

Mayor Teresa Harding 2025-2026 Budget speech

Special Council Meeting | 9.00 am, 1 July 2025

Fellow Councillors, CEO, residents and ratepayers of Ipswich, today it is my honour to table the Ipswich City Council 2025-2026 Budget and Annual Plan.

Today we put forward a Budget that is focused on our future – our future as a proud city and the fastest growing council in Queensland.

Over the next 20 years, no council in Queensland will grow at a faster rate than Ipswich. Our population will double, making our city home to more than half a million residents.

And while this enormous growth presents significant economic opportunities, it also presents us with enormous challenges in delivering the services, facilities, and infrastructure our city needs to grow sustainably.

This is not a Budget filled with short-term fixes or flashy announcements – it is a Budget firmly focused on setting our city up for a positive and prosperous future.

It is a Budget that considers the significant challenge ahead of us and continues to take the steps we need to tackle what we know will be a billion-dollar infrastructure shortfall over the next decade.

It is a Budget focused on creating operational efficiencies and savings, allowing us to focus more funding on boosting essential services while once again delivering a surplus.

But of course, it has not been easy in the tough fiscal environment that residents, businesses and governments face today.

This Council has come together over the past 8 months, to carefully consider the Budget presented today.

And each and every Councillor has contributed, collaborated and advocated for the Budget before us today – I thank each of you for your contribution and commitment to this important task.

We have all worked together to find, what we believe, is the right balance between our focus on improving service delivery while also planning for our future.

Importantly, we have not done this through staffing and programs cuts like other councils – instead we remain focused on delivering for the Ipswich of today while planning for the Ipswich of tomorrow.

Today, we hand down a \$678 million Budget supported by a general rate rise of 4.98 per cent.

When we consider all rates and charges, including the Queensland Government's waste and emergency management levies, and inflation, the average increase in total rates and charges is \$3.78 per week, which equivalent would be the cost of a loaf of bread or less than a Jacaranda iced coffee.

We continue to keep our rate increase for commercial properties and residential rental properties in line with the general rate rise, as we know that our renters and businesses are also doing it tough.

We will continue to offer rebates for some of our most vulnerable residents, with a full pension concession of \$258 per year and part pension concession of \$127 per year.

And, all Ipswich households will be able to continue to take advantage of our early payment discount of \$132.

With these discounts, we believe Ipswich City Council continues to offer one of the lowest general rate and charges in South East Queensland, ensuring value for money for our residents.

For the first time in our city's history, we will introduce a dedicated Infrastructure Levy to help combat a forecast billion-dollar infrastructure funding gap over the coming decade.

More than 50 houses are built in Ipswich each week and we welcome about 22 new residents each day, but our infrastructure is not keeping pace with this rapid growth.

For many years, our city has been significantly underfunded by both the Federal and State governments, not even coming close to matching the trajectory of the growth they have asked our city to accommodate.

And while residents may think that we profit greatly from these new housing developments, this is simply not the case.

When developers create new housing, these homes require access to services such as power, water, sewerage and roads. This should be funded through an 'infrastructure charge' on the developer, but this amount is capped by the Queensland Government.

The costs for council to deliver these new services for our growing community have risen by around 44 per cent, while the Queensland Government's infrastructure charges cap have not.

Therefore, the costs to deliver these services are now greater than what council can recoup through infrastructure charges, leaving a \$1 billion gap for the ratepayers of Ipswich.

An infrastructure levy is the only way forward to help to prepare for the growth we know is coming.

The alternative – letting our city grind to a halt – is not an option.

Therefore, we do join five other SEQ councils that have already introduced infrastructure or transport levies to cover the shortfall funding to local government, ensuring their cities can continue to move forward.

Ninety-nine per cent of ratepayers will pay \$55 under the levy, with the remaining one per cent – those whose unimproved land values are greater than \$900,000 – will pay more based on the unimproved valuation of their property.

While this won't solve the significant infrastructure underspend in our city, it will go some way to ensure we can continue to deliver the roads, footpaths, parks and sporting facilities Ipswich needs to grow.

