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DEVELOPMENT

Taking on Joburg's housing challenges

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THE HOUSING backlog in the City of Johannesburg (COJ) and the country is a red herring for many disgruntled citizens, especially the poor who have very little recourse but to wait.

In a bid to address that backlog, the Johannesburg Social Housing Company (Joshco) said it's planning to implement a turnaround strategy that was approved by the Department of Human Settlements.

Joshco was created by the COJ to provide and manage social and affordable rental accommodation that service various households with income levels of between R1 850 to R22 000 per month, as part of the City's plan to eradicate its housing backlog. Joshco has rental properties across the COJ which accommodate more than 8 900 families at 34 of their projects. The company provides homes to informal traders, domestic workers, government workers and other low-income residents. Joshco's core business includes student accommodation, the development of social and rental housing, conversion, refurbishment, upgrading and management of some of the city-owned rental housing stock, upgrading of hostels and the provision of turnaround strategies where necessary.

Enter Joshco's new CEO, Sello Molapane Mothotoana, a seasoned public servant who has been in both academia and the COJ's Human Settlements Department. But he has his work cut out for him. COO Themba Mathibe said the entity is experiencing many challenges with evictions at the moment.

"It is important to highlight and set the record straight that Joshco has not affected any evictions to date. The challenge Joshco is facing is the difficulty presented by many post Covid-19 crises, wherein many of our tenants lost their jobs, and experienced salary cuts," he said.

Joshco said it embarked on a consultative process with tenants on the different projects and made the necessary efforts to bridge the gap.

"We encourage our tenants to come forth to sign an Acknowledgment of Debt (AOD) and



THE Princess plots at Lufhereng are scheduled to open by the end of the year. | SUPPLIED

edgment of Debt (AOD) and make payment arrangements based on their current affordability status. This came after relaxing some of the AOD policies to accommodate the declining socio-economic climate affecting many of us. Joshco has also made efforts to create work opportunities for our tenants through the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) system which is aimed at hiring locals for certain services within Joshco projects to earn some income for a specific period of time," Mathibe said.

But it's not only the lack of social housing Joshco has to contend with. Recent reports indicated tenants were unhappy with their living conditions and the state of their rented homes.

"We have conducted a conditional assessment on all Joshco-owned properties and have set up a priority list of projects that required urgent attention. We will therefore be requesting additional budget during the mid-term budget adjustment from the shareholder, to ensure that the recommendations from the conditional assessment are

implemented accordingly. In the interim, there is a task team set up by the COO in each project looking at ensuring that service providers are appointed to attend to the urgent requests. We are happy that the living conditions of our tenants have improved compared to what they were in the past six months," he added.

It's also not all bad news. Joshco has achieved many successes under the leadership of the new senior management team, a cohort of young professionals who are dynamic and energetic. Capital projects that were due for construction, including the ones which had been stopped, have been unlocked and are now back

on course.

"We are also looking forward to the grand opening of our second student accommodation building, the launch of the first phase of the Riverside development which will yield 180 units by the end of 2022. There is also the launch of Princess plots, and the delivery of social housing units in the mixed development of Lufhereng. We are looking at delivering more affordable housing units which is a demand that's been growing for our young professionals, civil servants and those who don't qualify within the social housing income band," Mathibe added.

The new COO said their first



NEW Joshco COO, Themba Mathibe, says they have a vision to turn around social housing needs in the City of Johannesburg.

order of business is to improve all the Standard Operating Procedures, compliance standards and norms and rationalisation of all outstanding policies within the organisation. They also plan to introduce an organisational culture and functional leadership style that has a workforce that has a clear understanding of the organisational goals and needs to be addressed.

"We plan to rebuild good relations with our stakeholders, improve on communication and to build a Joshco that is responsive, financially sound and efficient in all its service offerings," Mathibe concluded.

◆ In order to qualify, an applicant must be a South African citizen, be 18 years and older, be employed or earn R1 850 – R22 000. Applicants can also WhatsApp "heita joshco" to 066 511 7319. You will receive an automated response stating all available rental units and their requirements. Visit www.joshco.co.za

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