

Oversight And Rapid Economic Transformation

A matter of public interest that goes a long way towards explaining why Umdoni is not living up to its true potential, is the deliberate manner in which the governing body, namely the council, is prevented from functioning in a constructive and healthy way. Municipal councils are elected to represent the communities for which the organisation exists, and to which it should render services.

The role of the council is to conduct oversight over the organisation's performance, to plan for community services and development, to compile and monitor budgets, and to regulate specific public activity through laws, policies and enforcement.

The dysfunction in the council starts with the irregular and disrespectful manner in which meetings are conducted. Umdoni's speaker shows no respect for the law and the rules of order that apply to council meetings. We are not so naïve as to believe that this is simply the result of immaturity or arrogance. It is an agreed-upon strategy by the ruling party to govern in secrecy, and to implement a grand plan of Radical Economic Transformation. The plan makes no room for debate, consultation or interrogation.

It requires unfettered access to municipal processes, funds and property. It could not work without the close cooperation of the accounting officer/municipal manager. The first move the MM made was to redraft the rules of order to prevent members of the public and the media

from gaining access to meetings of council structures. Despite the illegality of her amended rules, the majority readily voted to adopt it and the proceedings within the institution have since been sealed from public scrutiny.

Public interest matters, like the investigation into unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure, are brought to meetings as late items, hurriedly dispensed with by a majority vote "in-committee", and then removed. The public has no knowledge of what transpired and councillors who wish to read the reports and ask appropriate questions are prevented from doing so

The next sinister move by the MM was to limit spending on capital and maintenance work in ratepaying areas. This was achieved by preventing IDP and Budget submissions from being presented to the council for its consideration. Public participation is only a notion. Whatever does not fit the grand plan to secure voter growth in 2021 is rejected.

The limitation of rates to specific areas is a further part of the grand plan to sustain political support and to extract revenue where adherence to law is a way of life.

Expanded Public Works Programmes have become a vehicle for political patronage and manipulation.

All of this takes place whilst smiling politicians and pretty pictures are used to present a picture of progress that belies the growing unemployment and the crumbling infrastructure. It will not

be long before Umdoni's function will be to sustain a long row of expensive vehicles, plush offices, and a well-attired army of staff, whilst revenues fall and public infrastructure wilts. What Eskom did to SA, Rapid Economic Transformation will do to Umdoni, if it is not halted. Spending R2 million on informal trading stalls in Umzinto will not improve the local economy. Repairing the infrastructure and establishing clean, orderly conditions in the town is more likely to attract more custom and investment.

We are faced with a political bluff that can only last as long as the inflow of money is sustained. It is nationalisation on a local scale and current trends in the property market are signalling its impact. It is in the interest of all citizens to protect the economic drivers in our region.

The maintenance of public infrastructure remains the single most important service that the municipality must deliver, and we must unite to demand that this is done. Investment in commerce and industry is not going to happen where services are not rendered, and neglect is ever apparent. The economic growth that is so vital to future social stability requires transparent and efficient government that is focussed on its core function of providing basic services. A government that accounts for what it does is a government that has nothing to hide.

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