

Mr Speaker, Deputy Mayor, Chief Whip, Aldermen, Councillors, Municipal Manager, Directors, officials, invited guests, residents watching from home, and the people of George — good morning.

Before I continue, Mr Speaker, allow me to officially welcome our newly sworn-in councillors, Councillor Druzelda Jantjies and Councillor Nomawethu Lugodlo to the George Municipal Council. To our “Chosen One” from Uniondale, Councillor Jarques Esau — welcome back to Council in your new and improved capacity. We are glad to have you here. The opportunity to serve the residents of George is both an honour and a privilege, but mostly it is one that must be carried out with the utmost respect and responsibility. I trust that each of you will honour this responsibility to the best of your ability. Welcome, and I wish you the best.

Mnr. Speaker, vanoggend wil ek ook ons genooide gaste erken. Tussen ons sit ’n tapisserie van lewende geskiedenis — geskiedenis wat hier in die gebied wat ons as Pacaltsdorp ken, gebore is. Afstammeling van Eerste Nasie-volke, pioniers, rugbylegendes en gemeenskapsbouers sit vandag tussen ons. Dit is ’n voorreg om u vanoggend hier by ons te verwelkom.

Mr. Speaker, allow me also to give special acknowledgement to the members of our Community Relief Forum, who during difficult times, continued to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our municipality and our residents. Your support, your willingness to step in during times of crisis, and your commitment to our communities do not go unnoticed.

Mr Speaker, I recently established an initiative called the “Mayoral Blitz,” which focuses on service delivery IN our communities. Our directors, officials and the Mayoral Committee take to the streets to identify service delivery challenges firsthand and ensure that they are attended to.

We kicked off our first Mayoral Blitz in Uniondale earlier this month, we conversed with residents. Our residents want to be heard; our residents want to engage with leadership that is present. Our residents want government that does not only arrive during certain periods, and this is exactly why these Mayoral Blitzes matter.

These engagements are not about photo opportunities — although some may prefer to call me the “Facebook Mayor” — but rather about listening directly to residents, understanding their frustrations, seeing challenges for ourselves, and ensuring that action follows immediately.

Because what good is leadership if it cannot be seen where people are struggling?

That is exactly what Listen. Act. Deliver. means.

It means leadership must be visible.

It means government must be accessible.

And it means residents must see results.

Mr. Speaker, it has been some time since my last mayoral address, and during this period, I have spent much of my time in our communities – especially during the devastating storms that struck our municipal area earlier this month.

When the first weather warnings came through, our emergency teams immediately activated disaster response measures. Stormwater systems were cleaned, catchment pits cleared, and teams moved through communities to reduce the risk of flooding.

But what followed was far worse than anyone anticipated.

After the heavy rains came destructive winds that caused devastation across our municipal area. Not one specific area – every community felt the impact. Trees that had stood for more than a hundred years came crashing down. Homes were damaged. Infrastructure was destroyed. Tragically, lives were lost.

Today, our thoughts and prayers remain with the families who lost loved ones during this difficult time.

But in the middle of this disaster, we also saw the very best of George.

We saw municipal officials working day and night in dangerous conditions to restore services. We saw firefighters, engineers, law enforcement officers, disaster teams, and support staff putting residents first.

In some areas, including Blanco and Wilderness, entire infrastructure networks had to be rebuilt. Many of our farming communities had to wait for Eskom to restore electricity supply. Families lost their homes and had to be accommodated in municipal halls.

And during all of this, I made it my personal mission to be on the ground with residents – whether it was to assist, support, or simply to stand with people during a very difficult time.

I remember visiting one of the temporary shelters shortly after the storm. Families were sitting together, uncertain of what came next, worried about their homes, worried about their children. Yet even in that moment, residents were helping one another — sharing food, blankets, and comfort. That reminded me that the true strength of George is not found in buildings or infrastructure, but in our people.

But once the storm passed, something remarkable happened.

Our businesses, community organisations, churches, volunteers, and residents came together through the #GeorgeCleanUp initiative. Businesses contacted my office asking: “Where can we help? What can we do?”

That spirit of unity is what makes George special.

