

■ LEGAL CHALLENGE

Mixed signals over Durban film studio

MPHATHI NXUMALO

THE eThekweni Municipality is still committed to having a film studio at the Natal Command site in Durban that could potentially create thousands of jobs for its residents.

Municipal Manager Siphon Nzuza confirmed this yesterday as the R7 billion project is in jeopardy. The SANDF is now legally challenging Anant Singh's film studio project, saying it has plans of its own for a development on the site.

Singh had bought the 21-hectare site in 2003 from the municipality for R15 million. The SANDF had initially agreed to hand control of the site back to the municipality.

Nzuza said they were constantly engaging with all the parties involved as they believed that the site was going to create jobs for people and grow the municipality's economy.

Nzuza said the matter was heard last week at the Durban High Court but was postponed as the Department of Public Works, one of the respondents in the matter, was not ready.

"The date of the next hearing is still to be communicated," he said.

Singh told the Daily News that he found it "strange" that the SANDF would want to build a conference centre on the site when the city already had the top conference centre in Africa, referring to the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre.

According to the Sunday Tribune, the Daily News's sister newspaper, the SANDF had in the 1990s commissioned an audit firm to execute a feasibility study on the sites it controlled.

"After the report was completed, the SANDF decided to relinquish control of the Natal Command site and hand it back to the city," the news report read. However, during Lindiwe Sisulu's tenure as Minister of Defence, the fightback for the site began.

The SANDF apparently wants to build a conference centre with accommodation for its own purposes.

SANDF spokesperson Brigadier-General Mafi Mgobhozi yesterday declined to comment on the matter, saying it was sub judice.

Earlier problems with acquiring the site included an unsuccessful court challenge from Pietermaritzburg businessman Sunny Gayadin, who had objected to the sale of the site. The matter went to the Constitutional Court in 2012. Gayadin had argued that there were irregularities with the deal and that he would have paid R250m for the site.

In 2017, it was reported that Singh intended to build a hotel on the site and that two movies were to be shot at the facility, with construction expected to have begun last year.

Singh estimated that 17 000 construction jobs would be created and an additional 4 300 jobs when the development was fully operational.