

Publication: Sowetan - Main

Reach: 25596

Title: GEORGE BUILDING COLLAPSE: COUNCIL 'CONCEALING REPORT'

AVE: R 95188.83

Publish date: 06 Nov 2025

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● MPs want explanation on building approval discrepancies

By **KOENA MASHALE**

The joint parliamentary committee on human settlements and public works has criticised the George municipality in the Western Cape for refusing to answer questions connected to a report into the approval process of plans of the building that collapsed, killing dozens of workers.

The plans included that the structure was originally submitted as a three-storey building, but ended up as five storeys.

The municipality said reasons for the lack of disclosure were because of strict instructions by the investigating officer to not release or speak about the contents of the report.

However, the Western Cape police commissioner, Lt-Gen Thembisile Patekile, said he was not aware of such instructions.

The committees accused the municipality of undermining them.

Municipal manager Godfrey Louw said they were following instructions. "I'm not misleading parliament, not even to attempt to mislead parliament," he said.

"The investigating officer has requested us not to dispose or divulge the report that we received from the engineers. And, based on that request, we submitted the report to the investigating officer because his view was [that] it is part of the investigation, and it cannot be divulged into the public domain."

Patekile said they only discouraged the publication of the report to the media. "We requested this because it could jeopardise the case when it is ventilated in court," he said.

"We never said that it should not be given to any other person, but we said the publication of that [report] to the media, and the outcomes and everything, could jeopardise our cases, while doing the investigation, and some of the matters are sub judice. That's what I could remember in this matter."

Chairperson of the portfolio on public

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Rescue workers scour the rubble of the collapsed building in Victoria Street, George, in the Eastern Cape in May 2024. /Werner Hills

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works, Carol Phiri, said the municipality was unwilling to provide the report. "We will find a way to obtain that report but we will also proceed with other matters.

"The statement from the [George] mayor indicates that they're bringing in lawyers, which is inappropriate. They're obligated to respond to us; we can request their lawyers later. I want to emphasise this point: the city does not want to give us a report," she said.

Patekile said their investigations were

finalised but were being held back by a missing report from the department of employment & labour.

"I must clarify that I was in charge of that operation and, currently, we are conducting an inquest, and unfortunately, the employment & labour department has not submitted a report that we require to forward to the National Prosecuting Authority for this matter to be finalised," he said.

"This delay has been significant. During our meetings at the dock, we often found that representatives from the labour department were absent. We had sent junior staff members who lacked the authority to make decisions, and they often left the meetings early."

Deputy minister of employment & labour Jomo Sibiya said they were to submit the report to the NPA yesterday or today.