Elmhurst	
11	At the December 2025 engagement session, attendees identified a number of roads that were priorities for dust suppression or sealing. These roads were reviewed to identify the order of priority. Green St from the Bush Nursing Centre to Elmhurst-Glenpatrick Road was agreed as the priority, then whichever road had the highest traffic counts and density of housing.	Sealing of Green St from the Bush Nursing Centre to Elmhurst-Glenpatrick Road will be delivered as part of the 2026/27 capital works program. The gathering traffic count data on other roads in Elmhurst will take time, so the potential upgrades to other roads will be considered in future financial years.
12	There is a dip in the road at Hillarys Road, Elmhurst, near the intersection with Pyrenees Highway, can this be filled in and levelled?	As this is in an area adjoining the Pyrenees Highway, Council will need to engage with VicRoads on any works and therefore is unable to be actioned immediately. This request will be considered as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.
13	Boundary Road, Elmhurst, between the intersections with Glenpatrick Road and Pyrenees Highway also needs some maintenance work	Same as above, this is in an area adjoining the Pyrenees Highway, Council will need to engage with VicRoads on any works and therefore is unable to be actioned immediately. This request will be considered as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.
14	Dust suppression on Boundary Lane and Darbyshires Road was requested, the latter is used by a lot of farm machinery and trucks	Dust suppression methods have a short lifespan. Other options, such as OTTA seals, will be considered based on traffic count and other data. This request will be considered as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.
	Lake Bolac	
15	Query was received on the status of the Lake Bolac Walking Track project.	A significant part of this project is in areas that Council does not own or manage. The sections that are in areas that Council has oversight have been considered against the urgency of other capital works and asset maintenance projects that had been planned, and the funds available. We were unable to include this project for the 2026/27 financial year. This project is noted for consideration as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.

Moyston		
16	Request for bin surrounds at the Recreation Reserve	This request has had an initial investigation. There are a number of bins on site. The optimal location for a permanent bin surround structure needs to be determined. This will be investigated and considered as part of future capital works planning and budgeting
17	Queries regarding upgrades to the netball courts in Moyston and new change rooms	Funding from the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund was announced recently to upgrade the netball/tennis courts and begin planning for new changerooms close to the courts. Council's co-contribution towards these projects is included in the Draft Budget 2026/27.
Pomonal		
18	Request for walking/bike riding track from Pomonal Hall to Pomonal Estate	This is likely to require areas in the road reserve on Ararat-Halls Gap Road and Pomonal Road, which VicRoads is the road authority. This project is noted for future engagement with VicRoads and future capital works planning and budgeting.
19	There were queries regarding disposing of large volumes of green waste	These queries will be considered as part of a review of the rural skip bin service later this year.
20	Pomonal community requested to have their own rural skip bin.	This request will be considered as part of a review of the rural skip bin service later this year.
21	Query about walking tracks on the roadside on Robins Road.	This request has been considered against the urgency of other capital works and asset maintenance projects that had been planned, and the funds available. We were unable to include this project for the 2026/27 financial year. This project is noted for consideration as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.
Tatyoan		
22	In section 4.1.1(a), what is the 'revenue in lieu of rates'?	The line item 'Revenue in lieu of rates' captures revenue Council raises from properties under other legislation or via private agreement instead of general rates under the Local Government Act 1989 ¹ . For example, revenue under the Electricity Industry Act 2000 is calculated based on rates prescribed by the Victorian Government and the amount of energy generated, which can vary from year to year. An estimate of generation is used, which will be reconciled with actual generation that occurred that year in the calculation for the next period ^{2,3} .
23	In section 4.1.11 Other Expenses, how are the auditors' remuneration determined?	The External (Victorian Auditor-General) fees are set by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office under section 13 of the Audit Act (1994) to cover the reasonable costs and expenses that they incur. The internal budget covers independent members appointed to the Audit

¹ Local Government Better Practice Guide: Model Budget 2026-27, https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0014/223124/Model_Budget_2026-27_Better_Practice_Guide_FINAL.docx

² Payment in lieu of rates website, <https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/payment-in-lieu-of-rates-for-electricity-generators>

³ Payment in lieu of rates factsheet, https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/594616/PiLoR-fact-sheet.pdf

		and Risk Committee and the cost of undertaking the Strategic Internal Audit Program. The Committee members' remuneration is determined by Council at its discretion under section 53(6) and reflects the time commitment and responsibility involved in serving as a member of the Audit and Risk Committee.
	Willaura	
24	Area around the Willaura Cenotaph is likely to need some maintenance work in the future.	Area was tidied before ANZAC Day. Future works will be investigated and considered as part of future capital works planning and budgeting.
25	Footpath between the Willaura supermarket and Police Station needs attention	This footpath will be upgraded as part of the 2026/27 footpath program.
26	Request for a new ramp for wheelchair/ scooter access from the road to the footpath outside the Willaura bank area.	This will be incorporated into the above footpath upgrade project.

