INAUGURAL COUNCIL MEETING ADDRESS

Executive Mayor of George Municipality
Alderman Browen Johnson

Mr Speaker, Minister and Members of Parliament, Aldermen, Councillors, our Acting Municipal Manager, officials, members of the gallery, those watching online, and most importantly, the residents of George – good morning.

As we observe protocol and formally begin this new term of Council, allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Alderman Browen Johnson, the Executive Mayor of George Municipality.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

As we turn the page and move into a new term, I want to start by acknowledging the One who matters most in my life: God.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of life, for allowing us to see another day and for giving me the opportunity to serve this great city. Thank You for the trust You have placed in me and for the responsibility You have entrusted to me. I do not take it for granted.

One of my favourite passages in the Bible is Psalm 23. This morning, it feels especially appropriate:

Die Here is my herder; niks sal my ontbreek nie.
Hy laat my neerlê in groen weivelde en lei my na waters waar rus is.
Hy verkwik my siel en lei my in die spore van geregtigheid om sy Naam ontwil.
Al gaan ek in 'n dal van doodskaduwee, vrees ek geen onheil nie, want U is met my; u stok en u staf vertroos my.
U berei 'n tafel voor my teenoor my teëstanders, maak my hoof vet met olie, en my beker loop oor.
Net goedheid en guns sal my volg al die dae van my lewe, en ek sal in die huis van die Here bly in lengte van dae.

Hierdie Psalm herinner ons dat die Here saam met ons stap. Hy lei ons, Hy beskerm ons en Hy gee vir ons krag, selfs wanneer die pad vorentoe nie maklik is nie.

And that is something I hold close to my heart. This journey has had its challenges, and I know that the road ahead will not always be easy. But I go into this new term

with faith, with gratitude and with the belief that I have been given this opportunity for a reason.

Thank You, Lord, for Your guidance, Your blessings and Your protection. My prayer is that I will serve with humility, make the right decisions and fulfil this responsibility to the very best of my ability. Amen.

I also want to take a moment to thank my family.

To my incredible wife, Lucille: thank you for standing beside me and being my rock throughout this journey. You have carried a lot with me, often behind the scenes, and I know that the demands of public office do not always make family life easy. I appreciate you more than words can say.

And to my three beautiful children, Calum, Ava-Mae and Levi: I know it has not always been easy having Daddy away from home so often. Thank you for your patience, your support and even for your curiosity about what the election results mean. I think we have three budding political analysts in the house now, Lucille – en dit gaan nog vir ons probleme gee!

To the Democratic Alliance, the party I represent, thank you to our Provincial Leader, Minister Tertuis Simmers; our Regional Chairperson, Venolea Fortuin; Honourable Dirk Wessels; Honourable Nomafrench Mbombo; and every provincial, regional and local leader who played a part in the DA's success in George.

To every activist, our campaign team, the Bomb Squad, and the David Kramer kombi crew, Sean August, Bra Joe – our new Speaker – and every person who gave their time, energy and resources: thank you. Some people knocked on doors, some made calls, some put up posters, some organised, some donated, and many simply kept going when the days were long. Every contribution mattered. This victory belongs to all of you.

But, most importantly, I want to thank the people who gave us the mandate to lead George with an outright majority: the residents of this municipality.

Thank you for believing in me, for believing in the team of councillors we put forward, and for believing in our commitment to Listen. Act. Deliver.

You helped us grow our support from 46% in 2021 to 50.3% in 2026. That is significant growth, and we do not take it lightly. It is much more than an election result. It is a vote of confidence in the work that has been done, but it is also a clear expectation that we must do more, and do better.

And let me be very clear: I am the Executive Mayor of George Municipality, and I am the Mayor for ALL the residents of George.

That includes the people who voted for the DA, and those who did not. It includes every ward, every neighbourhood and every community in our municipal area. My responsibility does not stop at the boundary of a ward or at the political choices people make. Every resident deserves to be heard, treated with respect and served fairly.

