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Author: Staff Reporter

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Residents to pay dearly in 2023/24

Come 1 July, residents of Drakenstein Municipality will see a 15,1% increase in electricity tariffs – this comes after the 2023-'24 budget was approved by Council on Tuesday.

Even though the 15,1% is still high compared to last years 7,7% and considering the tough economic climate the country faces, it is however lower than the proposed 18,02% increase that was brought before council in March.

Earlier this year Eskom announced that they are increasing their bulk electricity tariffs with 18,49%.

“Nersa (National Energy Regulator of South Africa) tentatively communicated that municipalities may increase their tariffs by 15,1% subject to final approval,” the Executive Mayor of Drakenstein, Conrad Poole said during his budget speech. “As a responsible local government institution, and conscious of the impact on our residents Drakenstein Municipality will therefore implement the 15,1% or the Nersa final approved tariff increase.”

Other increases that will directly affect the pockets of locals are as follow:

Property rates tariff will increase with 3,9%; the water tariff increase with 6,5%; sewerage/sanitation increase with 6,5%; and the refuse removal tariff increase with 6,9%.

At a total of R3,4 billion, it is Drakenstein Municipality's largest annual budget to date. The total budget comprises a R3 billion operating and R457,5 million capital budget.

The budget allocation for EPWP makes provision for approximately 500 job opportunities at an estimated cost of R21,8 million. Poole said the National Department of Transport and Public Works' EPWP Grant contributes R4,3 million, while Drakenstein Municipality contributes R17,5 million. He said to ensure visible change and impact in wards through ward projects it was decided ward allocations would be

structured according to themes: Clean and Green Project; Support Projects (NGOs, Schools, Elderly and Sport); Safety Support Project; Skills Development; and Community Projects.

Poole said that a grant allocation of R24,5 million was awarded for housing to the municipality for the new financial year which will be used to service sites on Mbekweni Erf 557, with funds availed for further planning in Fairyland, Saron, Paarl East and Simondium.

Through the Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant (with national) an amount of R9 million was allocated to the Municipality for improvements in Lover's Lane, Chester Williams and other informal settlements. In addition to the aforementioned, an amount of R42,7 million will be spent directly by the Provincial Government on the Vlakkeland Housing Project, which will assist in building 265 new houses.

An amount of R5 million has been provided for the maintenance of the rental stock and to rectify structural defects. R9,4 million is earmarked for the infrastructure of sport, parks and cemeteries, and R34,6 million for the maintenance of roads and stormwater infrastructure. R303 million of the budget will be used to provide residents with clean drinking water and sanitation.

According to Poole the Municipality was awarded R1,4 billion by National Treasury for the upgrade of the sewerage and water networks. This project will run over the next three years.

“We have been allocated a Water Service Infrastructure Grant of R16 million to address our ageing water reticulation infrastructure.”

With waste management being in the spotlight these past few years, provision has been made for waste management projects and equipment which includes R5,1 million for the construction of organic waste diversion infrastructure to comply with new waste legislation and R1,7 million for additional skips.

Responding to the community's outcry over safety, a new, dedicated Public Safety Department will be established which will have a northern and southern precinct presence. “This will allow for a more focused and visible law enforcement,” Poole said. “To further support law enforcement, 18 people are currently being trained as Law Enforcement Peace Officers to boost our capacity. Another 16 Bobbies on the Beat will be trained and deployed in our Central Business Districts to improve safety.”

Poole also gave recognition to the Paarl Business Watch, Drakenstein Farm Watch, the South African Police Service, Wellington and Paarl East Community Policing Forums, and all the neighbourhood watches.

Some of the general projects that will benefit from the budget includes the upgrading of soup kitchens (R400 000), upgrading of the containerised night shelter (R800 000), purchasing of fire safety vehicles and equipment (R1,4 million), purchasing of tools of the trade (R2,5 million) and investing in information technology infrastructure (R3,1 million).

When it comes to electricity, the budget makes provision for R40,3 million to cater, inter alia, for the following electricity infrastructure projects: Replace old equipment (R3 million), increase existing medium-tension network capacity (R4 million), increase existing low-tension network capacity (R1,2 million), increase existing high-tension network capacity (R5,9 million), upgrade of bulk electricity to the Vlakkeland Housing Project (R8,6 million), repairs because of vandalism and theft (R4 million) and Electrical Infrastructure Upgrade Programme, which will include the electrification of informal settlements (R3,25 million).

“During the 2022-'23 financial year, the Western Cape Government awarded Drakenstein Municipality an Emergency

Municipal Load Shedding Relief Grant of R6 million, to be spent on backup generators at key water and wastewater infrastructure installations. The municipality allocated another R6 million from our own mid-year capital expenditure adjustment budget to extend the mitigation. A further R2,8 million has been allocated for the 2023-'24 year to continue with this initiative.”

According to Poole the municipality has prioritised its resources and reinforced its three-pronged Eskom Load Shedding Resilience Plan.

“We have developed a comprehensive contingency plan to mitigate possible service delivery disruptions caused by Eskom load shedding, as well as to safeguard municipal infrastructure.

“We are engaging with various Independent Power Producers. These are large-scale commercial investors who specialise in generating alternative energy for sale. We are also considering the pros and cons of wheeling – this is when IPPs use the municipal grid to distribute their power.”

After the Mayor's speech the other political parties were given the chance to give their comment on the budget. The parties pointed out their concerns, but mostly praised the mayor and the administration for an “excellent budget”.

Cllr André Fourie (VF+) said they feel that the way in which residents are being taxed is not right. He said tariffs are increased every year and residents are just expected to pay.

After a short caucus between certain political parties, Cllr Moutie Richards of the ANC said on behalf of the ANC, CDR, Patriotic Alliance and Independent Civic Organisation of SA (Icosa), they wish to work together with the council to provide the best service to the community. He said they do ask that all their comments regarding the implementation of the budget and projects be considered. All parties, except for the VF+ voted in favour of the 2023-'24 budget and tariffs.