



**Publication:** Mercury, The - Main  
**Title:** Concern about overgrown vegetation  
**Publish date:** 23 Mar 2023  
**Page:** 3

**Reach:** 10990  
**AVE:R** 25831.87  
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SAFETY

# Concern about overgrown vegetation

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RESIDENTS, councillors and property owners of eThekweni Municipality have spoken of their frustration over living in areas with overgrown vegetation, saying this posed a serious threat to their safety.

While some have questioned the efficiency in eThekweni Municipality's parks division in dealing with uncut grass and trees, others said they had given up complaining because the problems had been going on for a while.

A Newlands resident, who wanted to remain anonymous, spoke of how she had been unable to use a public gym facility since December because it was surrounded by overgrown grass.

Ward 24 councillor Hugh Makhathini admitted there were challenges with vegetation, adding that they had been reported to the authorities a number of times. He cited an incident in which a stream in Mahlathini Road, Chesterville, needed clearing and authorities only reacted

when there were calls for them to act.

"We have raised the issue with the cluster manager that there should be a proper schedule on when the cutting will take place as opposed to reacting to complaints," said Makhathini.

An uMlazi ward committee member, Mbuso Mazibuko, said the Parks Department had failed them as many parts of the ward were just not maintained. He singled out children's play equipment that had become unusable, as an illustration of the department's inadequacies.

Mazibuko, whose ward committee covers C, F, G and H sections of the township, said it had been years since the facilities had been attended to.

"Overgrown trees and other vegetation are a familiar sight for us, yet there was a time when things were not like this in our township," Mazibuko said.

DA councillor André Beetge said the problem was unlikely to get resolved because of problems associated with the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers in the department.

He alleged that EPWP staff were reluctant to do their work.

"What happens is that because most of them are appointed through patronage of sorts, they do not take instructions from the heads, that in turn results in permanent staff not doing their work, you then have the problem of public spaces that are not maintained."

The matter was also raised at a Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) portfolio committee meeting with eThekweni top brass last week.

The committee members said street lights that did not work and overgrown vegetation created fertile ground for criminals to pounce on unsuspecting members of the public.

Following Cogta's resolution to have eThekweni and Msunduzi municipalities meet with the committee every quarter, it was expected that both the Electricity and Parks departments would provide a progress report on what they have done to improve the shortcomings.

Responding to concerns, mayor Mxolisi Kaunda said as the leadership they were equally concerned about



PEDESTRIANS walk past a bushy area in Manor Gardens. Concern has been raised about the poor maintenance of public spaces in the city. | DOCTOR NGCOBO African News Agency (ANA)

overgrown vegetation and other issue, but expressed optimism of changes, telling members a lot had improved.

IFP committee member Otto Kunene said it was shocking that some parts of the municipality had overgrown vegetation as this formed part of the basic services expected from the municipality.

Committee chairperson Zinhle Cele said it worried her that there were instances where women and children were attacked as they had used routes that were not properly maintained.

She cited discoveries of dead bodies in KwaMashu as a sore point which

had seen locals banding together to clear some of the overgrown areas.

"As much as KwaMashu residents have started to stand up, it is important that the city plays its part. We cannot have criminals hovering because people have not performed the tasks set for them."

Municipal spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said they were satisfied with the engagement they had with the committee.

"We have already made a giant leap forward in addressing some of the issues that they have raised," said Mayisela.