

Rink 'not fit for use'

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A COUNCIL rescue package for the Bendigo Ice Skating Stadium was merely buying time for a doomed facility, a leading Bendigo ice sports figure has argued.

The City of Greater Bendigo maintains keeping the privately run Golden Square ice rink open with a \$100,000 loan it approved this week will provide a usable and increasingly rare facility for ice sports while bigger plans can be pursued.

Bendigo Ice Skating Stadium in Hattam Street is the only ice rink outside Melbourne in Victoria.

But former committee member and Australian Curling Association president John Anderson said he was disappointed the council had not seized the opportunity to move on the much needed new complex.

“The council would be better served if it focussed its efforts and developed the major facility,” he said.

“What this council needs to do is make the tough decision that would galvanise the issue and show our federal and state members, and close it (Hattam Street).

“We are pleased the rink will be able to be used, but it is not in a fit and proper state for ice sports.

“The ice is not of a standard where we are able to hold the National Championships this year.”

He said the major problem lay with the aging ice plant, which could cost more than a \$1 million to replace, and he doubted the present rink could remain financially viable.

“But it’s just not worth it; it is really best to scrap it and start again,” he said.

“You don’t pour money into a 15-year-old Holden and expect you can make a new Commodore.”

Mr Anderson said he was frustrated that an in-principle approval of a proposed new complex, based beside the Schweppes Centre, was passed by the council almost two years ago and still had not resulted in any action.

But City of Greater Bendigo Councillor Rod Fyffe, who also represents the council on the BISA committee, said a multi-million-dollar centre would not happen overnight and the loan would at least keep Hattam Street open for enthusiasts.

“It’s a good facility to keep open for those who have these skills to keep using, to practise and hopefully go onto represent Bendigo at national and international levels,” he said.

Cr Fyffe also rejected the suggestion that the rescue package was good money thrown after bad.

“And this is not a grant, it is a loan, and they have a good track record of repaying these loans.”

Cr Fyffe said he strongly supported the idea of the new complex to make Bendigo a centre for ice sports, but a multi-million-dollar project needed substantial and time consuming support from State and Federal governments, as well as private philanthropy.

“It is also one of a whole host of projects in high demand that the council has to consider and it has to go into the mix.” The former manager of the Bendigo Ice Skating Stadium, Ed Yarrington, said five years might be too long a gap to expect Hattam Street to fill.

“I think it’s fantastic that the council has given the centre the chance to keep operating,” he said.

“But it’s very tired and does need some serious upgrades, and I think it is not sustainable in the long run.”

He said he believed a definitive plan was needed in about 18 months, but he remained optimistic there was “light at the end of the tunnel” for ice sports in Bendigo.

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