FROM THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR’S DESK

In the previous edition I mentioned that my office would be spearheading the design of a strategy aimed at facilitating the economic recovery of Greater Knysna post COVID-19. Thank you to everyone who has contacted my office to contribute towards this goal. Your suggestions and innovative ideas are sure to assist in implementing this strategic reboot. It is encouraging to realise how many of our residents are actively concerned with the wellbeing of our town as a whole and, in particular, the renewal of our economy.

More and more restrictions are being relaxed as we move into the new, post COVID-19 normal, and whilst we must all still take responsibility for staying safe and keeping others safe, in order to revitalise our economy we must all start getting back to business. Let us #StaySafeMoveForward.

It is common knowledge that the Coronavirus has all but decimated the tourism industry – an industry integral to our local economy. With interprovincial travel allowing domestic travellers to cross internal borders, it is only a matter of time before international travel will be allowed to resume. I laud all members of our tourism industry for staying the course and encourage you to keep on keeping on. As a group, you are a major employer of residents throughout Greater Knysna and, while these are probably some of the most difficult times you have ever had to face, the tide will turn. It is coincidente that September is Tourism Month, but I urge all residents to support our tourism-related businesses as much as they can, every month of the year. We need them to not only survive, but to operate on a higher level than ever before.

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused devastation across the world. It has resulted in loss of life and economic hardship, and has changed our habits and the way we live. In light of this outbreak, the theme for the 2020 World Environmental Health Day on 26 September is: “Environmental health:- a key public health intervention in disease pandemic prevention”. This theme addresses the physical, chemical and biological factors that are external to a person, as well as the related factors impacting behaviours. It includes the assessment and control of the environmental factors that can potentially affect our health. It is targeted at preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments. These are all important considerations for the times that we are living in.

We have experienced the impact our environment can have on our day-to-day lives. While we are thankful for the rainfall recently received, it is a sad fact that the resultant flooding destroyed or damaged many homes in some of our poorest communities. It is, however, heart-warming to once again witness the people of Greater Knysna’s willingness and dedication to helping where and when help is needed. Thank you.

We are headed towards October, which is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Breast cancer is the second most prevalent cancer among black and coloured women, and the most prevalent cancer among Asian and white women. While breast cancer can have devastating effects – including death – early detection and effective treatment can lead to a positive prognosis with approximately 90% of patients surviving the disease if it is detected in its early stages. Please examine yourself regularly and seek medical advice immediately if you feel any irregularities. Your doctor, clinic nurse or even sites on the internet will be able to demonstrate the self-examination procedures to you.

Spring and Summer are on the horizon. I think it serves well as a reminder to us all that even the darkest nights must surrender to the dawn at some stage.

‘til next month,

ELRICK VAN ASWEGEN, EXECUTIVE MAYOR

SUBMIT YOUR ELECTRICITY & WATER METER READING ONLINE

Following initial Covid-19 related regulations and restrictions, meter readings have resumed. Customers with conventional electricity and water meters are, however, encouraged to submit their meter readings electronically by the 5th of each month. Please email your readings to meterreadings@knysna.gov.za or via our mobile app.

Please include your Knysna Municipal account number and date of reading.

If, for some reason, meter readings could not be taken and you have not made an electronic meter reading submission, rates will be calculated according to estimations.

Enquiries can be directed to rpienaar@knysna.gov.za or evandenberg@knysna.gov.za
CONVERSION TO PREPAID ELECTRICITY METERS

All conventional electricity meters will be replaced with prepaid meters as per the Municipality’s Credit Control Policy.

A local contractor has been appointed to perform the conversions and installations will take place between 08h30 to 16h00 from Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays. For queries, or to schedule a suitable time, please contact 044 302 6456.

You will be provided with 5 free units/kWh of electricity on the day of installation. Thereafter you will be able to purchase tokens for electricity from any vending platform e.g. the Municipal Customer Care Centre, Pick n Pay, Shoprite, Checkers, petrol stations, Kwik Spar, spaza shops etc., via your cell phone, your mobile banking app or other online service providers. Remember that you will need your electricity meter number (found on the back of your unit), to purchase tokens.

