

FUNDED: ■ Indoor aquatic centre ■ Levee stage 2 ■ Athel D'Ombra Drive upgrades

Council's infrastructure splash

NICK BIELBY

It will be a big 12 months for infrastructure in Maitland.

Maitland City Council has predicted a \$7000 surplus for the 2015-16 financial year in its draft delivery program and budget released this week.

Council's \$110 million financial plan, which is on public exhibition for the next month, earmarks several major projects that will be delivered by mid 2016.

The mayor of Maitland, Cr Peter Blackmore, said the plan included several high profile projects.

He said the delivery program contained projects that fit with the city's heritage characteristics but would provide contemporary facilities for Maitland residents.

"This is a program that not only meets the needs of the community, but one that is considered financially responsible while maintaining Maitland as a vibrant river city," Cr

Blackmore said.

A \$7 million indoor aquatic centre will be completed, stage two of The Levee, which includes the river link archway, will be built and major upgrades to Athel D'Ombra Drive will take place in the next 12 months.

Council will spend more than \$11 million on the Athel D'Ombra Drive area to turn the Maitland railway station car park into a transport interchange that features new bus parking spaces, sheltered bike parking and an

improved drop-off area.

More than \$8 million will be used to redevelop No.1 Sportsground in Maitland, \$10 million will be spent on road upgrades and \$9.2 million will go to the maintenance of community assets.

Upgrades to the Town Hall, expansion of the cycleway network and a review of library needs in central Maitland have also been earmarked.

Council will receive an extra \$3.93 million from rates in 2015-16 – the

second of a seven year annual rate rise.

General manager David Evans said next year's predicted surplus was modest. He said the delivery program and operational plan were council's most important strategic documents because they outlined a commitment to achieving community outcomes.

Council's draft plan will be on public exhibition until May 29.

A public information session will be held at the Town Hall at 5.30pm on May 20.



\$100,000 GIFT TO THE CITY: Departing head of Maitland Regional Art Gallery Joe Eisenberg who asked artists to donate a work to the city and (above) two of the works.

Picture by CATH BOWEN

Joe's parting gift: 'blown away' by artists' response

EMMA SWAIN

When Joe Eisenberg decided to hang up his white gloves and leave the walls of the Maitland Regional Art Gallery he imparted one rather large request.

That hundreds of Australian and international artists create and

donate a piece of work to the gallery inspired by the Tom Waits' song *The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me)*.

Obviously, in true Eisenberg fashion, the gallery director demanded the near impossible, but the artists responded and 165 obliged.

"I sent the artists the lyrics to this song and asked them to do me a

work on paper," Mr Eisenberg said. "I told them I was leaving and I wanted them to donate a piece of work to our collection."

Now hanging in the gallery – ahead of Saturday's opening of *Just Paper* – are works by Ewan McLeod, Robert Dickerson, Charles Blackman, Michael Bell, Reg

Mombassa and state government architect Peter Poulet.

"I'm absolutely blown away by the response to this. There are naked women and pianos... people really know me," Mr Eisenberg said.

"And these belong now to the collection and we've got easily \$100,000 worth here. It's my parting

gift to the city."

The festival of eight exhibitions also features a series of works by Maitland Mercury photographers Cath Bowen and Stuart Scott.

Just Paper opens on Saturday at 1.30pm with a free family event to follow on Sunday from 11am to 4pm.

Search for Caleb's tractor

JESSICA BROWN

Among the many family heirlooms stolen by the floodwater across the Hunter was Caleb Smith's toy tractor.

The Woodville teenager was given the John Deere peddle tractor by his late grandfather when he was just six years old.

But the storm of water picked it up from the family's Paterson Road property and sent it downstream.

It was last spotted on a fence at Taylors Bridge on Clarence Town Road on Sunday.

"We saw it on Sunday but it was too dangerous to go in and get it," Caleb's aunt Carmel Boland said.

"We went back to go but it was gone the next morning."

"It is very precious to him."

Ms Boland took the search for the missing tractor to Facebook and posted a



WANTED: The missing tractor.

photo online on Tuesday.

The story touched the hearts of many and has been shared more than 100 times on Facebook.

The tractor is green, yellow and black and plastered with Mercury stickers.

If you spot the tractor, call the Mercury office on 4931 0100.

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