

MAYORAL ADDRESS TO ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 26 APRIL 2023

Good morning Speaker, Deputy Mayor, Aldermen, Chief Whip, Councillors, Municipal Manager, Directors, Officials, Members of the Media and the Public

A number of draft by-laws were approved at a Council meeting on 20 April 2023. It is essential that a municipality ensures that its by-laws are relevant, aligned with legislation and stay up to date. Several changes are proposed to existing by-laws and some new ones have been compiled. The public is encouraged to give input during the public participation process which is now underway. All by-laws will be brought back to Council when the comments will be considered before the by-laws are finally approved and then promulgated.

A lot of misinformation is currently being spread regarding the draft Building Control by-law. It must be stressed that this by-law is aligned with the National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act, of 1977. It ensures that all information pertaining to building plan requirements is now collated into one document making it easier for applicants to know exactly what is required and ensure they are adhering to ALL building and construction requirements.

While a contravention may not be seen as important now, it may well cause a delay in the process of the sale of a property when a prospective buyer demands approved building plans and some of the construction is not authorized and does not meet safety standards.

Most complaints received by the municipality are from neighbours and pertain to the contraventions which are now being portrayed by some as "insane", such as braais, pool pumps and generator housings. If any of these structures were to collapse or damage a neighbour's property for example, then no doubt those very people who are now encouraging non-compliance with the legislation will be the very first ones expecting the municipality to act against the offending property owner.

It is indeed disappointing and concerning when citizens choose to use social media to promote notions that senior municipal officials and councillors are "insane" when they apply legislation. In this way, they are promoting the notion that it is fine to disregard legislation in an environment where there is poor governance in many municipalities.

It is important therefore that this by-law is brought into line with national legislation.

I would like to express my thanks to the members of the Administration and councillors who have worked hard on these projects. Some additional by-laws will be processed over the forthcoming weeks.

By the same token, a lot of misinformation is being spread regarding the proposed rate increases. It must be stressed that an increase in the value of a property by a certain percentage will not translate directly into the same percentage increase in rates. In fact, owners of properties valued at R 2 million or less should be levied a very low increase or even a decrease in property rates.

It is also important to point out that George Municipality strives to render first-class services. Some of the costs which the municipality has to incur are a result of state departments and entities not fulfilling their constitutional mandate. A prime example of this is the R 1.6 billion which the Municipality will need to spend on renewable energy projects over the next 3 years to generate electricity as a result of the collapse of ESKOM. Municipalities are only responsible for the transmission and not for the generation of electricity and this additional cost to keep the economy of George going must be borne by the ratepayer. Another example is the large amount of funding which the municipality is spending on CCTV cameras as well as additional law enforcement officers due to the fact that SAPS does not have the capacity to ensure the safety and security of our citizens.

Furthermore, the municipality spends a lot of overtime in order to ensure uninterrupted service delivery to residents. The municipality repairs pipe breakages, sewer leaks and power outages after hours and many municipalities leave such matters to the next working day. The same applies to the collection of refuse removal which is done on public holidays and costs double in the overtime but is done in the interests of service delivery. The municipality also looks after the poor and indigent and has approximately 130 soup kitchens at a cost of R3.5 million per year which feeds 53 000 hungry people. We also provide 70 units of electricity to indigents where the legislation which is followed by most municipalities only provides for 50 free electricity units. All these costs are funded from the rates collection. If George is to stay a leading city, then it is unavoidable that rates will have to increase.

During the tabling of the draft Budget, consideration was given to the impact of levying an additional R30 million in Rates on property owners to maintain the

current level of services or to cut back on expenditure which would in all likelihood have affected aspects of community safety, social services or sport. Council is often expected to make these difficult choices and we have accordingly provided additional relief to soften the increase on properties valued less than R2 million by providing.

The renewable energy projects are well underway and this week we started with the installation of a 400kWp solar unit at the Outeniqua Wastewater Treatment Works. Solar panels for the electricity and tourism buildings, the motor vehicle registration building as well as battery storage for the Civic Centre should all be in place by the end of June. This will reduce the municipality's consumption and hopefully contribute to getting off the 1st stage of loadshedding. Construction of the 1MWp plant has commenced and this should be completed by the end of September.

Even though our dam is currently 86 % full, water purification remains a challenge as the influx of residents into George is placing increasing pressure on our Water Treatment Works. The construction of the 20ML water treatment works is progressing well.

We are currently treating 39 ML of water per day including the use of the temporary package plant that has been on site since December 2022 with usage at 34-35 ML which ensures that our reservoirs remain relatively well balanced. At present, we are refurbishing a 4,5ML module at the Old Water Works and thereafter need to start a similar process on an 8,3ML module from mid-May to mid-June which will reduce the margin of production versus usage considerably. It is therefore imperative that we will have to use water sparingly in the meantime.