Residents with solar-power systems are kindly requested to contact the Manager: Electrical & Mechanical Services, Mr Jacques Lawrence at jlawrence@knysna.gov.za or tel no 044 302 6409.

WATER RESTRICTIONS

Winter Level 1 water restrictions now apply allowing:

- Watering of gardens for one hour, 3 days a week;
- The use of hosepipes for gardening and other purposes, and the use of irrigation systems from 17h00 to 18h00 during June to November as follows:
  > Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays – residents with even street numbers;
  > Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays – residents with odd street numbers; and
- Residents must still obtain permission from the Director: Technical Services before filling swimming pools and undertaking maintenance.

Please report water leaks and water abuse to 044 302 6331 (o/h) or 060 998 7000.

‘JOURNAL’ ENTRY ON YOUR MUNICIPAL ACCOUNT?

Our Revenue Enhancement Strategy (RES) was first rolled out in 2017. Improved revenue enhancement allows us to continue delivering services, maintain infrastructure and generally serve our residents. The RES allows us to optimise the ways in which we collect revenue and ultimately fulfil our mandate as the local authority. There are various aspects to this strategy and its implementation is showing positive results.

One of the RES actions is to pay careful attention to our billing system and procedure, and to ensure that customers are correctly charged for the services delivered to them. In doing so, we have unfortunately confirmed that a number of customers had not been invoiced for the basic water availability charge over a number of months.

This anomaly was corrected in the last statement cycle and residents may have noticed an additional entry on their latest statements. This “journal” entry represents the basic monthly water availability charge that had not been levied previously. We regret not communicating the implementation of this charge to our customers earlier and offer our most sincere apologies.

A detailed report will be presented to Council at its next meeting so that a resolution on how to proceed in this regard may be reached. We will keep affected parties notified of any developments in this matter.

Residents are urged to settle their accounts in full to avoid potential interest or late fees. Please email any queries regarding your account to accounts@knysna.gov.za or call 044 302 6413 or 6468.
The Knysna Municipal Integrated Human Settlement (IHS) Policy Framework was approved during the Integrated Human Settlements Committee meeting of 10 September, and will now be workshopped internally with the Directorate and then extended to the entire Council operational working environment to ensure collective ownership of the framework.

Knysna Acting Municipal Manager, Dr Louis Scheepers, said that the Knysna Municipality had recently committed itself to being part of the South African low income housing delivery chain landscape. Our all-embracing philosophy calls for ‘Re-Imaging a New Knysna’, which has been adopted as a strategic guideline to all departments that have led this.

“Given the high demand for housing and a growing database of 9 588 households, which increases by 3 per cent per annum, the high incidence of illegal occupations, which have resulted in the Municipality having a more reactive approach to its affordable housing programme, a more enhanced strategic value proposition by the Knysna Municipality has been called for. This will include building an enabling environment to enhance the capacities of our small contractors to provide the relevant support in realizing the targeted quantities of the typology products/units;” the AMM said.

According to Dr Scheepers, the strategic intention remains focused on the need for genuine commitment towards long term socio-economic integration through collaborative efforts and partnerships with development partners who share the same strategic vision. “Relative to its own housing challenges, the Municipality is similar to other regional public contexts in SA, and therefore sits with the same historical imperfections of spatial planning settlement distortions, characterized by race based and ad hoc housing programmes/projects. These are not driven by structured town planning management strategies and are always characterized by reactive modes of delivery that do not have a major impact on turning around situations of squalor and poverty in a meaningful and suitable manner.”

According to Dr Scheepers, Knysna Municipality’s current housing environment is characterized as the beginning of a more stable environment, notwithstanding the significant challenges that it still faces. “It is hoped that the approval of this draft policy will enhance the required stabilization as well as development of much needed staff capacity through appropriate policy framework and standard common operational procedures;” he said.

