

Mayor Teresa Harding 2024-2025 Budget speech

Council Special Meeting | 9.00 am, 27 June 2024

My fellow Councillors, CEO, residents and ratepayers of Ipswich, today it is my honour to table the Ipswich City Council 2024-2025 Budget and Annual Plan.

This is a Budget firmly focused on sustainability.

The financial sustainability of our Council as we face down an ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

As well as sustainable growth for our suburbs, as we prepare for our population to grow at a higher rate than any other council in Queensland in the coming decades.

Our population is set to more than double from our current 254,000 residents to 533,000 by 2046.

To achieve this, we need to cater for an additional 100,000 homes – this equates to 100 new homes being delivered in Ipswich each week.

With this comes the ever-increasing demand for roads, footpaths, sporting fields, playgrounds and parks to support the rapid growth of our city.

This is an incredible ask of council and the ratepayers of Ipswich, particularly during a cost-of-living crisis.

We are not a large council, we don't have the significant rates base of our larger neighbours such as Brisbane, Moreton Bay and Logan so we cannot take a backward step in preparing for our future.

Together, we have carefully considered the Budget presented today to ensure the financial sustainability of our council and the ongoing liveability of our city.

Importantly, this is not the Mayor's budget - this is a budget determined by all councillors.

Each and every councillor has collaborated, advocated on behalf of their divisions, and had their say in the Budget before us today – I thank you all for your contribution.

We have worked together to find a sensible balance between an ongoing cost-of-living crisis that shows little sign of easing and ensuring the sustainable growth of our suburbs.

Today, we hand down a \$663 million budget supported by a general rate rise of 5.45 percent – and an average increase to your residential rates and charges bill of \$2.58 per week per household.

We know times are tough for our most vulnerable residents, so this will be offset by a 5.45 percent increase in the pensioner concession for all eligible pensioners.

This will see the pensioner concession increased to \$258 for the full pension and \$127 for the part pension.

We also know that tenants don't directly pay rates, but often bear the brunt of rate rises through rent hikes.

Therefore, we have kept our rate increase the same for owner occupiers as for landlords to better protect our renters.

Despite having a local economy that has grown by 6.8 percent, construction costs that have risen by 27 percent, and Ipswich property valuations jumped last year by a staggering 33 percent, we worked hard to find the balance between the pressures of population growth and minimising the costs passed onto our ratepayers.

While a rate increase of 5.45 percent is higher than the current rate of CPI at 3.6 percent, this gap between those two figures equates to an extra 55 cents per week on your rates bill but will deliver an additional \$4 million to our city.

It is this small difference that has allowed our council to continue to deliver the services, programs and major projects that our residents expect – while maintaining a modest budget surplus.

To this end, this Budget commits more than \$200 million to our capital works program - which will ensure we continue to deliver the critical projects we need to move our city forward.

This includes more than \$62 million to maintain, upgrade and expand our growing road network.

This Council is delivering the largest road upgrades to our local network that this city has ever seen.

The duplication of the Springfield Parkway and Springfield Greenbank Arterial is well advanced, the expansion of Redbank Plains Road is on track, and Council is now proud to add the much-needed upgrades of Ripley and Fischer roads in Ripley, and the intersection of Mary and William streets, Blackstone, to this list.

Of course, it's not just the big projects that count - we know the smaller ones are just as important.

Therefore, Council will also commit a further \$16.3 million towards the rehabilitation of our sealed and gravel roads, close to \$1 million in new and improved footpaths, and a further \$2.6 million for our kerb and channel program across the suburbs of Ipswich.

Our asset rehabilitation continues in the wake of the devastating 2022 floods with a commitment of \$89 million this year - which includes \$11 million to support the continuation of the Voluntary Home Buy-Back Program through to 2026.

To date, we have seen 161 properties purchased with most already demolished or removed, and we look forward to working with the community on the potential for these new green spaces.

As our city grows, so does the demand for sporting fields, parks and community facilities, so this Budget will see \$12 million being invested to ensure our assets can keep pace with this demand.

That includes half a million dollars each for the upgrades of the Tivoli Sporting Complex and Redbank Plains Recreation Reserve this year – with an \$18 million proposed for investment over the next three years.

A number of attractions in our iconic Queens Park will receive more than \$4 million in upgrades as they continue to delight locals and attract visitors from across the south-east.

Plus, a new floodplain wetland will be established at the Pan Pacific Gardens, Redbank, a new ephemeral wetland at Bremervale Park, Raceview and another at Heit Family Park, Willowbank.

Resource recovery remains a key focus of this council as we commit almost \$20 million across our three-year capital works program to boost capacity in our waste infrastructure and reduce our dependency on landfill.

This includes \$1.3 million for significant upgrades to the Riverview Recycling and Refuse Centre, \$1 million to progress the new Southern Resource Recovery Centre and Animal Management Facility, and half a million dollars for the planning and design of the new Western Resource Recovery Centre.

We know times are tough for everyone, and councils are not immune to this. As the State and Federal governments squeeze their budgets, we are being asked to do more than ever before – but with much, much less.

From public transport and homelessness outreach to public health and community safety – and most recently, the treatment of fire ants – cost shifting onto Queensland councils has reached an all-time high.

For high growth councils, the biggest burden comes from the gap between what the State allows councils to charge developers for the infrastructure to service new homes, versus the true cost to deliver this service.

While the cost of delivering infrastructure has soared in recent years, infrastructure charges are capped by the State Government so councils cannot fully recoup these costs.

Councils face a looming \$2.2 billion blackhole for trunk infrastructure across Queensland, the equivalent of \$269 for every residential rates bill in the south-east including Ipswich.

Yet, we continue to buffer our communities from these costs while delivering more value for our residents than we ever have before – through more free and low-cost activities to help stretch family budgets further.

Over the past 12 months, more than 20,000 residents visited the Queens Park Environmental Education Centre, another 60,000 visited the Ipswich Art Gallery and Community Gallery, and more than 120,000 visitors enjoyed the Ipswich Nature Centre – the only one of its kind in South East Queensland.

Council delivers around 50 free or low-cost events each year – almost one a week – including our major events such as SPARK and Christmas in Ipswich which last year attracted more than 100,000 residents and visitors.

More than 20,000 residents have joined one of our 1,200 free or low-cost exercise and wellbeing sessions in the past year.

And, across our libraries, we had more 800,000 visits last year – with more than 85,000 residents participating in one of our 2,000 library programs.

In this school holiday break alone, Council is offering more than 100 free activities for families looking for a fun yet cost effective day out in Ipswich.

While the temptation always exists for councils to adopt lower and lower rate rises. We have seen in other councils where this has resulted in cuts to staff, cuts to major projects and cuts in service delivery – this is something our council simply cannot sustain.

Ipswich has the highest rate of growth over the next 20 years of any council in Queensland.

I commend our councillors for having the financial sensibility and long-term vision to ensure we are preparing for the future – and not passing the buck.

It has been a tough job, particularly for our new councillors, but we can truly say we have worked as a team to collectively deliver this Ipswich City Council 2024-25 Budget and Annual Plan.

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

This was a Budget we agreed would be about financial sustainability, sustainable growth and the long-term future of Ipswich and I believe we have achieved that today.

I now commend the Ipswich City Council 2024-2025 Budget and Annual Plan to the Chamber.

