

Joburg to expropriate buildings

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JOBURG mayor Herman Mashaba said the city would be commencing with plans to expropriate derelict buildings in the inner city.

Mashaba said the move was in line with a drive to rejuvenate the area and “ensure that we are able to develop quality low-cost housing, student accommodation, and affordable rental space for small businesses”.

He said the city’s group for-ensics and investigations services unit had made inroads into property hijackings in the inner city, with 15 property hijackers arrested and 12 properties returned to owners. Nine criminal dockets were before the courts, while a property hijacker and his accomplice, an attorney, had been convicted of fraud and sentenced to 15 years and eight years in prison respectively.

“To ensure this challenge is addressed holistically, it is imperative that cases of property hijackings are dealt with both criminally and civilly. The process includes the criminal prosecution of the hijackers, as well as civil litigation to address the issues of by-law compliance and the city potentially taking over ownership of these buildings,” Mashaba said.

The mayor said the redevelopment of properties would enhance access to low-cost, affordable housing for residents close to economic opportunities.

He said the city had an estimated 300 000 housing unit backlog, 158 000 individuals on the housing waiting list, an estimated 190 informal settlements, while an estimated 3 000 individuals migrated to Joburg every month.

Mashaba said it was key to find new, innovative ways to address the crisis.

“Unfortunately, some properties have been abandoned and the owners cannot be traced. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the city to ensure compliance with applicable by-laws, which in turn contributes to the degradation of the urban environment.”

Mashaba said he had written to former public works minister Nathi Nhleko requesting an agreement with his department in which it would name the city as its nominee for the transfer of abandoned properties in Joburg.

“I can confirm that the former minister’s office has received our correspondence and is in the process of considering the matter,” Mashaba said.

“Given recent political shifts within the department, I hope that the new minister, Thulas Nxesi, will give our request his full attention.” – African News Agency (ANA)