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work; third, unusable assets that can be disposed of.

"There are a whole lot of ideas we are working on, but to be fixated on this asset register – it's not possible. The value and condition of buildings change. It's important to understand what you own, but I think you have to look at it in a different way," he says.

And it's not just buildings – there's land too. Macpherson says it's not a question of if but when the department will release land to

functioning municipalities.

"What I think would be irre-

sponsible would be to hand over

land and buildings to municipalities that can-

not turn those into projects for good. We will get done what other people have spoken about for a very long time. We are going to release that land. We are going to ensure that it's used for the public's benefit.

"We will do all that we can to support municipalities, other departments and government entities that want to use public assets for public good," he says.

It's been just over four months since Macpherson was appointed a minister in the government of national unity (GNU), but he's confident that progress is being made.

Macpherson, 39, has been a member of the DA for more than 20 years and says the party is showing value in the coalition government.

"I don't think anything quite prepares you for going into government, especially after sitting on the opposition benches for 10 years. It's very difficult to get things done in opposition. I think the DA did the right thing by going into the GNU," he says. ✕

We are going to start running the asset portfolio as a business

Dean Macpherson

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How to fix a crumbling state

New 'landlord' Macpherson wants departments to start caring about their properties

Matthew Hirsch

● Dean Macpherson would like to "take you down to the station". Not in the sense of a TV cop drama, but as someone who is often considered to be the biggest landlord in South Africa.

The new minister of public works & infrastructure has many properties to manage in a portfolio worth about R150bn and there's one in particular he'd like to show as an example of state neglect.

The station in question is the police headquarters at Telkom Towers in Pretoria. If the old-fashioned slang for a police station is a cop shop, this one is a derelict cop mall.

The complex was flagged as a material irregularity by the auditor-general. It was evacuated in February and declared unfit for human use.

"I know a little bit about property and I've done some property transactions in my life," Macpherson tells the FM. "There's no way this complex

was worth R650m 10 years ago. We got fleeced." He calls it the "biggest property swindle ever" in South Africa.

"We got the wool pulled over our eyes," he says of a previous administration in which his party, the DA, was the official opposition.

Macpherson says the terms of reference for an independent investigation of the

purchase are complete and the work should start soon.

Telkom Towers is an example of a department that lacked care and duty for its properties in the past, he says.

"I think that there's no pride in public assets, so we don't look after things.

"It is really infuriating that there is that lackadaisical approach when it comes to properties.

"We cannot maintain every police station in this country. It's not possible. There's a conversation to be had around that. We need to better equip line departments to be able to run their own maintenance and infrastructure programmes."

Macpherson says his department is looking to work with Infrastructure South Africa on getting "standardised police stations" in various sizes. "The system as it is is just not working."

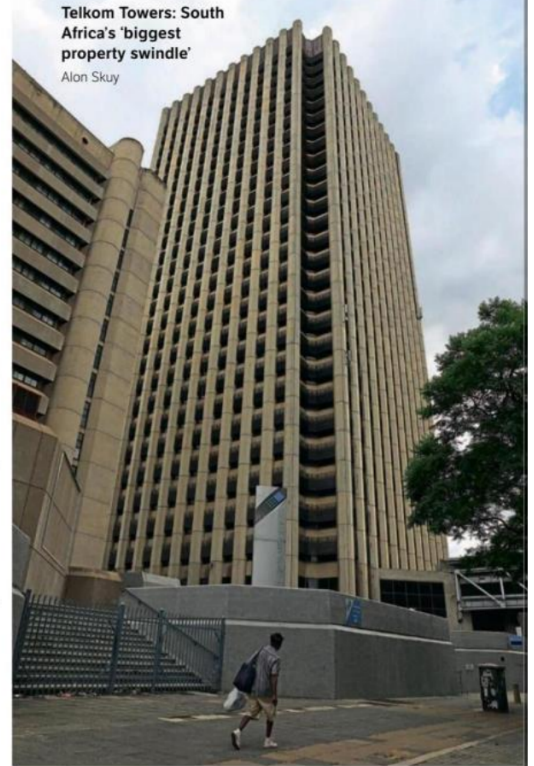
Getting an asset register is one of the challenges. He says it will never be 100% accurate.

Anyone who says so "should not be listened to. It's not possible. We are contemplating a risk-based register. What are the most risky and valuable properties? We start to create different buckets of properties.

"We take our assets and we use them. That's what we want to do. We are going to start running the asset portfolio as a business, so we start generating income."

The department plans to have three categories of properties: first, properties of great value and in good condition; second, valuable but need

Telkom Towers: South Africa's 'biggest property swindle'
Alon Skuy



Dean Macpherson: There's no pride in public assets
Matthew Hirsch