

## **Mayor Teresa Harding Inaugural Budget Speech 30 June 2020**

Many of us started 2020 with so much promise and hope for the year ahead. It marked an important year for our city too; the promise of democracy being restored and the return of elected representatives back to *these* Council Chambers.

Reflecting back to just a short three months ago, as we were all getting ready to go to the polls, we were also being asked to stay at home. The novel coronavirus had started to spread in cities and communities across the globe and Australia were at risk of following a similar trajectory with the rapid spread of COVID-19 becoming a real threat.

After the election, a fresh start for Ipswich represented a new era of governance and a new approach to shaping the future of our city together.

But, we never imagined how a global pandemic might try its luck in shaping us first.

Ipswich however, has an unmatched resilience and we band together in times of need, just as we have done through floods and fires, we kept the spread of COVID-19 at bay across our towns and suburbs.

But we have still felt the pain of this pandemic.

Never could we have imagined just how quickly COVID-19 would shape our everyday lives or how tough times would be. As a newly elected Council, we were ready to serve and get out into our communities, but the stay at home order and social distancing made this impractical. Instead we've been focused on driving a robust budget deliberation process, reflective of a fresh start and to ensure your rates deliver value.

I am humbled to present your Council's first budget today.

Before I do so, I'd like to take a moment to share this reflection with you.

After being declared into office from my backyard, I can clearly remember the very first day I drove to Council to begin work as your 51<sup>st</sup> Mayor.

I was overcome with a rush of emotion that brought me to tears that morning, because as I was parking in the Council Roderick Street car park, I looked across the road at our local Centrelink office in East Street, I saw a long and steady line snaking around the block of everyday people, like you and me, who had lost their jobs in an instant with no idea how they would pay their rent or mortgage, afford to feed their family, keep the lights on, or cover medical and other expenses.

On one hand, I had been given the keys to the city, on the other, I was reminded daily that "the promise and hope of 2020" was a distant and forgotten memory for so many in our community as a result of COVID-19.

Our city is full of opportunity, 2020 should have been an exciting moment for all of us. But it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that the last few months have been tough for so many; and negligent for us to ignore that Australia has entered its first recession in 29 years.

As the weekly news cycle relays another business closure or job losses and economists predicting the worst is yet to come; today we are delivering a budget that is reflective of the uncertainty we all currently face.

There is no escaping that COVID-19 has hurt the bottom line of family budgets, businesses, community groups and governments. The private sector is really hurting, and all levels of government must share the pain.

But, we know we cannot afford to have more job losses in our city.

This budget is about sustaining jobs, and creating jobs locally.

I'm deeply, deeply sorry to have to ask you to share this burden.

Audit reports tabled in the Queensland Parliament show millions and millions and millions of dollars, over \$78 million, was squandered away by the previous dismissed Council.

I cannot begin to express the disgust and heartbreak I've felt as I've poured through the financial data of the controlled entities established and governed by the dismissed councillors.

When I think of every ratepayer who worked hard to balance their family budgets and pay their bills on time, some having to make the choice to go without one thing over another.

And then I think of those same dollars being haphazardly and irresponsibly spent by those with their hands in the public purse. We've all seen the headlines.

I cannot help but wonder what a different budget this could have been for the people of Ipswich.

And so, this is a budget for our times.

Through this budget, we're asking everyone to do their small bit, so collectively we can make a big difference to our city's future.

The average rate rise to homeowners is roughly equal to one take-away coffee a month.

Or 98 cents per week per household – that's an average of 2.75% increase per annum.

We acknowledge that every dollar counts right now, and we will also continue to support those in need for extra assistance with repayment plans and other special arrangements.

We will also continue to offer a pensioner concession of up to \$245 per year.

In today's budget, Council has resolved to run a deficit this year so that we can keep 1,300 people employed, maintain services and keep buying products and services to keep the local economy moving.

To ensure we buy more from local businesses, our new Buy Ipswich procurement policy will start making it easier for Council and local businesses to transact. We can all do our part to keep people working and stimulating economic activity.

Please buy local where possible, let's keep the doors of businesses open; especially those sectors which have been impacted by COVID-19 such as retail, hospitality and tourism.

Our commercial ratepayers will also be asked to share the burden through an average increase of 2.4% per annum, which affects around 2,000 properties overall. This decision has not been taken lightly as we are aware that the commercial sector is under varying amounts of pressures. But as I said before, we must all share the burden.

We will continue to provide relief to those most impacted through our expansive Covid-19 Relief and Recovery package launched in this budget today.

I am pleased to announce that we have allocated \$850,000 towards supporting businesses, community and sporting organisations.

We propose to continue to waive and refund some fees and charges through to the end of September for businesses and organisations facing extreme hardship at an estimated cost of \$250,000.

This package is an express demonstration of our moral obligation to ensure those most affected have access to the support they need in these unprecedented times.

In the past, Council has maintained operating surpluses and we are committed to returning to an operating surplus in future years. However, 2020-21 will be an exception to allow us to contribute internal funding for the region's huge capital works program.

