

## ■ HAZARDOUS

# Safety, health of state-run buildings tip of iceberg

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THE safety and health issues in the Bank of Lisbon building which caught fire yesterday, owned by the department of public works, and managed by the Gauteng departments of health and human settlements, are only the tip of the iceberg.

At least nine other buildings in the Joburg CBD, owned and/or managed by the provincial legislature and the public works department, are in poor condition and are safety hazards, said Gauteng DA spokesperson on infrastructure development and planning, Alan Fuchs.

A total of 10 buildings were purchased in 2003, destined to form part

of the Kopanong Gauteng government precinct. Many of these are today either lying in ruins, abandoned, or are partially built.

The idea was to interlink all the Gauteng provincial buildings in area with pathways, underground tunnels, skywalks joining buildings, underground parking and a public square, according to then premier Mbhazima Shilowa.

The project was put on hold in 2010 indefinitely, partly because of objections from heritage bodies who claimed demolition permits had not been properly issued, and also because the department had no funding.

Some alterations were carried out after 2005, and only partially completed. Buildings such as Clegg House subsequently became targets

of the “pink paint” project in which several artists illegally pour pink paint over the buildings in protest

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**ALAN FUCHS**

DA spokesperson on infrastructure development and planning

that they were not being used.

Last year, said Fuchs, the project was resuscitated in an announcement by the Gauteng department of infrastructure development at an

estimated cost of R5 billion. A project manager and transaction advisers were appointed to conduct a feasibility study.

In June this year, plans for the precinct were again raised, with the province announcing that costs had escalated to R7.5bn.

The DA accused the ANC of wasting public funds through the long-delayed Kopanong project to develop government offices in Johannesburg.

Said Fuchs: “The report was released stating that they proposed that following the completion of the first phase of construction in 2022, the Gauteng government would start to pay an annual ‘unitary payment’ for a period of 22 years to cover the cost of construction as well as the ongoing operational costs of the precinct.

“The cost of construction alone has escalated from R2.5bn to R7.5bn.”

Added operational costs would increase the annual payment by the Gauteng government to between R800 million and R1.1bn depending on the finance option chosen.

This equates to a total spend of between R36bn and R50bn over the 22-year period.

“If there is any project that highlights the lack of expertise in the public sector and that demonstrates the reckless attitude of government to public money, then the Kopanong Precinct is the perfect case study.

“Somebody must be held accountable for yesterday's fires and deaths, and the gross and obscene waste of public resources and complete negligence of that and other buildings.”