

NO CLITTER FOR SOLLY

Red carpet
packed away
for speech;
cash to go on
service delivery

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EXPECT no red carpet to be rolled out this year when city mayor Solly Msimanga delivers his maiden State of the Capital Address on April 6 at the Tshwane Events Centre.

The plan was to do things slightly different under the DA-led administration, Msimanga told the Pretoria News.

"We are not going to have a big ceremony with the red carpet and all of that. It is not what I want to do. Yes, there will be other things that have traditionally been done; I am told some of these things have to happen," he said.

Msimanga was speaking exclusively to the Pretoria News ahead of his first State of the Capital Address in nine days' time.

Under the former ANC government in the city, the State of the Capital Address was a massive event and one to look forward to. It was held at Freedom Park in a large marquee set up for the occasion.

But Msimanga said he was not concerned with making the occasion a special event, and uppermost in his mind would be putting together a realistic budget to fund service delivery projects.

"I don't want to repeat the mistakes that had been made by the previous administration," he said.

One of the mistakes of his predecessor was to have little budget for infrastructure maintenance, he said.

"We will introduce a serious maintenance budget. We don't only need to replace our old infrastructure, but we also need to maintain it," he said.

The maintenance budget will address common problems of electricity outages and burst water pipes. Msimanga said it was important for his administration not to make lofty promises that were unrealistic.

"It won't help us to announce a whole lot of mega projects that we know are not going to be happening and disappoint our people yet again," he said.

The mega projects to be announced were those the city had already done feasibility studies on, he said.

"I want to make sure that we have a realistic budget going forward; that we begin to address some of the aspirations for our people in a realistic manner," according to Msimanga.

The mayor said his speech would talk to problems experienced by squatter camp dwellers. "I will talk about the services that should be going to informal settlements," he said. A housing project, to be funded by the provincial government, would be among the huge announcements.

"It will allow the city to demonstrate its ability to build houses here within the city," he said.

He would also talk about improving the city's revenue collection mechanism. "I will also talk to the issue of how we can collect as much revenue as we can in order for us to roll out more projects that can take the capital city forward."

Msimanga has recently been emphasising plans to attract new investors to the city, with a view to create more jobs and revitalise the economy. There were already big investors who had shown interest in doing business in the capital, he said.

"We met some of them last week,

and I will meet some of them later today." He refused to divulge where the investors were from.

Potential investors in the city were looking for opportunities, including developing empty buildings and industrial sites, such as Babelagi in Hammanskraal.

Msimanga admitted that the city was in dire financial straits, but he also said there were plans to recover from it.

"We inherited problems and it is not going to take 24 hours to resolve them. But I am glad over the changes that we have started affecting. We have begun saving quite a lot of money," he said.

In terms of job creation, Msimanga said the city intended cutting top management jobs to free some of the money.

"By freeing some money, we would be able to hire more people

who are doing jobs on the ground." He said his job-creation strategy included partnerships with two embassies. These would focus on training the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) beneficiaries.

Msimanga said it was important to impart entrepreneurial skills to the EPWP beneficiaries because the nature of their work was temporary.

The city would soon also launch

an anti-hijack unit within the metro police.

Msimanga said: "We will also be beefing up our cable theft unit. Every day we have copper cable being stolen."

A crime-fighting campaign involving communities will also be introduced.

"When crime is committed and cables are stolen it is the community that suffer," he said.