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Title: `Extortionists delay housing projects in Mandela Bay`

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A contractor was held captive in a container in Motherwell in Nelson Mandela Bay, Eastern Cape, and forced to transfer money into an account as part of an extortion scheme.

This is one example of why government housing projects in the area are delayed.

This was revealed at the Taking Legislature to the People in Despatch yesterday when the Eastern Cape human settlements portfolio committee tabled its report.

Committee chair Makhaya Twabu said the NU30 housing project had fallen victim to extortionists. "We were informed a service provider was locked in a container for a long time and instructed to transfer money into an account."

In his report, Twabu said the project suffered from extortion and threats directed at department officials. "Beneficiaries have lived for two months in their houses without electricity. There is no pegging of yards in the project, leading to quarrels between neighbours."

He said some houses still have "severe" cracks. "The contractors are failing to remove rubble after they complete work, and this rubble leads to drain blockages in streets."

City battles backlog of 78,990 houses

Addressing the house, Twabu urged the provincial government to work with the municipality on crimes reported to the police concerning construction sites. "We emphasise this because some projects are delayed and the issue of crime in the space of service delivery makes it impossible for officials to frequently check on the standard of work done."

He said they'd engage the Housing Development Agency (HDA), as the implementing agent, to fast-track contractor payments. "At times, we find that though the money is in the coffers of the HDA, contractors are complaining of delayed payments."

Twabu said the human settlements department was unhappy with the metro's spending levels. "The department must ensure voted funds are spent by the end of the financial year."

"We are unhappy with the money spent so far at this time of the year. It becomes difficult for us to recommend that more money be channelled because spending is low," he said.

Khoisan leader John Sayster said he was shocked the report did not mention Lapland's condition after being flooded twice this year.

"If Lapland is not in this, what is being done with all this money? It's unacceptable that people are expected to stay there while they continue to be flooded."

Wells Estate resident Mzimasi Mnykazi asked the committee to revisit the spatial planning of his area as there were a few schools and no police station. "Our children have to walk long distances to schools in Motherwell because some parents cannot afford transportation," she said.

"They become victims of crime and we do not have a police station and still have to report crimes in Motherwell."



Eastern Cape infrastructure, public works and human settlements MEC Siphokazi Mani-Lusithi and health MEC Ntandokazi Capa during the Taking Legislature to the People event yesterday. /Eugene Coetzee

Answering questions from the floor about the slow delivery of a Helenvale project, human settlements MEC Siphokazi Mani-Lusithi said: "The project is stalled because the contractor had to leave the

site due to gangsterism and that matter has been escalated to the security cluster."

The city's human settlements directorate is battling a housing backlog of 78,990, projected to take 28 years to clear.