

# City of Joburg to expropriate derelict buildings

**JOBURG –** The City of Johannesburg is going ahead with plans to expropriate derelict buildings in the inner city.

Executive Mayor Herman Mashaba said where owners of hijacked properties can be found, the City will consider entering into compliance agreements if the owners are willing and able to cooperate with the City to revamp their properties.

Should these property owners be unwilling or unable to enter into such agreements, the City will not hesitate to commence expropriation proceedings in court, he said. "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 as well as the City potentially taking over ownership of these buildings," Mashaba said. The mayor said 48 matters, including expropriation and abandonment agreements, are currently being investigated by the City for civil proceedings.

The redevelopment of such properties will help the City to enhance access to low-cost, affordable housing close to economic opportunities.

As of December last year, 265 buildings have been reported to the City as being hijacked. Since investigations by the Group Forensic and Investigation Service Unit into these properties started, 15 property hijackers have been arrested, 12 properties have been returned to owners, nine criminal dockets are

currently before the courts and a property hijacker and his accomplice were convicted of fraud and sentenced to 15 years and eight years in prison respectively.

"Far too many residents living in these derelict buildings are forced to survive under inhabitable and inhumane conditions, infringing on their rights to dignity."

Mashaba said that where the owners of hijacked buildings cannot be found, the City intends to have the property declared abandoned and to register the property in the name of the state. With an estimated 3 000 migrants moving to Joburg every month, it is no secret that the City is facing a 300 000 housing unit backlog. "It is therefore key for us to find new, innovative ways to address this crisis," Mashaba said.

The mayor said he had written to the former Minister of Public Works, Nathi Nhleko, to request that an agreement is reached with the Department of Public Works, in which the department will name the City as its nominee for the transfer of these abandoned properties in Johannesburg.

"I can confirm that the former minister's office had received our correspondence and was in the process of considering the matter.

"Given recent political shifts within the department, I hope that the new Minister of Public Works, Mr Thulas Nxesi, will give our request his full attention as a matter of urgency."

This will ensure, Mashaba said, that the City is able to expedite the redevelopment of these properties for the benefit of the poorest residents.