

DEVELOP NEW LOCAL INITIATIVES AND PRIORITIES IN THE BUDGET

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The 2009-2010 Blacktown City Council budget, passed during the last council meeting, was launched last night and is now on exhibition for public comments.

"I encourage all the residents to take interest and make comments and suggestions." Liberal Councillor Jess Diaz said. He described it as a good, safe and "easy as it goes". However, it does not contain any new major initiatives to respond to the global economic crisis, particularly the rising unemployment at a national level of 6% and probably over 10% in the local level.

"While Blacktown Council prides itself of being in the black, its financial stability is secure. debt-free, there are many infrastructure projects waiting for something to happen and by omission allowed to deteriorate. The Works Improvement Program has a huge disparity in the amount budgeted and the needs of the City. Some of these needs have been waiting for over five years.

"What I would like to see is a restudy or re-examination of how the budget is restructured, some of the works improvement waiting for several years become more costly and not commensurate with the interest the Council earns from its investments. This is an area that I suggest needs a new direction and initiative," Councillor Diaz added.

Liberal Councillor George Bilic attacked the absence of contingency plans for diminishing revenues and the capping of contributions in the areas for development.

Independent Councillor Russ Dickens called for more efficient operation of council and cut expenses to meet the increasing costs in the work program.

"There are misplaced priorities when we spend \$20m for an AFL stadium and allowed our CBDs to deteriorate. The \$300,000 allocated for embellishment of Blacktown CBD is far too small to make an impact on its development.

"The modern trend in city living is 'Walkable Urbanism'. People want to live in a safe environment , walking distance to transport, where they can work and enjoy the theatres , the arts and the food. In its present state, this is not Blacktown CBD or even Mt. Druitt. Our City needs new local initiatives and new set of priorities," Councillor Diaz concluded.

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