I will work with and respect everyone who wants to move George forward. Where we can improve, let us have the conversation. Where we have missed the mark, I am willing to be called out – respectfully and constructively – because the goal must always be to find solutions.

But let me also make this clear: this municipality will not be run through social media campaigns and mudslinging. We will deal with facts, we will do the work and we will communicate what we are doing. Residents have every right to know how we are using the mandate they have given us.

When I became Executive Mayor a year ago, my message was simple: I will be a Mayor who listens, acts and delivers. Those three words are easy to say, but they carry a serious responsibility.

- Listen to our residents. Understand their concerns and hear what our communities are telling us.
- Act decisively. Listening means very little if we do not follow it with action.
- Deliver real improvements and results that make a difference in people's everyday lives.

That commitment does not end with an election. It does not change because we have a new Council, and it certainly does not change because we have secured an outright majority.

We have a mandate, we have a plan, and we have a lot of work to do. So, Mr Speaker, let me set out the priorities that will guide our work, particularly during my first 100 days and throughout this term.

FIRST PRIORITY: A SAFER AND CLEANER GEORGE

We want to reclaim our streets and restore pride in our city. Residents must be able to walk through their neighbourhoods, use public spaces and feel that their municipality cares about the places where they live.

Over the next 100 days, residents will see us:

- Launch a major clean-up initiative, starting in our CBD.
- Apply the principles of the Broken Windows Theory: deal with neglected spaces, broken infrastructure and urban decay before these problems become bigger and more difficult to manage.
- Engage other spheres of government to facilitate the transfer of abandoned or dilapidated government-owned buildings to George Municipality, where possible and appropriate.
- Develop a coordinated programme with relevant stakeholders to address homelessness, with dignity, rehabilitation and sustainable solutions at its centre.
- Revitalise the CBD and make George cleaner, more attractive and welcoming.
- Strengthen the fight against cable theft and the vandalism of municipal infrastructure.
- Review our security and crime-prevention approach.
- Strengthen community participation and neighbourhood watch structures.
- Make the best use of municipal resources, including our 24/7 law enforcement component and the Integrated Operations Centre.

The message is simple: we are taking our streets back, restoring community pride and working towards safer neighbourhoods.

Through my engagements with communities, both as Mayor and on the campaign trail, one thing has become clear: our residents know where the problems are. More importantly, they often have practical ideas about how those problems can be solved. Sometimes, what is needed is simply for us to listen.

Let me give you two examples. The Maraiskamp Neighbourhood Watch approached me with a very real problem: they needed transport to assist with their patrols. The DA stepped in and delivered a motorbike to help them do exactly that.

Then there is Leanda from Conville, who approached me during a Mayoral Blitz about a dilapidated house and the danger it posed to her community. Our teams engaged with the matter to establish what could be done and how we could assist. The work is not yet finished, and we must keep following up until we have a clear outcome.

These are practical examples of what happens when residents speak up and when we respond. Building safer neighbourhoods is not something government can do on its own. We have to do it alongside our residents.

So, tell us where the problems are and where you need our help. Keep engaging with us. We need open, honest and respectful dialogue.

SECOND PRIORITY: JOBS, INVESTMENT AND HOUSING

Our focus is to make George one of the best places in South Africa to do business, attract investment and create opportunities. I want the words 'George' and 'ease of doing business' to go hand in hand.

Now, I want to make something very clear, regardless of what other political parties may have promised during the election campaign. We heard some very interesting promises. But let us be honest with our residents: the mandate of a municipality is not to create jobs directly.

Mense, dit is nie die munisipaliteit se mandaat om vir elke inwoner 'n werk te gee nie. Ons verantwoordelikheid is om die regte omstandighede te skep sodat besighede kan groei, beleggers na George kan kom en werksgeleenthede vir ons mense geskep kan word.

That means reliable services, well-maintained infrastructure and an environment where investors want to open businesses and grow. Those businesses create jobs and employ people.