Letters Received

(See next pages for copies of letters received)

Response to Letter 1

Thank you for your letter regarding housing, Norval Dam and carparking in Barkly Street. While the Council has strongly supported innovative housing models to increase the number of housing in Ararat Rural City, renewal of aging housing stock is also an important part of meeting today's housing needs. It allows homes that may be poorly insulated or that lack accessible features to be replaced with energy efficient and better quality homes.

Regarding Norval Dam, this site owned by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and GWMWater have a standpipe at this location. Your suggestion to enlarge and/or deepen this dam will be passed on to these organisations. The feedback regarding the carparking on Barkly Street has been provided to the 'Barkly Street CBD Parking Changes' project.

Response to Letter 2

Thank you to the Pomonal Resilience Group for your letter and for your ongoing commitment to bushfire preparedness. Thank you also for encouraging the Pomonal community to consider the existing strategies available to them, such as the option for additional green kerbside bins. If the Pomonal Resilience Group can, please also let Pomonal residents know that they may be able to save on travel costs by using the Halls Gap Transfer Station at 4300 Ararat-Halls Gap Road, Halls Gap.

Council looks forward to making bags of compost available at the Pomonal Markets, subject to the availability of staff. We will also increase communication of Council's waste management initiatives and promote the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste in the municipality.

The items for Council to consider that are related to skips in Pomonal will be considered as part of a review of the rural skip bin service later this year. The weekly green waste collection from September to mid-December, free waste disposal at transfer stations in October to mid-December, the annual free transfer station vouchers and free e-waste suggestions are unable to be committed to in the coming 2026/27 financial year. Elements of these items will continue to be considered for supporting sustainable waste management.

Council's Recovery Officer will continue to work with the Pomonal community, including with activities such as the creation of lists of contacts that can assist with preparing for the bushfire season.

Letter 1

PO. Box 567
11.04.2026

COUNCILLORS,
ARARAT RURAL CITY COUNCIL,
VINCENT STREET,
ARARAT, 3871.

Dear COUNCILLORS,

RE:- COMMENTS ABOUT COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2026.

RE:- INITIATIVES FOR HOUSING GROWTH.

DURING THE LAST (5) FIVE YEARS I HAVE NOTICED HOW MANY OLD HOUSES ARE SOLD MOST OF WHICH ARE NOT FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE IN. MOST OF THESE HOUSES WHICH ARE SOLD ARE DEMOLISHED AND A NEW HOUSE BUILT. THIS MEANS ONE HOUSE DEMOLISHED ANOTHER BUILT IS NO GAIN IN HOUSING. IN DAWSON STREET BETWEEN BARKIE AND DUBY STREETS FOUR (4) HOUSES WHICH WERE LIVEABLE WERE DEMOLISHED AND ONLY ONE WAS REBUILT BY THE OWNER. THE OTHER (3) THREE WERE PURCHASED AND ANOTHER HOUSE BUILT. THIS TO ME MEANS (3) AWAY FROM THREE MEANS NO GAIN IN HOUSING.

RECENTLY I WENT FOR A DRIVE IN THE MOYSON, RHYMNEY AND NORVIAH AREAS. I WAS WAS AMazed HOW LOW IN WATER NORVIAH DAM IS. THIS DAM IS A GREAT SERVICE TO FARMERS WHOM RUN SHOOT OF WATER FOR STOCK. BECAUSE OF THE PRESENT STATE OF THE DAM THERE IS THE OPPORTUNITY OF ARARAT RURAL CITY COUNCIL TO ENLARGE, DEEPEN, REMOVE OLD TREES

2

AND MAKE A GREATER STORAGE FOR FARMERS TO USE
IN THE FUTURE.

RE:- CAR PARKING IN BARNBY STREET.

WHILST PEOPLE CAN PARK IN BARNBY STREET
WITH NO LIMIT ON HOW LONG THEY CAN PARK
THERE, THEN THERE WILL ONLY CONTINUALLY BE
CONGESTION.

THERE HAS TO BE SOME METHOD TO MAKE
PEOPLE MOVE, SUCH AS A POST AT EACH PARKING
^{BAY} WITH A CAMERA WHICH RECORDS NUMBER PLATE
AND TIME, WHICH DELIVERS A CARD SAYING A
SPECIFICATED TIME OTHERWISE OTHERWISE OVERSTAY A FINE
WILL APPLY.

