



Publication: Mercury, The - Main
Title: Deputy mayor objects to EPWP spending
Publish date: 05 Oct 2022
Page: 3

Reach: 25432
AVE: R 19672.88
Author: Thami Magubane

Deputy mayor objects to EPWP spending

THAMI MAGUBANE
thami.magubane@inl.co.za

THE decision to extend the contracts of the employees under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) has come under fire from opposition parties in the eThekweni Municipality, who described the project as costly when the city was faced with a lot of problems.

Abantu Batho Congress (ABC), led by the city's deputy mayor Philani Mavundla, has defended its decision to vote against the extension of the contracts during a council meeting last week, saying the money could be used to fix infrastructure that is crumbling or was damaged by the April storms.

This view was supported by the DA, which described the programme as a national competency led by the Department of Public Works and as such all costs should be carried by the national department.

However, the IFP said the EPWP workers were doing important work.

During a council meeting last week, councillors were briefed on a new EPWP contract, with the parties saying the current term of the workers would be extended by three months and new recruitment would begin.

The national government has provided funding of R60 million for the programme, but because the number of people employed by the eThekweni Municipality far exceeds that funding, the municipality is expected to top it up with an additional R200m.

The municipality might also face

an uphill battle if it starts any "new" recruitment process as those currently in the programme have demanded to be employed full-time.

The programme was initially set up to give members of the public skills or a career start, and those in the programme are supposed to be there for around two years and then be replaced by a new group.

In eThekweni, this did not happen and some of the EPWP staff have been there for much longer. A few years ago they marched to the Durban City Hall demanding they be employed full-time or be paid out for the years they have worked after their initial contracts expired.

Mavundla said: "The ABC is in support of the EPWP as a poverty alleviation programme funded by taxpayer money through national government.

"The programme's R60m budget as set out by the national government is an indication of the government's commitment to addressing prevalent unemployment and poverty through job and entrepreneurial opportunities resulting from the programme.

"The ABC is firmly against the subsidisation of the EPWP with the hard-earned ratepayers' money as this means eThekweni residents pay additional tax which is unconstitutional and grossly unfair.

"In the last financial year, the ratepayers of eThekweni subsidised this programme by an additional R200m over and above the R60m from taxes collected by the South African Revenue Service. As the ABC, we are of the

firm view that there are more pressing infrastructure projects which the city should be investing in to address the city's infrastructure challenges.

"The city's water and sanitation infrastructure are one area of grave concern which needs urgent prioritisation," said Mavundla.

DA councillor Thabani Mthethwa said the municipality should recruit for the programme based on the funding that had been made available.

"This is funding for the national programme - if they need more money, they need to go back to the national government."

IFP councillor Mdu Nkosi said they were in support of the programme. "This is not a give-away, these people employed under the programme do a lot of work for the municipality in the different units.

"They are also able to look after their own families through the stipend they are earning."

ANC councillor Nkosenhle Madlala said when councillors discussed the challenges of the programme, they should not forget the usefulness of it.

He warned that if the city was to, out of political expediency, cut the number of people employed under the programme, cleanliness would deteriorate in some parts of the city.

"Today we are paying money to someone who works and performs a socially useful activity, if you retrench (that person), tomorrow you will be paying money for that person to go and eat at the soup kitchen (as they will be unemployed)," he said.