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# Land, buildings in focus

*Cars, piano, chairs to be scrapped as repair costs climb*

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**T**hree vehicles, a pulpit, a rowing machine, an ottoman, a piano and literally hundreds of chairs are among the things to be scrapped or auctioned by Ndlambe because they are broken and it's uneconomical to repair them. The assets are among a range of office equipment, furniture, vehicles and other items on municipal property, from Alexandria to Kenton.

This and other items were discussed in Ndlambe Municipality's open council meeting in the Council Chambers on Friday December 9.

On a more serious note, Ndlambe has been forced to write off around R5.9m in indigent subsidies because there are residents benefiting from free services who have not come forward since the 2020/21 year to provide relevant documentation to prove their quality as indigent. That proof is required for auditing purposes.

In June 2020, council resolved to condone the indigent register for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years and until the verification process was completed. But Covid restrictions hampered this process.

Ndlambe adjusted the annual financial statements revenue figure for 2020/21 by reversing the subsidies. Council was asked to approve a total reversal of R5.960,939.60 relating to the 2020/21 adjustment.

#### **Bathurst buildings:**

Earlier this year Centenary Hall was gutted by fire and eventually, in August, information came to council that the insurers would settle just over R500,000 for electronic equipment and office contents.

A structural engineer's report was then requested to assess the structural soundness of the building. On August 30, council took a resolution that "a public participation meeting be called for interested and affected parties relating to the future of the hall" and "that it be approved that the future of the hall then be reconsidered by council".

This week, the route for resolving the fate of Centenary Hall changed. The resolution above was rescinded. Now, instead, it was resolved that "council note that following discussions to be held with senior management – in



**FESTIVE MAGIC:** Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Kusile, Medupi... Port Alfred's special festive season lights display on the Library Lawns outside the Civic Centre were switched on last Tuesday evening, despite an earlier loadshedding glitch – and then a storm that saw 26mm rain fall in a matter of minutes.

Picture: **ANNELI HANSTEIN**

conjunction with the PMU – the financial implications of rebuilding the buildings be considered".

The public participation meeting would follow this management process "at which meeting interested and affected parties will be advised of the route to be followed".

In this month's meeting, under the same agenda item, councillors' attention was drawn to four municipal buildings in Nolutshanyo, Bathurst damaged during protests from November 2018 to January 2019. Three years later, those buildings had been neither rebuilt nor demolished.

Ward 5 councillor Mzwandile Sweli said they were a hazard to people living in the area or passing by because the structure was damaged and also because muggers and drug users had taken over the abandoned site.

He proposed the buildings be demolished before Christmas. A glitch in the technical drawings in the relevant annexure meant the item has to be brought to council's next meeting.

#### **Land audit:**

Meanwhile, Cogta, land reform and rural development, and the department of public works and infrastructure have been asked to assist with a comprehensive Ndlambe municipal land audit report. This, the report in the

council agenda said, would encourage land use management, local economic development in the municipality, and encourage spatial restructuring.

It would help identify potential precincts, guide local development and ensure co-ordination among sectors such as human settlements and bulk infrastructure.

#### **Auditor general report:**

The audit report for Ndlambe municipality's annual financial statements for the financial year ending June 30 was tabled for noting and not for discussion.

"In terms of the Municipal Finance Management Act... council will deal with the audit report within nine months after the end of [that] financial year... as part of the annual report."

Ndlambe received a financially unqualified audit opinion; however there were strong concerns, notably under irregular expenditure, unauthorised expenditure and supply chain management regulation contraventions.

#### **Extension of liquor trading hours:**

No festive season applications had been received, but it was anticipated there would be some. The administration recommended liquor trading hours for on- and off-consumption be extended for one hour

during weekdays and weekends, from December 9 to January 8. On Saturday December 31, the extension for on-consumption hours would be granted until 4am on January 1.

They also proposed tavern owners and liquor outlets should take full responsibility for the safety of their patrons as well as the cleanliness of their surroundings.

#### **Amatola Water as the service provider for the Eastern Cape:**

The minister of water and sanitation in mid-November issued a notice saying he intended to extend Amatola Water's service area to cover the entire Eastern Cape province. Two weeks later, the South African Local Government Association (Salga) issued a circular asking for comments on this proposal and citing the motivation of the department of water and sanitation.

Strengthening capacity and capability of Amatola in the province led the charge, along with rationalising the number of institutions in the water sector to ensure economies of scale.

The deadline for comments is December 15. In this week's council meeting, the infrastructure directorate strongly opposed this and recommended council oppose the recommendation on the basis the entity had failed to deliver a satisfactory

service in Ndlambe thus far.

#### **Ethics committee:**

The DA caucus tabled a motion for the establishment of an ethics committee in council, as provided for in the Municipal Systems Act. In their motivation, they cited contravention of Section 32 of Council's Standing Rules and Orders by two council members.

"The speaker, in most cases during council, pays more attention to his cellular phone than council proceedings and this directly results in failing to adhere to section 25 of these rules. Councillor [Xolisa] Runeli fails section 32 of these rules," says the motion proposed by DA caucus leader Sikhumbuzo Venene and seconded by councillor Tunyela Mbekela.

Section 32 covers a range of processes and protocols including (among others) that the chair may "direct any person to apologise for and withdraw any allegation, statement or remark if it is unbecoming, unnecessarily tactless, incriminating, disparaging, improper, racist or sexist or incites violence or injury or impairs the dignity or honour of a councillor or employee of the municipality".

This discussion was moved to "green", or confidential and so the public, including the media, were excluded from witnessing it.