

Good morning, Speaker, Aldermen, Deputy Mayor, Whip of Council, Councillors, Municipal Manager, Directors, officials, members of the public, and most importantly, the residents of George Municipality.

Allow me to begin by welcoming our newly sworn-in councillors. Welcome Cllrs Goeieman and Kleynhans. You have been entrusted with a mandate by the people of George to serve with integrity, courage, transparency, and commitment. I trust that each of you will honour that responsibility to the very best of your ability.

As this is our first Council meeting of the year, I want to commend our officials on an excellent, safe, and largely incident-free festive season. During this period, devastating fires affected parts of our province, including Mossel Bay Municipality, whom we were able to assist in their time of need. To all those affected, please know that you remain in our thoughts and prayers as you recover from these losses.

As our residents are well aware, George continues to face a serious drought. I would like to sincerely thank residents for their ongoing efforts to save water and once again appeal to everyone to continue doing their part. As a Municipality, we have acted proactively and responsibly, ensuring that we implemented all that we possibly could to safeguard our water sources. Over the span of several months, we have experienced significantly below-average rainfall when compared to historical norms, which placed increasing pressure on available water sources.

In September 2025, we acted and established a water task team. We realised that immediate action was required and actively cleared large patches of invasive alien vegetation within the Kaaimans-Katrivier catchment area, with the objective of protecting and conserving runoff into the Garden Route Dam water system. This intervention was critical in controlling a situation, as invasive alien vegetation is known to significantly reduce water yields by absorbing and diverting rainfall.

We also implemented a comprehensive Water Demand Management strategy to curb consumption, promote responsible water use, and extend the sustainability of existing water sources. In addition to the environmental interventions, the Municipality has made substantial infrastructure investments to strengthen water security. Through its R1.115 billion Budget Facility for Infrastructure Funding (BFI) grant, George Municipality has focused on upgrading and expanding water treatment works, reservoirs, and pump stations across the city. These projects are specifically designed to build resilience against increasingly erratic rainfall patterns and growing demand, while ensuring long-term storage and sustainability of the water supply system.

Importantly, the Municipality did not wait for a full-blown crisis, drought declaration scenario before taking action. Proactive planning, early intervention, and responsible financial investment were prioritised to protect and safeguard existing water sources and reduce the risk of an imminent disaster. Public awareness campaigns were also implemented to inform residents about the impact of invasive alien vegetation on water resources, further strengthening collective water stewardship.

I therefore ask our residents to remain prayerful during this time. I am reminded of the words in Scripture that offer encouragement and hope:

“Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

— **James 5:18**

May we continue to pray, and may Heaven give rain.

This festive season was particularly significant as we successfully launched the first-ever George Festival, held from 13 to 16 December. The festival showcased the culture, arts, and sport that make George truly unique. Our city came alive, and residents embraced what was on offer.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to our partners in the Western Cape Government — Minister Ricardo Mackenzie, his department, the Premier, and the broader provincial government — for believing in this idea and investing back into our community. To our municipal officials: your dedication and professionalism delivered an event that truly placed George on the map. From the lights and gospel concert to the long table at the museum, the futsal tournament in Thembaletu, and the jazz concert at Kaptein Dikkop, we demonstrated what this municipality is capable of. George Festival 2026 will be even better.

Despite the noise that has been made regarding backyard dwellers and Wendy houses, I want to inform residents that, as a proactive government, we have been engaged in the development of a policy framework regarding backyard dwellers since February 2025. While we recognise that this process has taken time, it is currently in formulation and must be carefully aligned with national legislation. We are also in the process of contracting draftsmen to assist residents with obtaining legal documentation for their dwellings. That is how a government helps – not by making a noise, but by stepping in and taking action.

With the festive season and the excitement behind us, allow me to briefly reflect on departmental work.

Community Safety and Mobility

During the festive season, we employed 60 beach monitors, including EPWP candidates and graduates from the Chrysalis Academy. These opportunities ensured beach safety while creating meaningful employment. I thank each monitor for their service.