To every official, every volunteer, every business, every organisation, and every resident who assisted in any way – thank you. George is stronger because of you.

Mr. Speaker, allow me now to briefly update Council and residents on the work being done across our departments.

Community Safety and Mobility

Our law enforcement teams assisted in the arrest of twelve suspects linked to crimes including robbery, cable theft, and damage to municipal infrastructure.

Our teams also assisted the NSRI at Victoria Bay during a rescue operation involving three individuals and a dog.

Mr Speaker, I must speak directly to residents about cable theft.

Cable theft is crippling our infrastructure. After the storm, damaged infrastructure became an easy target for criminals. But this affects all of us. When cables are stolen, residents lose electricity, services are interrupted, and taxpayers carry the cost of repairs.

We cannot allow this to continue.

I urge residents: if you see suspicious activity, report it immediately. These criminals are not only stealing from our municipality — they are stealing from our communities, from pensioners trying to keep their lights on, from businesses trying to operate, and from families trying to go about their daily lives.

I am also proud to report that our CCTV systems continue to produce excellent results. Since the start of the year, 42 arrests have been made through cooperation between our CCTV operators, Law Enforcement, and SAPS.

This is proof that investing in smart infrastructure helps us fight crime and protect residents.

Our Fire and Disaster Management teams have also been hard at work preparing firebreaks to protect communities against future veld and mountain fires.

During the recent storms, these teams played a critical role in disaster response and recovery efforts.

I want to sincerely thank our Director, Ms Lee-Anne Meiring, MMC Alderman Cronje, and every official in this department. Your dedication keeps our residents safe.

Community Services

Mr Speaker, after the fire at the George Transfer Station, demolition of the damaged structure officially began in March.

Temporary transfer operations are fully functional to ensure waste services continue uninterrupted while work progresses toward a new transfer station facility.

We have also begun work on the compost facility project and expanded efforts to divert green waste away from landfill sites. This is an important step toward environmental sustainability and more efficient waste management.

What this means for residents is simple: cleaner communities, less waste going to landfill sites, and a municipality that is planning responsibly for the future.

Earlier this month, we also took delivery of a new skip truck that is already serving our communities.

Our Library Services division has also been making a meaningful impact through the YearBeyond “Yeboneers” programme, which created opportunities for 16 unemployed young people across libraries in Blanco, Pacaltsdorp, Thembaletu, George, and Uniondale.

A huge thank you to our team at Community Services, Acting Director Doctor Kosie Haarhoff, MMCs Erika Brown and Melvin Roelfse for your continued service to our communities.

Corporate Services

Our HR Department hosted a successful Employee Wellness Day and conducted outreach programmes in Uniondale to educate staff and residents about recruitment processes, CV writing, and employment opportunities.

Mr Speaker, this is exactly the kind of outreach we must continue expanding — empowering residents with information and helping them access opportunities.

Because for many young people, opportunity starts with access to information.

Our Internal Audit team also achieved full conformance with Global Internal Audit Standards — an achievement only a few institutions have managed to accomplish.

This may sound technical, but what it really means is that your municipality continues striving for accountability, transparency, and good governance.

Thank you to our Director and Acting Municipal Manager, Mr. Bevan Ellman, MMC Ald Johan Du Toit and the entire team at Corporate Services.

Electrotechnical Services

Mr Speaker, one of the departments hardest hit by the storm was Electrotechnical Services.

Yet despite the immense pressure, this department continues to position George as a leader in energy resilience and innovation.

To date, the municipality has received more than 1 200 Small-Scale Embedded Generation applications. Over 450 applications have already been approved, representing nearly 24 megawatts of alternative energy generation.

Simply put, more residents and businesses are now becoming part of the solution by generating their own electricity and feeding power back into the system.

We have also reduced the cost of smart meters by more than 50% and increased the electricity export tariff to R1.03 per kWh for consumers who wish to export excess energy from 1 July 2026.

Mr Speaker, we have also made significant progress with both our short-term and long-term Independent Power Producer programmes.

In simple terms, this means the municipality is working toward securing additional electricity supply from alternative providers so that we are less dependent on Eskom over time.

The short-term IPP process is currently in its final adjudication stages, while our long-term 20-year programme continues progressing through the necessary technical and financial processes.

