

Budget questions answered

Councillors and officials presented the city's draft budget for 2007/08 to the public at meetings over the weekend. A team of **eZasegagasini Metro Reporters** was there

THE municipality held a series of regional budget hearings across eThekweni over the past weekend.

These were to give as many people as possible the opportunity to have their say on the city's R17-billion draft budget for 2007/08.

The law requires municipalities to encourage community participation in the drafting of their budgets, and this year efforts to make the process more democratic involved setting up meetings at 14 venues, for residents of eThekweni's 100 wards.

However, some of the meetings were poorly attended and had to be called off because so few residents turned up. And at a number of meetings councillors arrived late or failed to attend at all.

Earlier, public hearings were held at the City Hall, from 10-12 April, with presentations on the city's different areas of business, such as Health and Safety and Procurement and Infrastructure.

City officials explained to communities how

eThekweni's income – derived mostly from grants from national government, rates, and service charges – would be used.

As part of the city's integrated development plan, the budget was drafted to provide funding for a number of strategic priorities.

These include tackling high levels of poverty, crime, and inadequate or non-existing services in parts of the metro.

Concerns expressed by residents at many of the regional meetings last week touched on some of these priorities.

Electricity and water levies are due to rise by 7.5% and 15%, and a rates increase of 9.9% has been budgeted for.

This drew considerable ire at some meetings, however, officials pointed out that the city's basic social package had been beefed up under the budget. This provides a certain amount of free electricity and water and rates exemptions for poorer households on a sliding scale.

The final budget is expected to be approved by the council at the end of this month.

Hillcrest: ire at rates

SOHANA SINGH

ALTHOUGH very few members of the Greater Hillcrest community attended the draft budget hearings last Saturday, those who did were vociferous in expressing their concerns, especially over the increase in tariffs and rates for the coming year.

The consensus was that these increases were way beyond the inflation rate, and it was unfair to expect ratepayers to make up for backlogs in service delivery.

They expressed their dissatisfaction over the budget allocated to Safety

and Security over the next few years.

Water and sanitation projects took the lion's share of the budget for the Greater Hillcrest zone, comprising wards 2, 8, 9, and 10.

Roads projects came in a close second with R10.5-million allocated to the upgrade of Old Main road.

Sandile Maphumulo, Head: Electricity - who presented the draft budget and responded to questions, with the help of the local councillors - encouraged communities to pay for services to relieve the pressure on the city's budget.

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CURIOS: After the draft budget presentation at St Ramalinga Hall, Isipingo, residents asked officials to clarify technical points and wanted to know how the budget would benefit them. Picture: SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

Umbumbulu residents told World Cup spending won't slow delivery

SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

AN ESTIMATED R57-million of the city's R4.1 billion capital budget for the 2007/2008 financial year was to be shared among five southern wards.

This emerged at the Saturday meeting for residents of Umbumbulu and surrounding areas

Although the city plans to spend hundreds of millions of rands on World Cup, communities were assured that service delivery and reducing backlogs remained at the top of the agenda.

About R250-million has been earmarked in the 2007/08 financial year for

work on the stadium precinct and for transport and city beautification linked to the soccer tournament.

In addition, the city will be contributing R500-million over three years to the building of the R2.6-billion stadium itself.

In greater Umbumbulu, projects such as the rehabilitation of community parks, refuse removal and electricity upgrades will get a share of the R57-million, but the bulk of the money would be used to upgrade roads, and for economic development initiatives, housing and water.

The city's Head of Expenditure, Chris

Nagooroo, who led the draft budget presentations at the St Ramalinga Hall in Isipingo, said eThekweni remained focused on improving infrastructure and service delivery and regenerating urban areas.

Job creation

"Under our three-year budget focus we want to extend water (distribution) to cover 100% of the municipal area in the next two years," he said.

Nagooroo said the council had budgeted for economic growth and job creation initiatives.

Three water and sanitation

projects for the Nsimbini and Amanzimtoti areas of ward 93 are to get R19-million.

A further R9-million has been set aside for a low cost housing project in the Ezimbokodweni area.

Tana Magwaza, who is the ward 100 councillor, which incorporates Umbumbulu, said it was pleasing to note the municipality had dedicated funds to reduce the water and housing backlogs in the area.

"Of the 69 000 households in the area, only 39% have water and we appreciate what council is doing as this will obviously increase this percentage," he said.

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Big plans for north of the city

GUGU BLOSE and VERNON MCHUNU

AT THE KwaMashu meeting it emerged the draft budget was set to help fast-track the scores of developmental projects planned for several areas to the north of the city.

Aside from engineering projects to improve roads in KwaMashu, money would also be allocated for several other bigger projects.

These include a R17-million housing development; a R2-million

renewal of the KwaMashu town centre; a R1.5-million heroes monument in Inanda; a R2.5-million electricity supply project for the forthcoming Bridge City; and the R1.7-million construction of Bester Road, which would be part of the Bridge City road network.

The public were given an opportunity to speak out on issues affecting them.

In response to residents who complained of being sent rates charges on non-rateable properties, officials

said errors might have happened, and advised people to visit the city's rates division at Florence Mkhize building to seek corrections.

Residents learned the city had quit using aerial photographs to value properties as this had sometimes given the wrong impressions about the size of properties. Now, field workers were physically visiting each household.

Meanwhile at the Inanda-Ntuzuma meeting residents expressed anger at the

proposed hike in the levies for basic services and rates.

They also raised concerns around the priority given to certain infrastructure work. Some felt repairs to storm water drains were more important than sidewalks.

Some were also irate at the poor attendance at the meeting of ward councillors, with only two councillors attending, and arriving halfway through the meeting.

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Verulam: good crowd

FINOLA QUARSINGH

THE inadequacy of public transport, the need for more commercial and residential spaces for middle-income earners, and a desire for more community facilities, such as halls and recreational facilities, were some of the points raised at the Verulam zone meeting.

Deputy City Manager of Treasury Krish Kumar, chaired the meeting, at the Verulam sports and recreational grounds, for

wards 58, 59, 60, 61 and 62.

A member of the public, Phindile Juda of Redcliffe, was curious to know how to get electricity for her home.

Officials from various municipal departments were on hand to answer her and point her in the right direction, as well as to help with the other questions.

The attendance at the hearing was good.

Kumar thanked people for taking the time to be there and for their comments.

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