We also celebrated the completion of training for 20 new peace officers through a partnership with the Western Cape Department of Police Oversight and Community Safety. These officers received SAQA-accredited qualifications, opening pathways to sustainable careers. While some continue to claim that opportunities are not being created, these are real people whose lives have been positively changed through municipal action. This is what good governance looks like.

I am also pleased to report that we experienced no serious incidents, major fires, or disasters over the festive season. We were able to assist neighbouring municipalities when needed — a testament to a well-run local government that others can rely on.

Electrotechnical Services

Our smart metering project continues to gain momentum. Over the next 2.5 years, approximately 10 000 smart meters will be installed across our network. This will allow residents to monitor their electricity usage in real time, empowering households and businesses to manage consumption more effectively and reduce costs where possible.

Let me be clear: these measures are necessary to protect residents from ongoing failures at national level. We are forced to set electricity tariffs to keep up with the rising costs as set by Eskom and NERSA. They are determined by these two institutions in terms of national legislation. Yet, we have repeatedly seen that it is municipalities — and our officials — who are left to face the frustration and anger of residents when tariffs increase.

What is deeply concerning is the continued silence of certain representatives within this Council — representatives of the National ruling party — who know exactly where these decisions originate yet fail to stand up for the communities they represent. They remain quiet while municipalities are blamed for laws and tariffs imposed by their own political structures. Our residents simply cannot afford this silence any longer.

If you represent the people of George, then stand up for them. Speak to your national counterparts. Advocate for reform. Do not allow this municipality and its officials to absorb the backlash for decisions they did not make. The cumulative cost of decades of poor planning, mismanagement, and a lack of reform has become unbearable for ordinary households — right across our municipal area.

Despite these challenges, our municipality continues to innovate, adapt, and protect residents wherever possible. I would like to sincerely thank Director Rhode, his team, and Councillor Monique Simmers for leading initiatives that mitigate the impact of national failures on local communities.

We are also enhancing service delivery during power outages through the implementation of a system event capture function across most communication-enabled municipal substations. This technology detects abnormalities on outgoing feeders, triggers alarms, and enables proactive network responses — significantly reducing outage durations. We believe George is among the first local municipalities to adopt this technology, placing us firmly on par with the metros.

This is precisely why so many people are invested in George and what we are building here. Our success is not based on slogans or spectacle, but on capability, planning, and delivery. We do not make promises that sound impressive but cannot be sustained — we have all seen how attempts to mimic far-off Middle Eastern visions or announce ambitious solar plants without substance end: big headlines, high expectations, and nothing concrete to show for it. Whereas in reality and in George we have actively put our IPP processes in motion to stifle the monopoly that Eskom has on our power supply.

In George, we choose a different path — one grounded in realism, responsibility, and results — because our residents deserve governance that works, not ideas that never do.

Community Services

Our libraries continue to be pillars of learning, safety, and opportunity. Residents shared inspiring testimonies — some having been members for over 45 years. From midwives to graduates, our libraries serve all. I thank the department for preserving these vital spaces.

In December 2025, we launched an illegal dumping pledge drive in Pacaltsdorp. My visit to an illegal dumping site sparked conversation, and rightly so. While we do have a “bag-scratcher” challenge, illegal dumping is not limited to one group. It is often the result of choices made by residents and businesses alike.

This is a shared responsibility. While the municipality remains committed to waste removal and cleanliness, we need residents to work with us. Clean communities are built through partnership. Because we are a responsive government, we listen to the needs of our people. We will soon be visiting the greenbelt early in February with members of the public to address the complaints that they have.

In this spirit of collaboration, we are planning a Stop Illegal Dumping Walk in Thembaletu in February. In addition to the walk, several illegal dumping hotspots will be cleaned, beautified, and rehabilitated as part of a broader environmental improvement initiative. I encourage councillors and residents alike to participate. Let us come together, make a tangible difference, and expand this initiative to other areas of our municipality.