That does not mean we sit back and do nothing about unemployment. There are practical programmes through which we can help residents gain experience, access opportunities and become more visible in the job market.

Under this priority, we will:

- Extend the Job Seeker Voucher Programme to Uniondale and Haarlem.
- Expand Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) opportunities, particularly in rural and peripheral communities. EPWP must help people gain valuable experience and give households an opportunity to put bread and butter on the table. It was never created to enrich a few people with comfortable salaries.
- Remove unnecessary administrative bottlenecks in land-use applications and building-plan approvals.
- Improve communication between developers, businesses, residents and the municipality.
- Make George a leading municipality when it comes to ease of doing business.

When it comes to unlocking housing and development opportunities, I want us to prioritise:

- The Erf 325 West housing development.
- Unlocking housing opportunities along the York and Beach Road restructuring zone.
- Expediting the Old Crocodile Farm Social Housing development.
- Advancing the Gwaing Mixed-Use Development.
- Moving forward with the remainder of Rosedale Erf 325 East and the development planned for the Delville Park area.

On housing, I want to set an ambitious target: to halve the current valid housing waiting list within five years, supported by a credible housing delivery pipeline.

I know housing is one of the biggest challenges facing our communities. I know that many residents have been waiting for years for an opportunity to own a home. We cannot make empty promises, but we can set clear targets, plan properly and work hard to deliver more homes.

As George grows, our infrastructure must keep up. More people are moving here, businesses are investing and our communities are expanding. That growth must be supported by the roads, water and sanitation infrastructure people rely on every day.

On bulk infrastructure and roads, I want us to:

- Expedite the Gwaing Wastewater Treatment Works upgrades, including exploring public-private partnerships to help us reach our goals.
- Finalise the new Herolds Bay pump station and sanitation plant.
- Drive the R8 billion roads-related BFI programme.
- Prioritise the Rand Street extension, linking Metrogrounds with Pacaltsdorp and Thembalethu.
- Kick-start the multi-year Hansmoeskraal (Beach Road) to Gwaing River Mouth Road project.

On water security, I want us to:

- Advance the ultrafiltration plant and the plans to top up the Garden Route Dam by between 10 and 20 megalitres.
- Continue borehole exploration and development.
- Progress the Malgaskraal Dam as additional raw-water storage.
- Get the Wilderness Catchment Project underway.
- Upgrade the existing Wilderness Water Treatment Works to strengthen our resilience and work towards 100% local water supply.

Residents need to understand why this investment matters. Infrastructure is not just about pipes, roads, treatment plants or construction projects. It is about making sure our municipality can grow, businesses can invest, people can access opportunities and our communities receive the services they need.

Investment in infrastructure helps unlock further investment. Investment creates businesses, businesses create jobs, and jobs create dignity and opportunity.

My commitment is to keep attracting investment across our entire municipal area – not only in the CBD, but from George to Pacaltsdorp, Thembalethu, Uniondale, Haarlem and every community in between.

THIRD PRIORITY: AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE ELECTRICITY

Under this priority, we will focus on reducing our dependence on Eskom and managing the cost of electricity.

Residents will remember the letter I wrote to NERSA earlier this year. I made it clear that our residents cannot be expected to carry the cost of Eskom's mistakes and failures.

NERSA responded that the increases would proceed, regardless of what our residents could afford. To that, I say: we cannot keep allowing decisions to be made that place an ever-greater financial burden on our households and businesses.

Our residents are already feeling the pressure of the cost of living. Electricity is not a luxury. It is something households and businesses depend on every day. That is why we must take greater control of our energy future.

To do so, I want us to focus on:

- Following through on our Independent Power Producer (IPP) procurement process.
- Introducing a hybrid electricity supply model.
- Improving control over the different cost components that contribute to electricity tariffs.
- Focusing on long-term energy security and affordability for households and businesses.

