

Mayor Teresa Harding 2023-2024 Budget speech

22 June 2023

My fellow Councillors, CEO, residents and ratepayers of Ipswich, it is my honour to table the Ipswich City Council 2023-2024 Budget and Annual Plan.

This is the fourth budget being handed down by this council and it is perhaps one of the most important for our community.

We have come a long way over this term of council - through the Springfield Halloween Hailstorm in 2020 which inflicted more than \$1 billion of damage on our community.

A global pandemic and war in Ukraine - creating chaos in our economy, workforce and supply chains.

All followed by the devastation experienced across our city from high rainfall and extensive flooding in February and May last year.

In facing these extreme challenges, we also knew that we came into council 'behind the eight ball' in so many ways.

After years of inactivity from the previous councils on core issues such as waste management, growth and transport, and the derelict Ipswich Mall, we knew we had a lot of ground to cover.

We have faced these challenges head-on and today's Budget and Annual Plan is another big step from this council in simply getting on with the job of delivering for Ipswich.

We have kept the average general rate increase for residential properties well below inflation at 5.5 per cent - or an additional \$1.99 per week. Similarly, the standard commercial rate rise is 5 per cent.

Council has again, for the fifth year in a row on average, kept its rate rise below the rate of inflation while maintaining a sound financial position and our commitment to deliver for the community.

These are some of the toughest economic conditions Ipswich has experienced in recent memory, with inflation still sitting above 7 percent.

The cost of building roads and bridges, for example, has gone up by nearly 17 per cent in the past two years. For residents, we know that groceries, housing and essential services are more expensive than ever.

Therefore, council has given lengthy consideration to minimising the flow-on costs to our ratepayers – while still delivering value for money for Ipswich residents.

This year, council is overseeing a record \$692 million budget for our city. And proudly, recovery, roads and rubbish are at its heart.

Almost half of this – \$267 million – is committed to delivering next year’s capital works program, with more than \$500 million committed across the coming three-year program.

A significant component of this program is our city’s ongoing flood recovery, with council committing another \$75 million for our recovery program.

This includes \$25 million to rebuild and repair our open spaces and facilities, as well as \$38 million on repairing our flood-impacted sealed roads and drains.

As Ipswich grows, so does our local road network. Council has locked in more than \$49 million to maintain, upgrade and expand our local roads.

Another \$12 million is heading to our established suburbs as we continue our strong commitment to council’s three-year kerb and channel program.

In our booming suburbs, council’s biggest road projects – upgrades to Redbank Plains Road, Springfield Parkway and Springfield Greenbank Arterial – will collectively receive a boost of more than \$30 million to progress these vital works.

This council also promised our community we would take a strong stance on waste and repair the mistakes of the past – and this budget is again fulfilling this promise.

Council has set aside more than \$70 million to boost our waste and resource recovery services and infrastructure.

To meet the growing demand of our community, council will purchase 10 new and replacement waste collection vehicles at a cost of \$9 million - including \$3.3 million for a dedicated Food Organics and Garden Organics fleet.

This will see Ipswich leading the way in delivering a citywide FOGO service and shifting to an annual, on-demand bulky kerbside collection pick up.

Council's innovative approach will see significant volumes of waste diverted away from landfill and back into resource recovery streams.

Residents will also be relieved to hear that council has budgeted \$3.8 million for critical upgrades to the Rosewood and Riverview refuse and recycling centres, with a further \$1.2 million for planning and design of two new resource and recovery centres to better service the growing areas of our city.

This week, council had significant victories in its war on the negative impacts of waste.

On Monday, the Deputy Premier backed council's call to refuse a new Wanless landfill and, on Tuesday, the Planning and Environment Court supported council's decision to refuse two private landfill applications and appropriately condition the third.

This is further proof that our strong stance on waste is working – and our commitments in the coming financial year will only serve to reinforce this council's approach.

Council's commitment to turning the abandoned Ipswich Mall and cinema complex, bought by the previous council in 2009, into a thriving centre for the people of Ipswich is also in full swing, with \$53 million committed to the completion of the Venue building and the Commonwealth Hotel in the coming financial year.

The new Venue building, which will be completed in early 2024, will not just be home to six state-of-the-art HOYTS Cinemas but will also include 6,000 sqms of new restaurants and entertainment options for Ipswich residents as well as additional leasing revenue.

Council's determination to finally deliver a revitalised CBD for the people of Ipswich has brought close to 1 million residents and visitors back into the heart of our city in the past financial year.

And, our local businesses know it!

Off the back of council's investment, more than 50 new businesses have opened in Ipswich Central over the past two years – a far cry from the record high vacancy rates left by the previous council.

Environment and liveability remain a strong focus, with council this year creating its own dedicated Environment and Sustainability Department to deliver on our commitment to a clean, green Ipswich.

More than \$11 million will further our green initiatives in the coming year - including urban greening, waterway rehabilitation and our ongoing commitment to Enviroplan.

A further \$10 million will continue to improve our parks, sporting facilities and green spaces to ensure our city's liveability now and for years to come.

And finally, in our commitment to delivering value for money for Ipswich residents, council will continue to offer an incredible range of free and low costs activities and events for all.

Council maintains more than 550 parks and reserves covering 8,500 hectares, and more than 7,300 hectares of bushland.

We are home to more than 60 sport and recreation facilities catering to over 150 clubs and organisations.

The next financial year will see council continue to deliver dozens of free community events across the city, including our world-class major events such as Planes, Trains and Autos, SPARK Festival, Galvanised our festival of heritage and the incredibly popular Christmas In Ipswich.

We will run more than 1,600 Healthy Active adult classes - up from 1,200 last year - and more than 170 kids holiday programs - up from 140 last year.

And, there will be another 1,500 free programs delivered across our library network.

From our youngest residents taking part in Rhyme Time, our older kids playing soccer or learning to skate, to our adults and seniors taking part in yoga, running clubs and tai chi, there is something for everyone and on any budget.

Because, we know these are challenging times for all.

Balancing a council budget is no different to making ends meet at home – and we know it's tough.

The councillors in this room know what our city needs and what they would love to see for their communities – but we also know that these commitments are primarily paid for by the people of Ipswich.

I am proud of the Budget before us today – it finds the balance between delivering for our growing communities while living within our means.

It is responsible, it is resilient, and most importantly, is delivered with our residents and ratepayers at the forefront of our minds.

Thank you to the Deputy Mayor and my fellow councillors for their leadership and contributions to this Budget, as well as our CEO and her team for their hard work and efforts.

I now commend the Ipswich City Council 2023-2024 Budget and Annual Plan to the Chamber.