

ABOUT SPECIAL RATE AND CHARGE SCHEMES



Every year, we undertake a series of major works projects to improve local streetscapes. Most projects come about due to requests from residents and property owners for new or improved roads, footpaths or drainage. However, sometimes works are required because the existing infrastructure no longer meets modern standards.

If nearby property owners benefit from the proposed works, we may declare a special rate or charge requiring those property owners to contribute to the cost of the work. However, this only happens after a thorough process of investigation and engagement with those likely to benefit.

This fact sheet provides general information about special rate and charge schemes. For detailed information about a scheme near your property, visit <https://yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au/SRC>

THE PROCESS

While all projects likely to involve a special rate and charge follow a similar process, bigger projects will generally involve more consultation with property owners. The basic steps are:

PROJECT STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
PROJECT INITIATION	In most cases, we'll receive requests from property owners or residents asking for new or upgraded infrastructure in their street, but sometimes we will initiate the project. In both cases, we will conduct a preliminary assessment.
PROJECT ASSESSMENT	If the project appears to have merit, we'll investigate costs, expected benefits to the community and nearby property owners, and options for staging the project.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	Once we have costed the proposal, we will seek initial feedback from property owners to determine if they support the scheme. If there is enough support, an 'intention to declare' a special charge report will be considered by Council. If Council supports the project, property owners are then notified in writing and have an opportunity to make a submission 'for' or 'against' the proposal. For larger projects, there may also be opportunities to attend community information or design feedback sessions before the final report is prepared.
FINAL REVIEW	Anyone who has made a submission will be invited to address a Submissions Review Panel.
FINAL DECISION	Following the Panel hearing, Council may choose to modify the proposed scheme in line with submissions received, proceed or not proceed with the scheme. If the scheme goes ahead, property owners will be advised of the estimated charges and their options if they wish to challenge the decision at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

LENGTH OF PROCESS

The process may take 1–2 years, depending on the level of community engagement required. Once the process is complete, the works can be scheduled.

WHY PROPERTY OWNERS HAVE TO PAY

We often get asked why these projects aren't covered by general rates and charges. The *Local Government Act 1989* states that works and services that are of special benefit to a group of property owners can be levied a special rate or charge. The concept of 'special benefit' is the key difference between projects funded through these kinds of arrangements and other works projects.

For new land developments, the cost of constructing sealed roads, kerb and channel, footpaths, drainage, street lighting and other capital infrastructure is apportioned across the lots by the developer. In this way the purchasers of the lots and subsequent owners have paid for the infrastructure benefits derived by their property. If a property is sold without specific infrastructure or services present, it's equitable the property owner contributes to the cost of providing a special benefit for their property.

We only have a set amount of money available to pay for, and upgrade, infrastructure every year. Without the ability to raise a special rate or charge, we would not be able to fund many new projects. Additionally, it would be unfair to expect all property owners to pay for projects where the community benefit is limited to a specific geographic area.

HOW IS THE SPECIAL RATE OR CHARGE DECIDED?

Costs to property owners are carefully worked out following Council Policy and legislation. The calculation takes into account the expected benefit of the works project to the broader community, as well as the anticipated special benefit to each property owner. The City funds the proportion of the project that is expected to benefit the broader community, with property owners paying the special benefit.

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

We understand that not all property owners will be able to pay their contribution up front. As such, we can arrange a payment schedule designed to suit individual circumstances. Contact us for more information about payment plans.

HOW COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INFLUENCES THE OUTCOMES

As part of the community engagement process, we ask for feedback and submissions about the proposed work. The views shared as part of this process are taken into account by the Submissions Review Panel.

To help us make the best possible decisions, we want to hear from you – regardless of whether you are 'for' or 'against' the scheme.

APPEALING A SPECIAL RATE OR CHARGE

Not everyone will agree with a decision to raise a special rate or charge to their property. If Council decides to proceed with the scheme, despite objections, property owners have the option of submitting an appeal to VCAT at their cost. The tribunal may choose to uphold or amend the scheme.

MORE INFORMATION

- For more information about the proposed special rate and charge scheme benefitting your property, please visit <https://yoursay.geelongaustralia.com.au/SRC>
- If you have further questions, email engineeringplans@geelongcity.vic.gov.au or contact us on **03 5272 5272**.
- If you need an interpreter, contact TIS National on 131 450 and ask them to call us during normal business hours.
- If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact the appropriate National Relay Service number and ask them to call us during normal business hours.