We simply must reduce our dependence on Eskom and ease the pressure of rising electricity costs on residents and businesses. We must build a more sustainable energy future for George.

FOURTH PRIORITY: EXCELLENT MUNICIPAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Here, I want to focus on breaking down silos and building a municipality that works.

Residents do not care which department is responsible for a problem. They care whether the problem gets solved. They do not experience departments. They experience one municipality.

That is why I want us to:

- Restructure departments where necessary to improve performance and accountability.
- Break down departmental silos.
- Improve coordination between political leadership and the administration.
- Build a culture of caring, responsive and professional municipal employees.
- Ensure that staff take pride in serving residents.
- Improve efficiency, productivity and accountability.
- Put residents and ratepayers at the centre of every municipal decision.

I want every official to understand that when a resident walks through our doors, makes a phone call or reports a problem, they are not dealing with one department in isolation. They are dealing with George Municipality.

We must operate as one team, work towards the same goals and take pride in the name we represent. Our residents deserve a municipality that responds, takes responsibility and follows through. That is the standard we must set for ourselves.

FIFTH PRIORITY: EXPANDING GO GEORGE AND INTEGRATED TRANSPORT

Our aim is to connect communities, improve mobility and open up more opportunities for people across our municipal area.

Transport is about much more than getting from one place to another. It is about connecting people to jobs, education, healthcare, businesses and the services they need.

Under this priority, I want us to:

- Roll out the Thembalethu–CBD route.
- Advance the George CBD–Wilderness route.
- Progress the Touwsranten and Kleinkrantz routes.
- Continue with all outstanding GO GEORGE routes.
- Expedite the Integrated Transport Plan.

- Address operating permits and regulatory arrangements for e-hailing services and other transport operators.
- Pursue rebates for pensioners and scholars.

Our communities must be better connected. Whether you live in the CBD, Thembalethu, Pacaltsdorp, Touwsranten, Kleinkrantz, Uniondale or Haarlem, access to reliable transport can make a real difference to your daily life.

We want a transport system that gives people more options, connects communities and helps residents reach the opportunities available to them.

SIXTH PRIORITY: ESTABLISHING GEORGE AS THE SPORTS MECCA OF THE GARDEN ROUTE

Mr Speaker, if there is one thing I know about George, it is that our people love sport. And that suits me just fine, because I am a sports lover myself! Although, for now, I think I am done supporting Manchester United. Eish!

I am committed to establishing George as the Sports Mecca of the Garden Route.

We are blessed with sporting talent, facilities, natural assets and opportunities across our municipal area. These are gems that we must recognise, invest in and develop. We have a responsibility to turn these assets into opportunities, give local talent greater exposure and make sure our communities are included and represented on the biggest possible stages.

Sport must not only be something we watch. It must be something our communities can participate in, take pride in and use to create opportunities for themselves.

This is a major priority for us. We will focus on the following:

- Make provision in the budget, particularly through the adjustment budget, to appoint a consultant to develop a comprehensive sports master plan for George.
- Invest in our very own Easter tournament: the Bevin Fortuin Easter Tournament.
- Build on the success and growing popularity of Vlakkie Cricket by investing in the sport and supporting its professionalisation and long-term development in our municipal area.
- Establish a task team to formalise the Pacaltsdorp Heritage Osgat Trail. And let me be clear: we are not selling coastal heritage-sensitive land to developers. We are still working towards procuring the relevant sensitive erf from the Garden Route District Municipality so that it can be retained for communal access.
- Continue the roll-out and development of the George Festival.

This is a particularly personal priority for me because sport is so deeply rooted in our communities. Sport connects people. It brings different communities together, creates a sense of belonging and gives young people opportunities to discover their potential.

Whether it is on a rugby field, a cricket pitch, an athletics track or a trail, there is talent in George that deserves to be seen, supported and given the opportunity to grow.

