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! A room in a building in Huntley Street, one of a few left derelict for years. Photo: Chalotte Mokonyane

EC Public Works outlines plans for derelict Makhanda buildings

By Luvuyo Mjekula

The provincial Public Works Department (DPW) has responded to calls to account for badly vandalised and derelict buildings that have become havens for criminals in parts of Makhanda.

DA ward 8 councillor Cary Clark recently said the properties have deteriorated, been badly vandalised, had fire damage and have just been left by DPW to degrade and attract bad elements into areas where there are schools with young children and residential neighbourhoods.

She said this not only showed a town in decay, but the neglect of aesthetics and heritage.

During an oversight recently, the DA's Frontier Constituency leader Jane Cowley slammed the DPW for "absolute" lack of accountability. "I mean, this is a tragic waste of infrastructure," Cowley said.

Dr Malcolm Figg, who is the shadow MEC for Public Works in the province, would table the issue of the buildings for discussion in the provincial legislature.

Responding this week, DPW communications director Vuyani Nkasayi, said the department has various processes dealing with state-owned buildings to be utilised for various purposes in line with its mandate.

This includes properties identified for revenue generation and socio-economic purposes.

Properties identified for revenue generation purposes involve the disposal or leasing out of the buildings for short-term or long-term, Nkasayi explained.

"The socio-economic purposes involve allocating the buildings to other government departments such as the Department of Social Development for GBVF Centres or disposing of such properties to local municipalities for community development in line with Immovable Asset Management Policy."

The buildings in question

Nkasayi says the provincial department has four vandalised properties in Makhanda under its custodianship and these are as follows.

- Erf 9281, 5 Huntley Street – The department identified the property as part of revenue generation. Signing of a nine-year 11-month lease is currently being facilitated with an approved tenant.
- 2 Erf 9280, 5 Huntley Street – The property is earmarked for use as a GBVF Centre by the Department of Social Development. There was a planned site visit with the Department of Social Development, where DSD was to confirm whether the building would be suitable for their needs. However, since the site visit was cancelled by the Department of Social Development, there are engagements on a newly proposed date for the site visit.
- Erf 218, 7 King Street – The property was previously used for residential purposes by the officials from Settlers Hospital in Makhanda. It has been earmarked for a commercial lease, and the application has been received, pending internal departmental processes.
- Erf 6625, 6 Bailey Street – Consists of land registered to the Republic of South Africa, which is the National Government of Public Works and Infrastructure and a building owned by the provincial government. The building caught fire in 2024 and became uninhabitable. Due to the estimated cost of revamping the building, which is R612 000 against the municipal value of the building, which is R971 000, the department will seek approval to dispose of the building. However, the disposal of the building is subject to the successful acquisition from national government to provincial government. The process is underway.

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