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**Author:** Warren Hawkins  
warren@mahareng.co.za

**Page:** 2

# Maintaining MMM's 105 burial spaces 'a mammoth task'

**Warren Hawkins**  
warren@mahareng.co.za

Residents of Bloemfontein have witnessed the deterioration of the cemeteries and burial sites around the city for years. Several have even taken to social media to share pictures of overgrown tombs, inaccessible burial sites, and vandalised tombstones.

Bloemfontein Courant reached out to Dr Thabang Thinda, the Mangaung Metro's (MMM) HOD for Community Services, to find out how the metro plans to rectify the current state of cemeteries.

"MMM has 105 declared burial spaces in the municipal area," explained Thinda. "Maintenance of all these cemeteries is a mammoth task, as well as labour and resource intensive." He went on to say that "active cemeteries" receive preference when it comes to maintenance and infrastructure, but not to the neglect of those who have reached capacity.

"Securing of all cemetery sites is a

priority for MMM and fencing of the active cemeteries are implemented when funds are available," said the HOD. He made an example of Southpark Cemetery, which recently received a new perimeter fence. "Budget provision for proper fencing has been requested for Memoriam Cemetery and Botshabelo Cemetery as part of the phased in approach to develop and secure cemeteries."

Thinda stated that millions have been allocated to restore and secure cemeteries. "R7.5 million was allocated to Southpark Cemetery for fencing, R10 million has been budgeted for Memoriam and Botshabelo Cemeteries, and R9 million for the Nalisview Cemetery, also for road infrastructure."

Sustainable funding to develop and maintain cemeteries will also be prioritised, according to the HOD, as well as private and NGO involvement.

According to Thinda, National Government programmes, such as the EPWP, PES, and CWP programmes,

focussing on job creation and skills transfer, are "complementing" internal MMM staff in maintaining cemeteries, parks, and city entrances on a rotational basis.

Regarding issues of vandalism and security at cemeteries and burial spaces, Dr Thinda says: "MMM strives to have full-time security at all cemeteries to guard cemeteries and to check on issues of vandalism." He also encourages residents to report vandalism to MMM Law Enforcement. "Patrolling of cemeteries by the Law Enforcement Department on a regular basis is also reemphasised with the responsible unit," he added.

Finally, MMM is encouraging community participation in the maintenance of cemeteries. "The Parks Department has an Adopt-a-Park programme which encourages the community to partner with the municipality on issues of maintenance and restoration of cemeteries," concluded Dr Thinda.



Burial sites at Bainsvlei Cemetery are inaccessible due to overgrowth.



Some tombstones are so overgrown that they are hidden. PHOTOS: WARREN HAWKINS