



MEDIA RELEASE

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The role of Municipalities in the delivery of housing.

Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa says that "*everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing*". In this regard the "*State must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realization of this right.*" Thus the Constitution creates obligations for government to take all reasonable actions to ensure that all its people have the opportunity to acquire a home.

Since 1994, the government has taken several steps to address its responsibilities towards housing. These measures include the Housing Act of 1997, which sets out Government's visions and key principles underlying the provision of housing; the Local Government Municipal Systems Act of 2000, which puts in place mechanisms and principles to ensure all of government to move towards social and economic upliftment and to ensure access to essential services; and further plans such as the National and Provincial Spatial Development Frameworks and the National Development Plan.

Schedule 4 of our Constitution stipulates what functions each sphere of government is responsible for. It states that housing is a function of our National and Provincial Governments. But in reality, although the finance for housing development is provided by National Government, through Provincial Government, the management of the implementation of housing projects has become the responsibility of Municipalities. Because of the resources required to take on this responsibility, this is often referred to as an under-funded or unfunded mandate, which are mandates or responsibilities where a sphere of government performs certain functions or activities for which they do not have any clear source of funds. In particular, Municipalities are expected to carry out functions that are not specified or not allocated in the Constitution, such as housing, libraries and museums.

Municipalities have thus become the implementing agency for the roll-out of housing projects, and the housing program is an under-funded mandate which creates additional burdens and challenges on the strained resources of a Municipality.

The question then arises as to what should Municipalities be doing in respect of housing?

Firstly, Municipalities are responsible for setting housing delivery goals. To set feasible and reasonable targets, municipalities need to have a good overview of the housing demand. This does not only include the number of houses that are needed, but also the types of houses, their locations etc. To get a good overview, the municipality needs to collect information that can assist them in providing the kind of housing that the people need.

Secondly, municipalities must coordinate the delivery of housing to ensure that the housing projects are delivered at the right time, the agreed price and to the specified quality.

Besides the external co-operation between the spheres of government, the Municipality must have a well-structured and effective internal organization in order to have an effective municipal housing service delivery. After all, the delivery of human settlements includes much more than just houses. It is the municipality's task to provide the necessary services. Without water, electricity and roads, a house is not finished. The implementation of these tasks cannot be done by one department or section alone, but needs the cooperation of all departments that are involved in the delivery of human settlements.

Thirdly, Municipalities are responsible for the planning and structuring of their towns. In particular local government should be focusing on how to restructure urban areas to undo the legacy of town planning under the apartheid regime and to create a socially, racially and economically integrated society. In Knysna the biggest obstacle to this is the lack of sufficient well-located land. Although Knysna is surrounded by undeveloped land, much of this land is undevelopable or unserviceable by virtue of it being in a flood plain; on very steep land; or in sensitive environmental areas. Also, in order to ensure the protection of the visual quality of the area as a whole and in order to avoid inefficiencies in service delivery and high costs of transport for future residents, it is important not to allow the towns to sprawl outwards into the rural areas.

Municipalities are responsible for ensuring sound public participation for all forms of housing development. Such public involvement begins with the development of a Housing Sector Plan which can meet the needs of all parties. In order to reach all involved interest groups, it is often necessary to use a variety of methods for communication and consultation. An example of such a plan is part of the Integrated Strategic Development Framework.

It must be borne in mind though, that *whilst the* municipality must take into account the interest of the community, it must not forget the overall aims and needs of the broader municipality. It is crucial that the municipality balances the need of the affected community, or housing clients, with the broader development responsibilities of the municipality.

Knysna Municipality is in the fortunate position of having established a very good reputation for the successful delivery of housing. In closing, irrespective of whether housing is legally and technically a Municipal function, it is important that the Constitutional rights of all our residents to adequate housing are upheld.

ENDS

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