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# Pool cash eaten up

## Edmonton kept waiting as funds sunk into Esplanade dining precinct

A CRITICAL infrastructure project has been sacrificed after millions of dollars were quietly diverted to an overhaul of the Cairns glitter strip.

Edmonton residents have been waiting years for Cairns Regional Council to build a new public pool after the southern growth suburb's former facility was shut in 2016.

Their patience almost paid off with the council winning a \$3m state government grant and earmarking another \$9m to build the new pool this financial year.

Exploratory drilling crews had assessed the ground at Sugarworld Adventure Park and plans were published for a 19.5m indoor heated pool, a 25m long lap pool with a small grandstand and land for a future 25m extension.

Then the guillotine silently fell and the shovel-ready project was pushed back at least a year to make up funds for the \$28m Esplanade dining precinct upgrade.

Acting CEO Christine Posgate confirmed the council had asked for the project's \$3m grant to be transferred to the Esplanade works.

"Council made an application for Building Our Regions funding for the Edmonton pool project in late 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic," she said.

"Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis has had severe and wide-ranging economic impacts and, as a result, a comprehensive review of council's capital works program was undertaken as part of the annual budgeting process for 2020-21.

"The priority and affordability of all projects was considered, with the \$12m Edmonton pool project deferred."

That meant the project "no longer met the eligibility requirements" for funding.

"In order to secure the \$3m in state funding, council requested that the Building Our Regions grant was transferred to a project that was still proceeding in the 2020-21 capital works program – in this case the Esplanade dining precinct, which was fast-tracked to ensure the city was well prepared for the expected return of tourists," Ms Posgate said.

There was no public announcement about the Edmonton pool being axed. The council has not mentioned the project in media correspondence since August 2019.

The works were among former division 2 councillor John Schilling's key platforms before he was beaten by Cr Rob Pyne at last year's election.

A council spokesman said the pool project had not been abandoned entirely.

However, the council will likely have to tighten its purse strings with warnings of rate rises and a \$6m cash deficit for the coming financial year.

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