

## **City bails out ice rink**

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BENDIGO council has moved to bail out Bendigo's struggling ice skating rink with a \$100,000 interest-free loan.

City of Greater Bendigo council will make the three-year loan to the privately owned skating rink in Golden Square on the condition it meets requirements to upgrade and maintain the facility, meet a financial plan, increases its level of volunteerism and continues with a council representation in its management team.

The rink closed in December and meetings were held last month to discuss the Bendigo Ice Skating Association's solvency.

But last night the City of Greater Bendigo council unanimously voted to support the rescue package, which will help to cover the \$82,000 debt the centre owes the landlord and the YMCA and \$9702 expected in upgrade costs to improve the rink's safety, performance and efficiency.

The news also comes after the not-for-profit i2i Teaming Institute submitted a proposal in January to council to incorporate Bendigo, the only Victorian rink outside Melbourne, in an improved nationwide ice sports network.

The Golden Square rink's new financial plan maintains the centre will increase revenue in the next financial year through increased marketing and patronage.

Cr Rod Fyffe, who is a BISA committee member, said the rink was a valuable community asset the council needed to keep alive while the BASA had met the council's stringent parameters.

"Unfortunately it has closed and this is a way of going forward that has been tried and proven in the past," Cr Fyffe said.

"We need to keep this open, it's a point of interest and differentiation for Bendigo, we have some very good skaters in Bendigo and opportunities for our children."

He said the BISA had succeeded in repaying all past loans to council.

Cr Julie Rivendell said the council's due diligence in investigating the rink's financial problems had been rigorous and the Discovery Centre showed how a valuable asset with support and revised management could turn itself around from financial stress within years.

"I've got great belief in a community's capacity to change its future," she said.

"The future of ice-skating and ice sports in general centres around the proposed new centre, but we know that complex may take some time. In the meantime this is our community's commitment to keeping the opportunities for these young people available," Cr Rivendell said.

Cr Kevin Gibbins said the council needed to make the commitment immediately to keep the trust of ice sports participants and ensure they understood that the council's commitment was long term.

He also called for a strategy to be developed to focus on having a new ice sports centre for Bendigo in four to five years.

Cr Greg Williams said the financial problems had been developing over successive councils and he lamented the lost opportunity of a \$4million project proposed in 2005 to incorporate a new ice-skating rink with a heated swimming pool at Kangaroo Flat.

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