Jones Lancelly
C. J. Lancelly
ALAN STODOLSKY

ARARAT RURAL CITY
RECEIVED

14 APR 2026

REFERRED TO.....

FILE NO.....

DOC ID NO.....

Ararat Rural City Council
engage@ararat.vic.gov.au

Pomonal Resilience Group
Subgroup of Pomonal Progress
Association (PPA)
C/- Post Office, Pomonal 3381

23/04/2026

Re: Submission for Ararat Rural City Council (ARCC) 2026/2027 budget

The Pomonal Resilience Group is a subgroup of Pomonal Progress Association, who work towards enhancing community wellbeing and resilience. A special team of Pomonal residents with a wide range of expertise, alongside the Pomonal Resilience Group, are currently working on the Pomonal Resilience & Wellbeing plan. Through this process and during the last couple of challenging years post-bushfires, community concerns have come to light.

One of our community's biggest priorities every year is **preparing our properties for the bushfire season and the 2024 bushfires proved that this is essential**. 2026/2027 predictions of unseasonably hot temperatures and low rainfall are a great concern - we need to work on our fuel reduction throughout the year and particularly during the high vegetation growth season. **Pomonal community need an annual green waste collection program to help us prepare for the bushfire season.**

The closure of the Pomonal Transfer Station has caused great concern for our community, particularly due to travel costs – the cost of fuel and the extra time it takes to get to the nearest transfer station at Ararat. **Pomonal residents are disadvantaged due to the distance from Pomonal to the nearest ARCC transfer station. This is impacting wellbeing and liveability.**

We support ARCC's compost program, where green waste is treated to make compost that can be purchased. We will continue to encourage our community to buy compost from ARCC. **The difficulty is getting locals to take their trailer loads of green waste to Ararat Transfer Station.** We want to support the Victorian Government/EPA sustainability standard of **reducing greenhouse gas emissions** by discouraging burn off or landfill of green waste.

The Pomonal community require assistance from ARCC in preparing for the bushfire season and in dealing with our waste in a sustainable manner throughout the year. We would like council to consider the following assistance in the 2026/2027 budget:

1. ARCC to sell bags of compost at Pomonal Markets to help promote the product and with a sign encouraging green waste disposal at the Ararat Transfer Station.
2. Weekly instead of fortnightly green waste bin kerbside pickup, September to mid-December.
3. Free green waste disposal at ARCC transfer stations October to mid-December.
4. Annual free transfer station vouchers (use any time within financial year) for property owners: 4 x green waste and 2 x general waste - trailer loads.
5. Green waste rubbish skips at Pomonal four times a year (quarterly).
6. General rubbish/hard garbage skips at Pomonal twice a year
7. Scrap metal skips at Pomonal twice a year and continue to accept scrap metal for free.
8. Make e-waste free to encourage people to recycle instead of putting in general rubbish bins.
9. Continue to minimise transfer station disposal prices to encourage recycling.
10. Expand/improve communication of ARCC's waste management initiatives and recommendations to our communities: increase advertising on social media, exposure at markets to show people the services you offer eg compost.
11. Assist Pomonal and other towns Progress Associations in creating a list of local bushfire hazard reduction/property maintenance contractors, with public liability insurance, who residents can pay, to assistance with cleaning up properties before bushfire season.

Pomonal Resilience Group encourage our Pomonal community to consider these strategies:

1. Fully utilise and correctly use, the existing kerbside waste collection four bin system, including green waste bin.
2. Reduce greenhouse emissions and support ARCC's compost program by getting green waste to Ararat Transfer Station, via any available means including green bins, trailers or any **extra services provided by ARCC in the next budget**.
3. If additional fortnightly green waste collection is required throughout the year, an additional kerbside service green bin can be ordered from ARCC for approximately \$147 – cheaper, safer and easier management than driving to the transfer station and paying \$15 plus fuel costs per car boot load.
4. Upcycle/re-purpose goods and participate in Pomonal Community Garage Sale trails to sell or give-away items to others for their use.
5. To comply with statewide legislation/council requirements and to help our CFA volunteers by reducing their callouts, regularly assess and manage own properties to reduce bushfire hazards eg clearing vegetation from fencelines. Seek advice from ARCC, PPA and contract experts when required to avoid dangers. Prepare your property so you do not receive compliance notices from ARCC (statewide legislation).

Thank you for considering this submission and please call or email me if you would like to discuss.

Yours sincerely



Sue Macaffer

suecolmacaffer@bigpond.com

On behalf of the Pomonal Resilience Group.

Phone 0407810389