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URBAN DECAY

Plans to rejuvenate city centre and tackle derelict buildings

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THE business community, public, informal traders and professionals can look forward to having a safer, cleaner and more attractive Pretoria inner city after the City of Tshwane resolved to join hands with the national Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to improve the environment.

This was the undertaking made by Tshwane mayor Cilliers Brink and the department via Minister Dean Macpherson during a meeting at Tshwane House last week.

Both high-profile DA members deliberated on issues affecting the inner city and how they can work together as the municipality and national government to address them.

Brink said: "We discussed issues around the inner city and how we can take hands between the City of Tshwane and the national government to reinvigorate our inner city and to make it a clean, safe space for all of our people."

Macpherson said both parties will have monthly meetings with a view to start clearing the "backlogs that exist so that we can get people back into the inner city and we can put the government departments back into work in the inner city".

He expressed the intention to contribute to making Tshwane "the amazing city that it is, and not only just now but into the future".

Brink said the national government is the City's biggest property owner, adding that there is "a lot we can do together to reinvigorate the Pretoria CBD, making it safe, clean and pleasant for traders, business people, professionals and families".

Both leaders conducted oversight visits at the vacant and vandalised former Telkom headquarters building purchased by the department in 2016 in conjunction with the SAPS. It emerged that parts of the building had been vacant since 2017.

Macpherson said he would commission an independent probe into the purchase of the building for R695 million and its subsequent renovation for R250m.

The commission is expected to provide him with recommendations within 60 days following its appointment and on the necessary steps to address and remedy the situation.

In a media statement, Macpher-



THE City of Tshwane, in partnership with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, plans to revive the inner city and make it cleaner and more attractive. | JACQUES NAUDE Independent Newspapers

son said the government could not be spending millions to repair and address vandalism.

"We will have to start working closer with role-players such as the City of Tshwane to ensure our buildings are used for the public good and do not fall into disrepair and cause a burden for the municipality. By working together we can reclaim these buildings, unleash infrastructure investment and turn our country into a construction site," he said.

Brink said the City was reviewing its derelict buildings by-laws, adding that it had come up against some constitutional challenges.

In January this year, former MMC for Corporate and Shared Services Kingsley Wakelin, now an MP, made a renewed commitment to tackle hijacked and illegally occupied buildings in the Pretoria CBD.

Wakelin said Melgisedek would be top on the list of buildings targeted by the City in terms of the council-approved programme called Tshwane Sustainable and Better Buildings, which aims to drive inner-city regeneration by tackling derelict and illegally occupied buildings.

He lamented that negligent prop-



THE programme to revitalise the inner city includes the dilapidated Melgisedek complex in Riviera. | File

erty owners, slumlords, and building-hijacking syndicates had taken advantage of people desperate for affordable and well-located accommodation,

which had led to the illegal occupation of buildings that led, in turn, to urban decay and posed a direct threat to human lives.