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Author: Sibongiseni Maphumulo

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SIBONGISENI MAPHUMULO

The Esplanade Government Building (EGB) in Durban is set to receive a four-star rating from the Green Building Council South Africa (GBCSA) as part of a multimillion-rand rehabilitation and upgrade.

The project, valued at R800 million, will transform the dilapidated seven-storey, 18 000-square-metre structure into a modern, eco-friendly hub for multiple government departments.

Speaking at the handover to contractors on Monday, MEC for Public Works and Infrastructure Martin Meyer described the project as a turning point for government infrastructure.

"During its prime, the Esplanade Government Building stood tall and represented what the department could achieve when assets were efficiently utilised.

"Today, it symbolises neglect and forgotten treasures," said Meyer.

The refurbishment will be undertaken by Enza Construction and will incorporate green building technologies, including rooftop photovoltaic panels and rainwater harvesting systems. Meyer said the updated structure would address modern environmental challenges. "Climate change is no longer a distant concern. It is a reality for this and future generations. This

transformation offers a chance to build differently, considering how what we construct today impacts what we receive from nature," Meyer said.

Enza Construction has been tasked with removing the building's brutalist style, which Meyer referred to as "a silent reminder of our past," and replacing it with a forward-looking, sustainable design. Once completed, the facility will consolidate various government departments into one location, streamlining public service delivery.

"Close to a billion rand will transform this building into a modern structure, home to multi-departmental staff, offices, and amenities. Such undertakings allow us to reimagine government infrastructure as both practical and sustainable," Meyer said.

The move will also save on rental expenses paid for private office spaces. Meyer added, "By housing staff in government-owned buildings, we can redirect rental costs to other priority areas. Mixed-use spaces, combining offices with commercial areas, will make government buildings viable and self-sufficient."

The revamped EGB is expected to set a benchmark for sustainable government buildings in South Africa. Meyer emphasised the importance of ensuring public assets serve both environmental and practical needs.