

■ DRUMMOND

Residents say 'I don't' in proposed venue dispute

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A PROPERTY owner believes that building and operating a large wedding venue in the heart of a rural KwaZulu-Natal village could secure the future of his family, but the idea is not sitting pretty with everyone.

Members of Drummond's farming community, located in eThekweni Municipality's outer west region, are opposed to Ajith Thakoordien's development plan.

Some residents said they initially believed Thakoordien was building a house and then a poultry farm on his 32000m² property.

However, when they read a special consent notice on his gate recently, it indicated that Thakoordien had plans to build a nursery, a B&B, a restaurant and a 400-seater wedding hall on his property.

Residents met Thakoordien at the 1000 Hills Hotel on Thursday as

part of the municipality's special consent process.

They raised concerns about the possible noise and traffic nuisances and the potential for harm when building near eco sensitive zones.

At various times during the hour-long meeting, Thakoordien insisted that everything on the plans complied with the municipality's requirements.

Tristan Dickerson, who chaired the meeting, informed residents that the session was for information gathering only, and if they were not satisfied with answers received, they could e-mail their concerns to the municipality and Thakoordien.

When Thakoordien addressed the gathering, he introduced himself as an architect working in the national Department of Public Works.

He said the buildings he planned, including his four-bedroom home, were all single-storey and he needed special consent to erect the wedding hall because the project



AJITH Thakoordien addresses Drummond residents about his plans for a wedding hall in the area. | **SIBONELO NGCOBO** African News Agency (ANA)

was on land zoned agricultural.

"I'm going to be living here so I wouldn't do something that will create a nuisance."

He assured the hall's 185 parking bays were according to municipal requirements.

Thakoordien said including a plant nursery in his plans was neces-

sary for him to gain special consent.

One resident responded: "Why build it (the nursery)? It's like trying to get around the back door to get compliance."

Another asked, why change from a chicken farm?

Thakoordien responded: "It was purely for investment reasons, so I decided to build something my kids can take over."

Resident Julie Ramseier said: "Our biggest concern was the noise and size of the road to handle the traffic. We understand you will be living there, and on the day, the noise won't be trouble for you. It's going to change the face of Drummond. It will become a concrete valley."

Thakoordien said a traffic impact assessment had been done for his application and it was in accordance with the municipality's guidelines.

"Acoustics and noise control formed part of the design process and was achieved through the roof insulation, acoustic curtains, solid masonry walls and limiting the use of glazed elements."

One resident named, Chris (surname unknown), received a round of applause after he shared his thoughts: "You can see we don't want you to pour concrete because you will destroy the wetland and wildlife here. Why do you want to ruin a neighbourhood?"

"Here's a suggestion, come and build your house and

live with us," said Chris.

Chairperson of the local ratepayers association, Carol Bailey, said they lived in a very "horsey community with lots of stables" and farming. The property was at the bottom of a valley and of concern was "the noise would travel up" when functions were held.

"The last census done around 2012 showed Drummond had 955 people, since then only about 20 new homes have been built."

Bailey said the setting of the property didn't make for a picturesque wedding venue and Thakoordien's venue was surrounded by farms and hills.

"Why it is viable, I don't know."

Bailey said they were also peeved that as head architect with the Department of Public Works, Thakoordien might have had an unfair advantage in putting his plan together.

Thakoordien disagreed. He said the property was advertised and he purchased it via a property agent, and followed the special consent application process in the "exact same way" as others.

He also planned to engage professionals to produce an aesthetically pleasing venue where "good wedding pictures will not be a problem".

Thakoordien said he was pleased with the meeting as it allowed for the development concept to be explained.

"I received concerns as well as positive responses.

"The project will create opportunities for local entrepreneurs, create jobs and stimulate the local economy."