He explained that municipal housing projects are wholly funded through the Human Settlements’ Development Grant administered by the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements (WCDoHS). “Knysna Municipality acts as a developer/agent of WCDoHS for the implementation of the Housing Programmes. There is, however, a need for additional funding due to the Corona virus pandemic, which resulted in the national lockdown, and additional requirements for Health and Safety. We have been in constant communication with the WCDoHs with regard to ensuring that additional funds, over and above the budgeted amount, are made available to cover Health and Safety requirements as well as standing time and extension of time claims, which are applicable in terms of the General Conditions of Contract.”

Knysna Municipality developed its IHS guidelines for its Strategic Housing Policy using established and comparative national and international best practice within the current affordable housing industry. These guidelines aim to minimize the associated risks and inability to effectively and efficiently sustain the Municipality’s desired housing programme commitments. “It is important to note that these guidelines were compiled in alignment with housing legislative and regulatory guidelines,” said Dr Scheepers. “More importantly, these guidelines will periodically be reviewed and aligned where necessary, to ensure they continue to remain relevant, legal and applicable from both administrative and legislative perspectives,” added the Acting Municipal Manager.

Now that the draft policy has been adopted, the Framework will be rewritten and documented as a common document. This document will then be used internally and externally to outline and administer the Knysna Municipal housing programme. It will also be used operationally within and across the departments, as well as in the Municipality’s daily interaction with their customer base and external stakeholders.

“This policy will also be linked to efforts to realign the Department’s organisational structure and capacity to be reflective of the ability to successfully undertake a significant housing delivery process and will be reviewed periodically for further refinement and adaptability to changing circumstances. This will also extend to other key requirements such as budget formulation, alignment of required systems and resources to ensure necessary sustainability of our development programme,” concluded Dr Scheepers.
CELEBRATING THE MUNICIPALITY'S OWN WOMEN OF WORTH

As part of our Women's Month celebrations, we showcase two more female employees in this issue. Both are passionate about their work and highly committed to creating an inclusive, innovative and inspired Greater Knysna.

Nolufefe Mbalo:

Nolufefe Mbalo joined Knysna Municipality as a process controller at the water purification plant in 2003. The first female to join the department, Nolufefe has opened the doors to the many who have followed her. She is passionate about transferring and sharing her skills with other women in the department.

Nolufefe is an ardent advocate for women and children's rights. She is fearless and unflinching, a voice to the voiceless, a prayer warrior and a leader who has become a part of her community's DNA. She is a member of the Nomonde Molosi soup kitchen in Ward 8 and a Women's League leader. As a single mother of four, she is also a school governing body member at both Concordia High and Thembelitsha Primary schools.

Giving advice to herself, she says: “Your dreams are valid, you deserve the world, now go fetch it.” She gains strength through prayer and song in moments of weakness.

Lazola Ngqumshe:

The lady behind our clean water supply, Lazola Ngqumshe heads up our water and sewer reticulation unit.

Lazola's love for mathematics and physical science in secondary school led to a career in civil engineering. “My mother is a civil engineer. Growing up and looking at what her job entailed inspired me to follow the same path,” she said.

Lazola enjoys being constantly challenged in her field of work. “There is no one-size-fits-all approach to resolving any issues in this field. You have to think on your feet. Knowing that my duty is to ensure that a basic human right is catered for on a daily basis gives me an understanding of the responsibility I have towards the community and this institution,” she said.

On the topic of gender-based violence, Lazola urged all women within the Municipality, Greater Knysna and South Africa as a whole to walk away from toxic situations that could cost them their lives. “As much as I consider Knysna to be one of the safest towns, I still exercise extra caution when I am returning home. I constantly scan my surroundings just to ensure that I am safe. Being a mother of two young girls makes things even worse for me. I am constantly filled with scepticism and worried about their safety,” she said.

She takes pride in doing her work and would encourage all other women in and outside the organisation to “give it a shot” and tap into a male-dominated space. This does not only prove the strength of a woman, but repositions them in, and addresses the predominantly patriarchal attitude of our society.

“Do not be afraid to move and grow. You are not a tree; you are not rooted to one place. Do away with limiting thoughts. If it scares you, just go for it. The higher the risk, the better the reward.”