Why is this important?

Because we are working toward reducing dependence on Eskom and protecting residents against rising electricity costs.

During our recent budget public participation meetings, many residents expressed frustration about electricity tariff increases.

And they are right to be frustrated.

This year, I wrote directly to NERSA to explain that our residents cannot continue carrying the burden of failures elsewhere in the system.

Unfortunately, those concerns were ignored.

But as a municipality that listens, acts, and delivers, we decided that we would not simply pass every increase directly onto residents. Instead, we chose to absorb part of that burden ourselves through the draft budget.

That is what responsible local government looks like.

It means standing with residents during difficult times.

It means finding solutions instead of excuses.

And it means understanding that behind every tariff increase is a family trying to make ends meet.

I want to commend Mr Michael Rhode, MMC Monique Simmers, and the entire Electrotechnical team for their outstanding work — especially during the storm response.

Human Settlements

Mr Speaker, housing delivery remains one of the most important priorities for our residents.

Progress continues across several projects in Themba lethu, Metro Grounds, and Erf 325, where homes are being completed and handed over to beneficiaries.

- Themba lethu USIP is a R21.5 million project which has already seen 46 homes being handed over with 31 units awaiting connection services and 23 units are in their final stages of completion.
- ERF 325 in Pacaltsdorp, a R61 million project has already delivered more than 400 homes to residents, including military veterans, persons living with disabilities, and BNG beneficiaries. A further 95 units are nearing completion.
- Metro Grounds, a R162 million project, has already delivered more than 500 homes. An additional 120 homes have been completed, with 48 units still requiring occupation certificates.
- Themba lethu UISP Area 1, a R20 million project, has commenced with the installation of roads, water, and sanitation services to 114 sites.

Our Human Settlements teams also distributed emergency relief kits to residents affected by the storms. The demand increased dramatically during May, with more than 2 300 emergency kits distributed.

We also hosted a title deed handover drive where 192 title deeds were handed over to beneficiaries — giving families ownership, security, and peace of mind.

To our Human Settlements officials: thank you. Director Mr Phosa, MMC Jean Safers, and the entire team — you worked in terrible weather conditions to ensure families had shelter, support, and dignity during their time of need.

Planning and Development

Mr Speaker, the review of our Municipal Spatial Development Framework is now underway and will help shape the future growth and development of George.

New industrial sites are also being developed in the Metro and Gwayang areas to create opportunities for economic growth and job creation. The sites in the Metro area will be available for development within the next 18 months.

Residents have consistently asked for more economic opportunities, more investment, and more jobs.

We listened.

We acted.

And now we are delivering.

George continues to experience strong growth in both residential and commercial development. More than 1 500 building plans have already been approved this year. We have finalised 214 land-use applications this year with 66 in the third quarter alone, and issued 471 certificates of occupancy during the same period.

People are choosing George because they can see that this municipality works.

They can see service delivery.

They can see infrastructure investment.

And they can see a municipality that genuinely cares about its residents.

Mr Speaker, climate change also remains a serious concern for our municipality. This is why we have submitted River Management Plans for environmental authorisation, and we are also making progress on our Climate Action Plan with stakeholder engagement set to take place over the next six months.

Last year we were dealing with drought conditions. Just months later, we faced severe flooding. Today, our dam levels stand above 90%.

This reminds us that we cannot afford to ignore changing weather patterns. We must continue planning responsibly and building resilience for the future.

Again, thank you to Mr. Phosa, the team at planning and development and MMC Gert Niehaus for your work in this department.

Mr. Speaker, when I look back at the past few months, I do not only see storms, damaged infrastructure, or difficult times and challenges.

I see resilience, the ability to remain standing through all that we face.

I see municipal workers who give their all.

I see communities helping one another, businesses stepping forward to assist.

I see councillors helping where they can, but most importantly, I see all of us, the residents of this great municipality who continue to believe and build the future of George, together.

And that is why I remain hopeful.

Because the story of George is not a story of people waiting for change.

It is a story of people creating progress together.

May we continue moving George forward.

May we continue building a municipality where every resident can live with dignity, work with opportunity, and feel safe raising their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.