Make no mistake. I am not a "show pony" mayor and this is not a council promising to pull a rabbit out of a black hat. This is a budget about things that matter.

Our capital works program is not based on the shiniest or sexy projects. So we won't have a reason to fly around the world spruiking about them.

This is a budget that focuses on investing in and building the assets and infrastructure that matter and make a real difference to the everyday lives of people who choose to live and work in this great city.

For the first time ever, this Council has developed a three year capital works budget – and the projects we'll deliver will be simultaneously good for the community and good for local jobs.

At a time where industry needs a boost to keep trades and services in business and people employed, we are investing \$232m in capital works and infrastructure. Our Buy Ipswich procurement policy will further enhance our ability to secure local jobs and keep the Ipswich economy ticking along.

As part of the capital works budget, we have committed \$26 million towards road maintenance and rehabilitation which will add to the amenity and liveability of the city.

This will be put towards filling over 5,000 potholes, repairing and resurfacing a network of over 1,500km of sealed roads and about 260km of gravel road maintenance, and making sure more than 26,000 streetlights are shining bright across the region.

We're delivering a budget based on prioritisation and real need.

We're also investing \$13m into strategic transport infrastructure to ease congestion and help people get to work, school or home safer and quicker. This includes major projects like:

- Duplication of Springfield Parkway and Springfield-Greenbank Arterial from Centenary Highway to Eden Station Drive;
- Complete construction of Marsden Parade Realignment to link with Gordon Street;
- Complete the detailed design of a major capacity and safety upgrade of Redbank Plains Road between Keidges Road and Kruger Parade;
- Construction of traffic signals and stormwater drainage upgrades at the Robertson Road and Grange Road intersection

Our capital works program will improve connectivity across our city and provide a boost to productivity.

The State and Federal Governments have also committed to providing a combined \$8.7 million in response to COVID-19. We will be taking every opportunity to advocate to both levels of government to ensure Ipswich starts to receive our fair share of funding. Our projected population growth is 4.6% and is the fastest rate in Queensland. While Queensland's population growth is 1.6% and Australia's is 1%.

The Federal and State Governments receive 97% of all taxes and local government only receives 3% to deliver on significant road maintenance, waste services and many community and sporting services.

The State and Federal Governments need to step up and fund the Ipswich Central to Springfield Central Public Transport Corridor, as well as a second bridge crossing for our CBD.

This will be aided by our renewed focus on transparency and accountability.

Your new Council can only be open, transparent and accountable about Council's financial position and our plan to stimulate the economy over the next year; and return the budget to surplus in the years to come.

While we're committed to keeping jobs safe, we must still be held to account and perform to the highest of standards on behalf of our community and find savings and efficiencies where possible.

Today I am announcing that Councillors and Council Executives have also committed to share the burden. We have unanimously agreed not to adopt a pay-rise this financial year, instead passing on the savings to deliver services to the community and relief to those in need.

As we look towards the second half of 2020, we have identified a range of opportunities to strengthen our city through the power of trust, transparency and productive partnerships.

Our strategic priorities for the next year reflect what the community has told us they want: to stimulate local businesses and job creation, preserving and protecting our environment, doing what is needed to make this a better-connected community, as well as ensuring our city is governed responsibly, ethically and with an openness and transparency not seen before.

I have said it before and I will continue to say it. Transparency, accountability and integrity are at the heart of good governance and must be at the centre of every action taken by this Council. That responsibility is not just beholden to us as your Council, but also to Council officers and I will be holding the organisation responsible for delivering on our commitments to you.

The imminent launch of the Transparency and Integrity Hub will ensure a higher level of accountability over financial performance, a crucial indicator in times where fiscal constraint must be exercised.

We will all have access to the details of this budget and our monthly performance against it so we can track how we're delivering. We won't always be perfect, but we will be honest.

As we traverse the coming year, which will no doubt continue to present some difficulties, I remain optimistic about our great city.

For a city that is home to the oldest and newest urban centres in Queensland, and nationally significant population growth rates; we are truly unique.

Today we collectively hand down a \$603.4 million budget for the City of Ipswich. While we can't deliver everything to everyone, this budget will deliver hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of road construction and sealing, footpaths and bikeways, kerb and channel; the upkeep of parks and reserves; and waste collection; all of which ensures the region moves along smoothly and efficiently week after week, month after month.

The 2020-21 Budget will ensure we recover economically from recent events and continue to deliver the best to our ratepayers and residents.

It meets the current *and* future needs of the city and sets the tone for the next four years; a considered and responsive budget and a Council willing to make difficult and responsible decisions for the overall and long-term public benefit.

Your new Council is pragmatic and realistic, and we remain optimistic and committed to ensuring this organisation is in a remarkably better position.

On behalf of all Councillors I would like to thank the community for supporting us on this journey. We look forward to collaborating and partnering with you to deliver on the activities outlined in our Operational Plan, and through the 2020-21 Budget.

Thank you.

Mayor Teresa Harding