The installation of smart water meters has commenced and the first 250 have already been installed. The installation of the first 2000 smart water meters will be completed by the end of June. The purpose of the meters is to assist residents to monitor their water usage and detect water leaks and be able to read water meters remotely. It is blatant misinformation that these are pre-paid water meters. They will not cut off a consumer's water supply.

Planet Youth, an international whole-of-society programme focussed on mental health, was launched as a pilot project in George in February this year. The aim of the programme is to enrol all children in George across the subdistrict in activities that promote protective factors to develop healthy futures. The local

community aims to achieve a significant reduction in youth alcohol harm which will be measured as decreased school dropout rates, improved school academic performance, and a reduction in violence. The first phase of the project which included a survey at certain schools is almost complete with the results expected next month. George is honoured as the first city in Africa to be a pilot site in this very important project. We are grateful to the Planet Youth team which includes the medical staff at George Hospital, the WC Dept of Health, UCT and others working on this important project.

A very successful Community Safety Forum was held with various stakeholders last week. The workshop was attended by SAPS, Neighbourhood Watches, Community Police Forums as well as the Provincial Departments of Community Safety, Education, Social Development and the Garden Route District Municipality. It was encouraging to see the enthusiasm and obtain positive input from the various participants and it is clear that safety is a high priority in our town. A Community Safety Forum was established, and a community safety steering committee will now be established to formulate a community safety plan. The municipality is investing a considerable amount in cameras and extending the hours of operation of the CCTV camera room to improve safety and security for our residents.

Our administration continues to excel in various fields. Our Civil department was honoured with four major awards in different categories at the Western Cape Process Controller Awards Ceremony 2023, hosted by the Western Cape Department of Water and Sanitation. The Civil Engineering Directorate won Best Water Treatment Works with a design capacity greater than 10 MI/day for George New Water Treatment Works; Best Water Treatment Works with a design capacity less than 10MI/day for Uniondale Water Treatment Works and first runner-up for Best Water Treatment works with a design capacity less than 10 MI/day for Wilderness Water Treatment Works.

Suzanne Laido won the individual prize as first runner-up in the category, Best Process Controller at a Water Treatment Works George with a design capacity greater than 10MI/day. Congratulations to our Civil Department.

The George Municipality's Communication team was nominated as one of the top three most proactive communication teams in local municipalities in South Africa during the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) Communications Awards last week. According to SALGA, the award for which the George Municipal Communications team was nominated, is for a

communications team that is always proactive in its work. Well done to the team for keeping the citizens of George well informed.

The launch of the new municipal app is imminent. My Smart City has been successfully launched in a number of the metro's including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni.

George Municipality has partnered with My Smart City to bring a tailored one-stop solution to service delivery. Residents will be able to pay their municipal accounts, buy prepaid electricity and register service delivery requests on the app. This all fits in with the vision of making George a Smart City which is innovative, progressive and delivers high quality service to all its residents-truly a City for All Reasons.

EXL

A multi-national contact centre company, EXL, will shortly commence business as a call centre in George servicing clients the USA. This company expects to employ 300 of our young, matriculated persons within the next year, who will receive the necessary training. I have been informed that George is the first location outside of a major city in the world where this company has opened an office. Based on success here, there are prospects for further expansion. Over the past two years, we have worked towards this goal and a successful launch could easily attract similar companies to George.

Discussions are also being held with a major company that has expressed interest in expanding its existing retail operations and presence in George.

As I conclude, I would like to touch on a number of indicators reflecting economic activity in George>

Building Control:

From April 2021 to Mar 2022, we received 1868 building plan applications of which 87 per cent were for residential developments compared to a total of 1692 building plans for the past 12 months, and the portion of residential development has risen to 90 per cent.

The number of occupancy certificates issued over the past 12 months, exceeds the previous year by 12.8 per cent, representing a construction value of over R1.045 billion, compared to R740mil in the previous year.

Land use:

Between May 2021 and Apr 22, 1995, new properties were registered and over the period from May 2022 to April 2023, this figure was 1405, equating to 3400 new properties registered over the past two years.

Land Cover indicates an additional footprint area of 262ha was taken up between 2014-2020. Residential densification, specifically in the central south and southern areas is a main feature of the land cover change in the past three years.

In closing, I would like to extend my thanks to councillors, MMCs and the officials who have done all the hard work to deliver our services and drive the improvement in infrastructure.

Thank you especially to our Municipal Manager, Dr Michele Gratz for her continuous dedication and drive and to our directors and senior management team who work very long hours to take our city forward towards our goal of being the leading Intermediate City in the country. We salute you; we appreciate the work you do for George.

Thank you, Speaker.