Let us also move away from pointing fingers and saying, *“Look at my area — it’s still dirty while the municipality cleans elsewhere.”* Instead, join us. Submit ideas. Work with us. We live in an age where many are quick to become keyboard warriors, yet slow to take meaningful action in their own streets, neighbourhoods, or wards. I say to you: save the data and do something constructive. Let us work together to keep George clean.

To further strengthen innovation and evidence-based planning, we will be appointing a professional service provider to conduct a waste characterisation study. This study will identify waste streams generated by households and businesses across different areas, enabling targeted and effective waste management interventions. In addition, all green bag waste will be diverted from the landfill for off-site sorting. This green waste will be made available to farmers for composting, contributing to landfill diversion and promoting sustainable environmental practices.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to our Acting Director, Mr Sivuyile Mtila, his dedicated staff, and Councillor Erika Brown for their continued efforts in keeping our city clean. The work you do not only ensures a cleaner environment but a healthier one as well. I look forward to seeing strengthened collaboration between our communities, councillors, and officials as we work together to protect and enhance the city, we all call home.

Planning and Development

Now, Mr Speaker, councillors — listen properly as I outline the successes of our Human Settlements Department. But before I do, this must be said.

Over the past year, our department has achieved significant progress despite serious national failures — failures driven by the very same party I referred to earlier when speaking about electricity. For years, there has been no meaningful reform in national housing legislation. Yet, in the absence of innovation and reform, our officials have continued to deliver, making the most of the limited tools available to them.

Our officials are left to absorb the anger and frustration of beneficiaries who have waited decades for homes. Families are removed from waiting lists not because they are dishonest or undeserving, but because national rules punish progress — earning slightly more, improving one’s circumstances, disqualifies them. We need councillors who will lobby for reform and will not sit in silence.

I refuse to be part of that silence.

Instead, I choose to recognise and commend the work of our officials who continue to deliver in spite of outdated legislation and national inaction.

Let us turn to the facts.

In Thembaletu, the UISP project, which commenced in March 2025, is valued at R21.5 million and comprises 100 housing units. To date, 35 units have been handed over, with a further 26 units ready for occupation, pending electrical connections.

At Metro Grounds, a R162 million project delivered across three phases, more than 500 homes have already been handed over from a total yield of over 600 units.

At Erf 325, Pacaltsdorp, a R61 million development, we have handed over more than 400 homes, including housing for persons with disabilities and our first-ever homes for military veterans.

In total, this municipality has delivered safe havens, lasting assets, and dignity to over 1 000 families just in 2025.

To the Human Settlements Department: I commend you. Through professionalism, resilience, and commitment, you have ensured that more than a thousand families now have a place they can proudly call home.

In terms of spatial planning, the Gwayang Mixed Use Development successfully concluded its public participation process and will be presented to the Southern Cape Joint Municipal Planning Tribunal for consideration and decision in due course. The project seeks to provide additional land for Residential, Business and Industrial development in George and is expected to make a significant impact on the demand for employment.

Progress was also made on the Metro Industrial Development, which is currently being finalised for submission to the Land Use Management Department, after which the public participation process will commence. The project will primarily provide additional Industrial Properties to stimulate economic growth and create job opportunities and makes provision for another property that can be used for development of a school. In addition, service providers have been appointed to prepare three Site Development Plans as part of the Ilisoletu Precinct Development, marking a key milestone in advancing this project from planning to implementation. Concepts for the development of around 60 hectares of Municipal land is also underway focussing on providing additional Residential, Business, Educational and Recreational opportunities for the citizens of George Municipality.

We are making progress within our planning and development department. Looking after all of our residents so that our municipal area can thrive for all of our residents.

Mr Speaker, in closing, this address reflects a municipality that does not shy away from challenges, but confronts them with honesty, innovation, and resolve. Across departments, our officials continue to deliver services, protect residents, and build opportunities – often despite constraints beyond our control. To our officials, councillors, and communities: thank you for your partnership, your resilience, and your commitment to George. Together, we will continue to govern responsibly, deliver with purpose, and build a city that works for all who call it home.