It was fantastic to host our rugby clubs in the Council Chamber, where they signed a letter of intent to be part of the Bevin Fortuin Easter Tournament. This tournament will honour a man who took Blanco and George to great heights during his career. A man who once sat as a councillor in these very seats, but, most importantly, a man who meant so much to his family and community. We have a responsibility to get the planning right and to keep his name alive through something that will benefit our people.

I am also excited about the continued development of the George Festival, which will take place from 12 to 16 December 2026 across our beautiful city. It is another opportunity to showcase our culture, arts and sporting talent, attract visitors and bring our communities together.

We must be ambitious about what George can become. We should not simply be a municipality that hosts sporting events. We should be a municipality that develops sporting opportunities, nurtures talent and attracts events that put George firmly on the map.

That is how we build a sporting destination. That is how we establish George as the Sports Mecca of the Garden Route.

CLOSING: THE WORK CONTINUES

Mr Speaker, as I bring this address to a close, I want to remind this Council and the residents of George that this is a new chapter for our municipality.

The election is behind us. The campaigning is over. The people have spoken, and they have given the Democratic Alliance a clear mandate to continue leading George.

We accept that mandate with gratitude, but also with a deep understanding of the responsibility that comes with it.

To my DA caucus: we have worked hard to earn the trust of the people of George. Now we must work even harder to honour it. We must remain focused, united and committed to the promises we made. An outright majority is not a licence to become comfortable. It is a responsibility to deliver even more.

To the new Council: we may not always agree, and we do not have to. We come from different political parties and represent different communities, but we all have a responsibility to the people of George. I will always make room for constructive debate, honest engagement and ideas that move our municipality forward. But let us never lose sight of why we are here.

And to the residents of George: thank you for your trust. Trust is not something we can simply claim because we won an election. It is something we must earn every day – through the decisions we make, the problems we solve and the difference you can see in your own neighbourhoods.

The six priorities I have outlined today are not simply a list of projects or promises. They represent the kind of municipality we want to build.

A safer and cleaner George, where residents can feel proud of their streets and neighbourhoods.

A George that attracts jobs and investment, creates opportunities and makes meaningful progress in addressing our housing challenges.

A municipality that works towards affordable and sustainable electricity, giving households and businesses greater security and reducing the pressure on their pockets.

A municipality that delivers excellent services, where departments work together and residents are treated with the care, respect and urgency they deserve.

A better-connected George through the expansion of GO GEORGE and integrated transport, ensuring that more people can access jobs, education, healthcare and opportunities.

And a George that embraces its identity as the Sports Mecca of the Garden Route, where we invest in talent, develop opportunities, bring communities together and showcase everything our people and our municipality have to offer.

These priorities are connected. They are all about improving the everyday lives of our residents and making George a better place to live, work, invest and visit.

I know we will not get everything right every time. There will be challenges, difficult decisions and moments when the road ahead is not easy. But we will not lose sight of the responsibility entrusted to us, and we will not stop working to make George better.

I want residents to hold us accountable. Speak to us. Tell us when something is not working. And expect us to respond.

Because Listen. Act. Deliver. is not just a slogan on a poster or a campaign banner. It is a promise about how we intend to govern.

When you raise a concern, we must listen.

When your community faces a problem, we must act.

And when we make a commitment, we must deliver – so that you can see and feel the difference in your everyday life.

That is what this next term must be about. Not simply talking about what we want to achieve, but showing residents what we are doing to achieve it.

I started this address by thanking God for the opportunity to serve. I end by recognising that this opportunity is not mine alone. It is a responsibility entrusted to us by the people of George.

The mandate has been given. The work continues.

To every resident, in every ward and every community: we hear you, we are ready to act, and we are committed to delivering.

Let us get to work. Let us build on what we have achieved, address what still needs to change and move George forward – together.

We listened. We acted. We delivered. And in this new term, with a new Council and a clear mandate from our residents, we will listen even more, act with greater urgency and deliver even more.

Because the people of George deserve a municipality that does not just make promises, but keeps them.

The next chapter starts now. Let’s make it count.

Thank you.