



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: Immediate
DATE: Tuesday 13 August 2019

Knysna Municipality delivers on housing.

Although a function of National and Provincial Government, providing access to housing remains one of Knysna Municipality's main concerns. According to Executive Mayor Mark Willemse a total of 447 houses were built during the 2018/2019 financial year, while 200 serviced sites and 454 slabs were provided to qualifying residents.

2018/2019 FINANCIAL YEAR

"We also handed over 40 houses in Happy Valley and 11 title deeds in Karatara during this time," said Willemse. "These fantastic results are a testament to our commitment to providing housing to our residents, some of whom have been on waiting lists for many years." The houses, serviced sites and slabs were provided throughout Bloemfontein, Qolweni, Ethembeni, Flenters, Hlalani, Dam-se-bos, Concordia, Nekkies and Oupad.

Knysna Municipality was recognised at the prestigious Govan Mbeki Housing Awards again this year. It attained second place in the Best Upgrading of Informal Settlements Program category for its Witlokasie Project. "This is the seventh time that our commitment to providing housing has been recognised and lauded by this seminal awards program," said Willemse.

CURRENT PROJECTS

"Moving forward on these successes, our Directorate of Integrated Human Settlements is building on a three-year delivery plan," Willemse said. "Housing remains an ongoing concern and we have long-term strategies in place. This plan aims to deliver homes in the short-term."

This plan will see a further 100 serviced sites and another 460 houses constructed during the 2019/2020 financial year. "We will continue to work in the areas where we gained traction last year," he continued. "This financial year will also see homes built in Hornlee and Rheenendal, with serviced sites laid out in Sedgefield. Happy Valley and Witlokasie will also see benefits from this plan during this year."

According to the three-year delivery plan, the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 financial years will see a combined total of 714 serviced sites and 448 houses delivered throughout all these areas, as well as Rhobololo, Bongani, Joodsekamp, Khayaletu, Smutsville and Sizamile.

Already in development, a five to 10-year delivery plan will be responsive to the needs of communities and various stakeholders. It will be based on a typology-driven model that includes diverse housing products, like:

- Breaking New Ground (BNG);
- Contractor Built People's Housing Process (PHP);
- Interim Services Support Programme (ISSP); and
- Social Housing and Public Rental Opportunities.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING HOUSES?

Schedule 4 of the Constitution of South Africa states that housing is a function of National and Provincial Governments. “The reality is that providing housing is not the responsibility of Local Government,” Willemse explained. “We merely act as an agent on behalf of the state.”

“Housing is only one example of functions expected of municipalities, but which are not specified or allocated to them in the Constitution,” he continued. “We have become the implementing agency for the roll-out of housing projects and do so under continuous uncertainty regarding funding. This places even more stress on our already strained resources.”

“While providing housing might not be a key function of Local Government, the onus of providing services like water, electricity and roads remains with the municipality.”

FUNDING

Finance for housing development is provided by National Government Agencies like the Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA) and the National Housing Finance Council (NHFC) through Provincial Government. Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of housing projects but, because of the resources required, this is referred to as an unfunded mandate. These are mandates where certain functions are performed without a clear source of funds.

“The Western Cape Government’s Department of Human Settlements (WCDOHS) and Knysna Municipality itself will be funding the projects contained in the three-year delivery plan,” Willemse explained. “We meet with the WCDOHS on an ongoing basis to evaluate progress and funding required. Funding is rolled over, expunged or transferred depended on the progress made per project.”

The three-year delivery plan envisages a total spend of R 164,730 million, with R 69,4 million being spent during 2019/2020.

“We are also examining ways to encourage private and public funding through investment in our housing programmes,” he continued. “Our Strategic Integrated Human Settlement Plan aims to present potential investors with a number of options and a variety of typologies. Still in its draft phase, the final plan suggests different models on which to base housing delivery programs and will be pivotal in addressing long-term socio-economic integration.”

CHALLENGES AND A CALL ON RESIDENTS

“Our biggest challenge is the frustration of residents who are still waiting for houses, or those who feel that less deserving candidates received access to housing before they did,” he said. “Providing access to adequate housing to our residents is a Constitutional right according to Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa, but I can only repeat that this is a function of National and Provincial Government – not of Knysna Municipality.”

“As such, I desperately call on residents not to vent their anger regarding this issue in such a way that it infringes on the rights of others or puts others and their property in danger. I know that you are frustrated and angry, but this is a function of National and Provincial Government. Demonstrations and protests at a local level only lead to disruption, vandalism and violence. It cannot lead to more houses.”

“But providing housing faces a number of challenges on a national scale,” Willemse went on to say. “I think it is fair to say that national, provincial and local governments have all taken great steps in addressing this function, regardless of the inherent challenges.”

According to Willemse, historic ideologies, procedures and programs are a major factor. “This is true across the country, but especially so in Knysna, where we have the third largest

concentration of informal settlements. There are, of course, other factors that bring their own hampering effects.”

Two big problems Knysna faces when it comes to providing housing are the high level of mobility towards Knysna and the town’s typography. “The Western Cape is seeing an influx of daily new arrivals,” Willemse explained. “In Knysna our already extensive waiting list for housing is growing by a staggering 3% per year. Couple that with the steep hills and valleys of Greater Knysna and the issue of uncertain funding, and the reality of the situation soon becomes clear.”

“Yet, we remain undaunted! Our previous success and our commitment to our residents motivate us to deliver on our promises - despite the challenges we might face,” Willemse concluded. “Making good on the Constitution’s promise of access to adequate housing is a long-term, ongoing process. And our day-to-day victories in this regard ensure that we can all enjoy living in an inspired, innovative and inclusive Knysna.”

ENDS

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