

ABOUT US

The eZasegasini Metro is the official eThekweni Municipality publication through which ratepayers and residents are kept informed about news, entertainment and perspectives in the greater Durban region. It is also a forum for readers' views. It hits the streets fortnightly on a Friday, with 450 000 copies distributed throughout the region. To contact us: eZasegasini Metro, PO Box 5588, Durban, 4000 Newsroom: 311 2290/81/84 Fax: 306 4603 Communications: 311 2279 angamuthu@durban.gov.za eThekweni Info Centre 0800 331 011 (toll-free) Fax: 304 2880 sizakala@durban.gov.za Visit: Shop 12, Old Mutual Arcade, 303 West Street

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Tax breaks spur growth

SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

THE government's urban renewal tax break scheme is helping to give the Durban CBD a new lease on life.

The scheme makes available substantial tax write-offs to investors who buy dilapidated buildings with the aim of regenerating them in cities which have been identified as Urban Development Zones.

It was introduced three years ago and benefits investors and cities.

For cities it represents a way to combat urban decay and protect their rates base. While investors who refurbish existing buildings are eligible for a 20% tax deduction in the first year of earning income, plus an annual depreciation of 20% over a four-year period.

For new developments, this incentive offers a tax deduction of 20% in the first year, plus an annual depreciation of 5% for the next 16 years.

The accelerated depreciation may be set-off against any other income – including personal income tax – and not only income from that particular building. But the taxpayer must own the building, and it can only be used for trade.

As an added bonus, an amendment was made to the scheme in 2005 to allow sectional title owners, who own properties of at least 1 000m² to benefit from the incentive.

eThekweni, which is one of the 16 participating municipalities, already has a few success stories to tell.

Mayor Obed Mlaba cited the revamping of the JBS building in Field Street which after being developed was leased to Mr Price.



SUCCESS: The JBS building in Field Street which was developed, taking advantage of urban renewal tax breaks, and leased to Mr Price

"There is a major improvement occurring and a lot of interest is also being shown in the area near the Kings Park precinct," he said.

Ivor Smith, who developed the JBS building echoed the mayor, saying a second phase development of the 13-storey building was about to begin.

"The first four storeys will be commercial and the rest of the block will be renovated for residential tenants," he said.

Mlaba said the time was right for investors to buy buildings in Albert Park and the Warwick Triangle.

"I would like to see more buildings being sold to African people who despite constituting 70% of the population were sidelined from the economy."

He said this had resulted in

only one group benefiting from the lucrative property market. "When we talk of inner city development and urban densification we need to make sure the previously marginalised get a fair slice in the property business," he said.

Mitre House

Another building which was rescued from decay was Mitri House, which had become notorious for its filth and overcrowding.

But this was before the six-storey flat, near the International Convention Centre, came into the possession of Babo Hadebe who wasted no time regenerating it.

"The lift was not working, water was leaking throughout the building, the whole

complex was indescribably filthy," said Babo Hadebe.

"First we had to introduce strict security and access control to counter-act overcrowding."

The city's Strategic Projects Department said interest in the scheme had been phenomenal. The department's Fikile Ndlovu said that it had handled more than 300 inquiries of which 18 had been approved registrations.

"Five of these are already completed. The total value of these developments is about R600-million."

"The good news is the amendments made to the scheme in 2005 give emerging property investors an opportunity to get into the CBD property market," Ndlovu said.

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BONGANI XABA

UShaka manager upbeat

KEN MCHUNU

BONGANI Xaba has been appointed as the new Chief Operations Officer of uShaka Marine World.

Having been the park's Operations Director for three years, Xaba says uShaka enjoyed an excellent year of trading in 2006.

He said the first two months of 2007 have set the tone for

the year ahead. "Figures for December 2006 and January 2007 are up by 10% and 11% respectively on previous years," he said.

Challenge

"However, uShaka faced the challenge of ensuring that the product and services it offered surpassed expectations," said Xaba.

He said new attractions and the "commitment of our staff to customer service" would keep attendance figures growing.

From 2004 to 2006, uShaka contributed about R1.5-billion to the economy of KwaZulu-Natal.

It is one of eThekweni's flagship projects and part of the city's long-term development programme.

Ward committee elections completed

VERNON MCHUNU

THE process of setting up a powerful new way for ordinary people to have a say in the running of their city has been completed.

Desmond Myeza, Manager of the Speaker's Office, said the ward committee elections had been held (over nearly six months) and faced few hurdles or objections.

"On the whole, we have had a smooth process of democracy in which community members elected people whom they feel will be able to help represent them in government," Myeza said.

Each 10-member committee gives citizens a more direct say in local affairs than ever before.

Until now, residents have been able to voice concerns and make suggestions to their elected ward councillor, city officials, and even to Mayor Obed Mlaba at one of his frequent mayoral izimbizo's held in many parts of eThekweni in recent years.

In addition, the city council has regularly held its meetings in a different part of greater Durban each month in a concerted effort to make its deliberations accessible to people in far-flung areas.

Now, ward committees will give citizens another way to influence decision making on issues affecting their areas, and so speed delivery.

"The Freedom Charter said the people shall govern. With ward committees we are giving expression to that ideal," said Mlaba.

Concerns

The idea of ward committees arose out of concerns that municipalities, particularly the bigger ones – such as eThekweni with 100 wards – lacked the time or capacity to properly consider the con-

cerns of all the wards.

Ward committees address those concerns by acting as a link between the municipality and residents.

In eThekweni, ward committees are set to play an important advisory role to the council, with their first major test being the formulation of the city budget over the next few months.

Committees will recommend which of their local needs deserve a slice of the city's budget pie.

They will be given the task of ensuring local priorities are in line with the city's overall Integrated Dev-

Mlaba blasts teens

SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

MAYOR Obed Mlaba says the high number of schoolgirls who fall pregnant is a cause for concern.

He was speaking to A J Mwelase Senior Secondary pupils in Lamontville during a recent visit to the school.

Although the main reason for Mlaba's visit was to deliver 10 computers donated by the Jewish community of Durban, he took the opportunity to caution pupils against "the negative lot that contributed to their downfall".

"Your future depends on the decisions you make today," he said.

Mlaba said it was shocking that statistics showed that in Gauteng alone, 2 000 girls of school-going age had fallen pregnant in the past year.

"How can someone who still relies on their parents for food, clothing and shelter possibly think they can raise a child?" he asked.

The mayor criticised those who blamed only the girls for falling pregnant. Young men were the main culprits.

"It is you (young men) who start all the trouble by approaching a girl in the first place," he said.

Mlaba said that he would look at approaching one of Durban's sister cities to see how the school could be helped.

"My dream is for schools to have libraries, computer labs, science labs and decent indoor sports centres," he said.

Thanking the mayor, school Principal Benjamin Mtshali said that the computers would help the school improve its pass rate, especially at matric level.

"Now that we have computers all we lack is internet access so that we may communicate with the sister cities mentioned earlier by the mayor," he said.

The school achieved an 83% Grade 12 pass rate last year, a 23% improvement on two years ago. The principal said they were aiming for 100% this year.

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