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Housing projects underway

KEN MCHUNU

THE CITY'S housing backlog will soon be reduced thanks to a R15.8-million housing and infrastructure development underway at Savannah Park west of the city.

The first phase of the project began early last year with the construction of roads and the installation of sewers, stormwater drains and water pipes. It also included the laying of foundations for 464 low cost houses. Project Manager Bongus Gumede said that some 30 informal dwellings would be relocated to make way for the largely green-field project.

"The design and procurement process started about a year ago and the construction of services started this April," Gumede said.

The project forms part of the city's accelerated housing delivery programme that seeks to address housing demands in eThekweni.

Gumede said the city was considered increasing its target of 16 000 new houses per year by strengthening its development projects.

He said that in eThekweni

there is a backlog of some 210 000 housing units. "This is due to the continued growth of informal settlements, which are impossible to monitor permanently to guarantee that further influxes do not persist."

Construction of the Savannah Park houses is due for completion towards the end of the year.

Councillor for Ward 17, Thalete Hlengwa, said the allocation of the houses, which each have an area of 30 m², would give priority to existing residents and low-income earners, after which preference would be given to land claimants, special cases and people with disabilities. He said the ward faced a severe overcrowding problem. With the existing four-roomed houses unable to cope with demand, shacks had mushroomed. He said some people had lived in shacks for more than 20 years.

"The project promises to bring great relief to these families", Hlengwa said.

Local sub-contactors and the unemployed had also benefited from, with about 70% of the workforce drawn from the ward, he said.

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BIG NAMES FOR AFRICA DAY CONCERT



RENOWNED entertainers Mafikizolo (pictured), Johnny Clegg and Malini are set to perform at the 10th Renaissance Festival's Africa Day celebrations next week. The festival, themed "Uniting the African Diaspora", will run from 22 to 28 May and will feature conferences, concerts and events at venues throughout Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Richards Bay. Highlights include a two-day conference, on 26 and 27 May, where speakers from across the globe will converse on issues around identity, human rights and economic development. There will also be a youth conference on 22 May in which racism and moral degeneration will be up for discussion. Friday, 23 May

will see the launch of a research project titled 'Family Tree' which delves into some of eThekweni's family histories, with the Africa Day concert taking place on 25 May. The festival aims to celebrate, challenge and explore Africa's rebirth. "The African renaissance is about turning around", says the festival's vice chairperson, Professor Sihawu Ngubane. "Apartheid disconnected us from the rest of the continent, this is meant to put African flavour back in all that we do. It's about the renewal, reconstruction and revival of Africa. It's about celebrating the achievements of Africa and creating awareness about who we are and what we are as Africans."

Samantha Moodley

City gives go ahead for Newlands housing plans

SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

THE CITY has agreed to release portions of land for a housing infill project in the north of the city.

The plots of vacant municipal-owned land are located in the residential area of Newlands.

An Executive Committee meeting this week gave the nod to a request by the city's Housing Department seeking approval to rezone the land to cater for "densification and maximizing housing opportunities."

The sites will be used for multiple storey and complex type developments as part of the city's housing programme aimed at low and middle-income earners.

But the DA, whilst saying that it was not challenging the delivery of housing, warned of "an uproar from the community who had not been sufficiently consulted."

DA Councillor Colin Gaillard said the recommendation did not take into consideration the provision of recreational facilities and other

infrastructural needs.

He also argued that the recommendation undermined the city's Integrated Development Plan (IDP).

"We're grateful for the houses, but in terms of our IDP, development cannot occur in a vacuum, thereby causing strain on the existing infrastructure and recreational facilities."

Gaillard criticised suggestions contained in a report by the Housing Department that Newlands had adequate infrastructure and that the traffic

congestion that would result from the project would not be serious enough to warrant limitations on the development.

"Some of the roads in the area were not designed to handle large volumes of traffic," he said.

The report also states that the sites have no vegetation of ecological value, hence it was not anticipated that there would be negative environmental impacts.

ANC Exco members insisted that the provision of housing remained on top of the city's priorities.

"At first I thought something sensible was going to come out when Gaillard mentioned the integrated approach but when he spoke about inciting the community against the project, I realised that this has become political," said ANC councillor Nigel Gumede.

Gumede, who also chairs council's Housing Committee, said regardless of what opposition said, "we are going to support this project."

Nomvuzo Shabalala, who

supported him, also voiced discontent at what she said was a tactic by the DA to stall housing delivery.

"It's a pity that the DA always accuses the ANC of using housing to campaign, yet they are the very ones who are now blocking housing delivery."

In his party's defence, DA caucus leader John Steenhuisen maintained that the DA had "never challenged the delivery of housing but rather the throwing around of council money by the ruling party."

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