

Johannesburg: Doing the best for residents in informal settlements

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The City of Johannesburg is exploring innovative ways of relocating residents living on unsuitable land to more user-friendly neighbourhoods within easy reach of public amenities.

Recently Executive Mayor Clr Parks Tau, Member of the Mayoral Committee on Housing Clr Dan Bovu and several senior housing officials visited their counterparts in the City of Tshwane for knowledge exchange on the issue.

Both cities share similar challenges when it comes to suitable land for relocation to areas in the proximity of developed localities, shortage of burial land, flooding, migration and inner city regeneration.

Mayor Tau and his delegation went to Tshwane solely to gain first-hand experience on the model their counterparts were using to relocate informal settlements households, acquire the necessary funding and engage communities.

An interesting aspect of the City of Tshwane's model is the one that pertains to the conversion of vacated land into a green space within seven days after households have been moved to avoid the area being reoccupied. Where possible, the residents are relocated to not more than 10 kilometres away from other developments and public amenities.

Johannesburg is faced with a challenge of informal settlements that need relocation either because they are prone to flooding or existing tensions between the informal settlers and locals. High levels of crime have also been cited as a reason the City would want to relocate residents of informal settlements. The settlements in question include Sol Plaaityje, Hospital Hill, Zandspruit, Fleurhof, Marlboro, Tshepisoong, Ivory Park and Kya Sands.

During intensive engagement sessions with residents of the various settlements, facilitated by Clr Bovu, a number of issues identified as critical were highlighted. These, according to Clr Bovu,

included:

- Inadequate service delivery
- The lack of information regarding both current and proposed projects in the area
- Residents' limited or lack of knowledge or understanding of applicable planning processes and systems influencing the delivery process
- High demand for housing delivery, not just access to services

“Some of these settlements continue to grow even after we have numbered them. This increases the pressure on service delivery,” Clr Bovu said.

The intention of the engagements and assessments was to understand the situation at hand and determine the best possible course of action for each settlement in relation to the integrated development planning processes, concluded Clr Bovu.

These efforts are part of the City’s Vision 2040, which wants see Johannesburg establishing neighbourhoods “where all can find a place to live a good quality of life with access to work and social amenities – clinics, libraries and public squares”.

According to the vision, the City will “work towards the upliftment of well-located informal settlements. It will develop an alternative housing model to the RDP settlements [and] ensure well-located neighbourhoods with housing that is denser and more varied”.