



Bob: Amanda, over the last couple of weeks we've been talking about our city budget, considered priorities and the like; this week I'd like to digress a bit and talk about a couple of other things, one being local rates. I know you've been doing some work on rate comparisons, what can you tell us?

Amanda: Orange City Council will be considering its 2020-21 budget for approval at its Council meeting on Tuesday 23rd June. How do Orange's rates compare with other local government areas? Information on rates is available from the <https://yourcouncil.nsw.gov.au/compare-councils/>

website where there is a useful map that compares the average rates of councils: residential; business; farmland and mining rates. The latest figures available are for 2017/18. I have previously compared Orange and Bathurst rates.

Note 1 Income comparisons

The following compares the average rates of the two councils and the amount of revenue raised by each:

Rates	Orange		Bathurst	
	\$	\$000s	\$	\$'000s
Average Residential Rate	1,254.39		1,020.04	
Income from residential rates		22,935		18,058
Average Business Rate	6,336.15		3,923.89	
Income from business rates		7,782		5,537
Average Farmland Rate	1,824.32		1,389.66	
Income from Farmland Rates		684		2,069
Average Mining Rate	0		454.55	
Income from mining rates		0		10
Less net Pensioner Rebates		-553		-314
Special Rate - Town Improvement		671		0
Total Rates		31,519		25,360

Orange has a Special Town Improvement Rate that raised \$671,000 last year. It is not clear what area the Special Town Improvement Rate applies to, and what it pays for. I still have not been able to obtain a map showing where different business rates apply in Orange.

In summary Orange has high rates in comparison to Bathurst and is a relatively expensive place to live and to do business. Orange raises \$6 million more in rates and receives \$13

million more in User Charges and Fees than Bathurst. Rates notices are complicated documents and difficult to follow. I recently asked a friend from Bathurst to give me a copy of her rates notice and I have tried to interpret them comparing like with like in the comparison below:

Comparison of 2019/20 Rates Notices Bathurst and Orange

	Orange \$	Bathurst \$
Residential Rate*	621.21	996.01
Residential Base Rate	696.1	0
	1317.31	996.01
Domestic Waste Management		
Domestic Garbage Charge	245.25	
Domestic Recycling Charge	89.8	
Domestic Organic Charge	25	
Domestic Organics Equalisation Levy	23.3	
	383.35	413
Sewer Charge	522.59	614
Residential Stormwater Charge	25	0
Water Availability Charge**	67.18	175
Total Residential Rates	2315.43	2198.01

* House with rateable value of \$102,900

** There is also a water consumption charge. In Orange for 2020-21 the charge is \$2.50 per kl for the first 450 kls and then \$3.75 per kl after that.

So, in 2019/20 residential rates in Orange by \$ this comparison were 5% more expensive than in Bathurst.

One of the options being considered for Orange's budget for 2020-21 is to add a bulky waste levy charge to all residents of \$12.50p.a. This would increase the domestic waste management charge to Orange residents to \$395.85 based on the rates notice shown above.

Bob: I'm sure that will give readers plenty to think about. Anything else?

Amanda: I would welcome assistance from business owners so we can do a comparison of costs of doing business in Orange and Bathurst.

Bob: Over to you, business owners.

While on business matters, last week I contacted Council to ask what they were doing to assist small business owners. I asked because I know that Council had a person whose role was heavily involved in this area but was no longer there. I was told other Council staff had been filling in for this position on a caretaker basis. That concerned me because I consider it a crucial and much needed role, one that needs someone's full attention, and especially during times like we now find ourselves in.

I pushed the point a bit and was provided with the following list of activities. It's quite impressive and it's also obvious that our Council has been very active in a number of areas, and I mean very active. I let readers draw their own conclusions for now:

- Local purchasing policy and CEO encouragement to purchase local wherever possible.
- Covid-19 Rebound Group.
- Working with Orange 360 to enable the Newcrest Staycation project. While the request is exclusive of 360 it has seen a lot of behind the scenes preparation from us to enable the project to go ahead.
- Council is about to award a contract for master planning the Lake Canobolas Precinct (Lake, scout camp, mountain bike park) to develop facilities that are suitable for the local community as well as attracting visitors from other areas to the location.
- Scout Camp rebuild engaging local companies.
- Potential doubling of Event Sponsorship from

\$100,000 to \$200,000 to attract visitors to town to spend money in shops (subject to approval at the extraordinary Council meeting).

- Economic Development Community Committee has re-commenced meetings. This committee brings information to Council and takes information from the Council to their industry.
- A number of civil projects engaging both Council and contractors are going on around the city to allow cash to flow back into the shops.
- Facilitating the information flow from various sources on free business improvement training via webinars etc to the Orange Business Chamber and other peak organisations for distribution to their members.



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- Created and publicised a Business Directory on the Council website (<https://www.orange.nsw.gov.au/business-directory/>) that gives business a chance to readily amend their trading hours or situation without having to go to the expense of changing their own website. Helps local residents find businesses that are open. There are currently 331 listings on the site. There are also business resources at the bottom of the page where businesses can readily access information to help them through the Covid restrictions.

- Council has joined with other Central NSW Joint Organisation Councils to conduct a digital campaign titled "We want you back" to encourage people to travel to the region, stimulating the local spend.
- We are working with the RDA on a CBD mapping project that will help inform us of changes to business mix in the CBD over time.
- The Federal Government has given Council a grant of \$720,809 to bring forward projects to get cash circulating in the economy.
- Council are trying to bring forward as many projects as possible with local suppliers and contractors to get the money flowing in the economy.
- Working with a number of companies to relocate or establish here (details are commercial in confidence).
- Working with organisations to help them secure grants.
- Health and Innovation Masterplan to drive growth in the zone around the Bloomfield campus, now out for community comment.

The feedback we got from businesses and the Business Chamber was that they were busy doing what they had to do, and they would come to us if they needed help. On this basis we have supplied relevant info to the Business Chambers and peak organisations as well as fielded calls from a number of businesses seeking extra information and assistance.

We have to balance current needs of the economy with the medium to longer term needs of the economy and the city. While Covid has been devastating for many, some companies and industries have fared well and kept the economy alive. While we are trying to help those struggling businesses, we also need to keep an eye on the future through longer term projects such as Future City and the Lake Canobolas Precinct Master Plan.