The Municipal budget for Knysna for the 2016/17 financial year was tabled on May 31st by Executive Mayor Georlene Wolmarans as part of her final State of the Town & Budget address.

"The budget for the next financial year continues to reflect the strategies and priorities of the town, chief among them the need to address our water security issues," Wolmarans said in her initial remarks. “The next budget for Knysna Municipal amounts to approximately R154 million comprising of R175.5 million in capital expenditures and R78 million for operating expenses. This constitutes a considerable increase of 10% on the adjusted budget for 2015/2016 which amounted to a total of R78 million."

The capitalized funds in the capital budget have been allocated as follows: R152 million for housing and infrastructure, R23 million for upgrade to the parking scheme at Claridon Park, R10 million N2DGP grant for multi-purpose centres, R14 million for the water treatment plant, R23 million for a new cemetery and R5 million for upgrades to Groen Street. R490 300 has been allocated to each ward for their respective projects."

"The cost of increased service delivery to our ever-growing population is clearly leading to an increasing burden on our limited revenue budget," continued Wolmarans. "The tagline of the town means that the basic services we are constitutionally obliged to provide are on average cheaper than other municipalities. The knock-on effects of lower tariffs and our water scarcity are also substantial." Turning to the state of the town’s roads, Wolmarans said: "We are demonstrating a clear commitment to improve and maintain our roads infrastructure by appropriately doubling the expenditure on repairs and maintenance of our roads to R75 million in the next financial year."

"To feed the budget, the municipality depends on revenue income obtained from rates and the expenditure on repairs and maintenance of our roads, to R35 million in the next financial year."

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"Of main concern to the residents of Knysna are the changes in tariffs, rates and rebates which are as follows:"

- The electricity revenue tariff will increase by 7%, as approved by the National Energy Regulator.
- The first two consumption tiers for the water tariff will increase by 7% with tariffs in subsequent tiers rising as an consumption increases. The final water allocation to eligible residents will remain at R 3 000 per month, while for non-eligible residents the allocation will be reduced to R 3 300.
- The sewage tariff and refuse tariff will increase by 7% and 5% respectively. The refuse tariff will most likely be adjusted according when the new refuse facility opens for operation.
- Other similar tariffs will also increase by 8%, unless specifically shown to be different in the tariff book.

"In terms of domestic assessment rates, the increase in the rate will be 7% for domestic and non-domestic properties."

"The assessment rate roll for domestic owners will be reduced to 10%, with the Green-Rate reduced to 7% and the Rural Rates scrapped in its totality. The additional portion of domestic property value which is excluded will remain at R10 000.

"Knysna is predominately domestic in its tax base and the downturn in the national economy means development has virtually ceased, which has necessitated council to cut back on both fixed and operational costs.

"This is three options which we must weigh: firstly, aggressively grow our status as a preferred national and international bucket list destination taking advantage of the exchange rate, secondly, actively work inward investment in eco-friendly manufacturing to create more jobs and, thirdly, create more jobs by attracting more service-based companies to the area.

Wolmarans highlighted the fact that Knysna has obtained three consecutive “clean” audits by the Auditor General. The final budget documents are available on www.knysna.gov.za or copies can be obtained from the Municipal Offices in Queen Street.

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