Together, this Council has made a deliberate choice to continue to deliver for our residents – instead of cutting and scrimping on the services and programs that make the Ipswich we love.

This includes an almost \$580 million capital works program across the next three years, funding some of the biggest road projects our city has ever seen.

\$7 million for Stage 2 of Springfield Parkway – part of \$42.3 million to be spent over the next five years.

\$2.8 million over the next three years to continue the upgrade of Redbank Plains Road, doubling its capacity to a four-lane urban road.

Another \$9 million for Stage 1 of the Ripley Road upgrade, as part of a \$113.8 million spend over the next four years.

As well as \$28.5 million over the next four years for the upgrade of Fischer Road, Ripley.

This Budget will also kickstart the upgrades of School Road, Redbank Plains; Jones Road, Bellbird Park; Mary Street, Blackstone; Toongarra Road, Leichhardt and Augusta Parkway and Sinnathamby Boulevard in Springfield Central.

Overall, we're investing \$54.7 million over the next year in maintaining, upgrading and expanding our road network to cater for our growing city.

We're delivering more of what you love with \$24 million dedicated to improving our sporting and community facilities across the city.

Including upgrades to Queens Park, Limestone Park, Redbank Plains Recreation Reserve, Tivoli Sporting Complex, and the much-loved Ipswich Nature Centre.

Work also continues on our \$40 million upgrade to North Ipswich Reserve, thanks to the support of the Australian and Queensland governments, alongside the \$10 million investment from council, which will deliver a new 2000-seat western grandstand and commence the staged approach for a national-standard sport and entertainment precinct anchored around a boutique rectangular stadium that will revolutionise access to sporting and entertainment content in Queensland's sporting heartland.

Planning will also begin on the establishment of three new community hubs in our fastest growing suburbs of Ripley, Springfield Central and Yamanto.

This is a Budget that is bringing spending back to our suburbs, with more than 80 percent of this financial year's capital works program to be spent outside Ipswich Central.

As always, environment and sustainability remains a priority for this Council as we continue with upgrades and expansions to our resource recovery infrastructure.

Our three-year capital works program will see upgrades continuing at our Riverview centre, while planning and design work commences for our new Southern and Western resource recovery centres.

We've set aside \$2.2 million over the next three years for climate resilience and renewable activities to keep Ipswich moving towards a net zero target. This includes the installation of additional solar systems and EV charging stations across the city.

In total, more than \$25 million will be invested in the coming year to support our commitment to a green and clean Ipswich.

We know times continue to be tough for Ipswich residents, businesses and charities, and this is always something that is top of mind for all us Councillors.

Our responsible approach to the Budget has allowed Council to continue to deliver for the community while still maintaining one of the lowest general rate and charges of all South East Queensland councils.

Despite this, we are still leading the region with the free and low-cost activities and programs we offer to Ipswich families each year.

In 2024, our Active and Healthy program featured 40 weekly activities, 18 nutrition workshops and 131 Active Kids school holiday sessions – with more than 30,000 residents taking part in the past year.

More than 160,000 residents and visitors enjoyed our unique Ipswich Nature Centre. 85,000 residents enjoyed one of our 2,000 free programs at our wonderful Ipswich Libraries.

And our Ipswich Festivals and Discover Ipswich program continues to attract almost 2 million people to our city each year, and inject \$400 million into our local economy.

I commend all Councillors for their contribution, commitment and courage in taking the tough steps needed to lay out a positive path for our city's future.

It has been a complex challenge, and one we know comes with great responsibility, accountability and trust. As a Council we've been able to come together and collectively deliver this Ipswich City Council 2025-2026 Budget and Annual Plan.

I would also like to thank the CEO, Sonia Cooper, and her team for their hard work and efforts in supporting the Budget we hand down today.

This was not a Budget about quick fixes or passing the buck - it is brave, financially sensible and future-focused. It is the Budget we need now, to ensure we can continue to grow and prosper into the future.

I now commend the Ipswich City Council 2025-2026 Budget and Annual Plan to the Chamber.

