

## **Mayoral Speech: 22 November 2021**

Honourable Speaker, Alderman, Councillors, (Visitors), Municipal Manager, Directors, Officiating Dignitaries, Honoured Guests, Officials, Guests, Family members

I am incredibly humbled and honoured to have been afforded the privilege of being the Executive Mayor of George Municipality for the term of office commencing today, 22 November 2021.

Congratulations to all councillors who have been elected and who have been inaugurated today. The road to becoming a councillor is no easy one and I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to my wife, Gail and to my family for the support over the years.

As a Council we have the collective responsibility to act in the interest of George Municipality and all its citizens to ensure that we exercise our oversight and monitoring roles as well as provide policy direction over the services that are provided to our 210 000 plus citizens and all our stakeholders.

In taking office we thank the acting municipal manager, the directors and the administration of George Municipality not only for the excellent arrangements for the inauguration today but also for the work they do around the clock in managing this municipality.

In looking to the future for George, it is my belief that the next five years present a critical opportunity for George's future to make its mark as a leading secondary city in South Africa.

To achieve this vision, we need to ensure that the basic services we provide to all our communities in terms of our Constitutional mandate are being delivered at a high standard and that we continue to seek solutions to be more effective where necessary.

Through our engagements it is apparent that many of our citizens endure hardship and poverty that has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic where jobs and lives have been lost. We will continue to support and review

the work being done through soup kitchens and vegetable gardens to improve assistance and facilitation of relief efforts.

Housing shortages remain high on the priority list even though progress is being made through the roll-out of houses in the various construction projects presently under way. We will continue to address the plight of those home seekers living in backyards and in informal settlements and the backlogs to seek solutions by also providing more opportunities in the GAP housing, FLISP and social housing rental sectors.

The safety of our communities will also require increasing levels of attention. This is where the use of CCTV cameras could be of great assistance.

Employment opportunities, the need for Jobs is the cry we are receiving from our citizens.

I have referred to these challenges so that I can connect them to what I refer to as the five-year opportunity that we have to re-position George.

In a super-human effort over the past eight months, the municipal manager and her team have secured a R1,1bn Budget Facility for Infrastructure Grant facility for George over 4-5 years to undertake essential water related infrastructure that will benefit not only Pacaltsdorp and Thembalethu, but also enable economic growth to take place as we increase our daily water treatment capacity by 50% to 60 Ml per day.

The effect of this is that we are one of few municipalities in SA who can plan capital expenditure programmes of possibly R500m per year for the next five years knowing that funding has been secured for half of that programme. This will enable not only the re-visioning of the many other infrastructure budgetary needs but also how to manage cash flows.

In receiving this grant there is also the responsibility for this new Council and the Administration to craft a path for George's economic development that will provide the employment opportunities so desperately needed by our citizens.

We also take note that this Council will need to ensure that the next phases of the Go George bus system get launched; and that the Neighbourhood Partnership Development Programme gets implemented.

We also need to find solutions for the major crisis affecting service delivery and the economy – that of the inconsistency of Eskom's electricity supply. It will be a key objective in the coming term to source alternative sources of

electricity so that we can avoid at least Stage 1 of Load-shedding cycles – and hopefully another Stage as well as we partner with private sector power producers.

We will therefore be driving economic activity in major sectors – such as agriculture, agri-processing, tourism, contact centres as examples - and be engaging our stakeholders to understand their vision for the future of George.

To achieve these objectives, over these five years we will need to develop a common Vision that can embrace our opportunities to help meet the ongoing challenges in our society. We therefore need to work together, learn to collaborate to achieve success for George as a leading secondary city in South Africa.

In crafting our Vision for a future George, we will take note of what the international advisory firm, KPMG call the seven fundamental principles that drive growth and sustainability of “magnet” cities (being the term for our category of city):

- 1) Attracting young wealth creators: we are seeing young families relocating to George; talented individuals; citizens keen on sporting and outdoor activities
- 2) Undergoing constant physical renewal: we are already seeing evidence of private sector investment into commercial property renewal, new builds
- 3) Defining the city identity: our relaxed lifestyle is an attraction
- 4) Connect to other cities: here our airport plays an important role
- 5) Cultivate new ideas: George is attracting the interest of contact centre companies; IT sector; optic fibre; we are seeing new quirky meeting places develop
- 6) Stimulate investment: the massive investment in water infrastructure is a major boost; so too Medi Clinic

- 7) Develop strong leadership: the interaction between private sector role-players; active semi-retirees who are highly skilled and public sector is a dynamic that must be fostered.

The fundamental principles and ingredients therefore exist to build an exciting future for George.

We need to craft a Vision that benefits all of society in taking the economy of George forward: to encourage economic sectors that can grow jobs; and encourage investment. Ultimately it will be jobs that provide dignity to many despairing citizens who can then progressively improve their prospects of better livelihoods.

This is therefore our task as a Council to drive these objectives. I am excited by these prospects and look forward to how we can collectively drive a better future for George over the next five years.

Thank you, Speaker.

Leon van Wyk

22 November 2021