

Budget on Debate Vote 13– Public Works and Infrastructure

Speech by Sello Seitlholo MP

DA Shadow Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure

Honourable house chairperson

Since the appointment of Minister Sihle Zikalala back in March, it is important for this house and South Africans at home to note that this minister is yet to attend a single portfolio committee meeting of Public Works and Infrastructure.

Minister, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is an enabling and coordinating department. As such, the department has a responsibility to ensure that its client departments, such as Police, Health, Education as well as local government, to name but a few, have the facilities to undertake their respective constitutional mandate.

This extends further than just the buildings. This includes the state of the building, the maintenance of the building, load shedding interventions like the availability of generators, Heating, Ventilation and Airconditioning & Cooling (HVAC).

Chairperson, I highlight these important points to bring closer to home the realities faced by ordinary South Africans on the ground due to the failure of the department to take up its coordinating and enabling role.

However, what the department has enabled is the creation of Informal Settlements on government properties, where people live in squalor, far removed from job opportunities, and with absolutely no access to basic services such as running water, sanitation, access roads and many more.

Minister, the property in Walmansthal in Tshwane has been unlawfully invaded and an informal settlement is burgeoning. Because this does not form part of the City of Tshwane's spatial development framework, and remains zoned as agricultural land, there is no access to bulk services in the area. The residents are now illegally connected to the water pipelines of the military base and Magalies water, and illegally tapping into various electricity lines.

The onus of the provision of bulk services now falls on the City of Tshwane who have not budgeted nor planned for this. This is due to the department's inability to protect its properties from illegal occupation.

A further example of the department's negligence to protect its properties can be seen at Knofloskraal in the Theewaterkloof Local Municipality here in the Western Cape.

Minister, the land in this area was earmarked for a Forestry project which would have seen beneficiaries become not just participants but also owners of the project.

Despite early warnings that land invasions were starting to occur, and several court orders to prevent further land invasions, the DPWI failed to bring these under control and there are now more than 3000 occupants living in the property. Knoflokskraal is now undeniably an informal settlement.

Once again, we have missed opportunities and instead have people living in abhorrent conditions with no services, and no potential to improve their lives because the department of forestry and fisheries has now withdrawn the programme. Theewaterkloof municipality, just as in Tshwane, is being pressurised to formalise the area despite not having neither the resources nor the development plans.

While these are large scale invasions, smaller occupations of DPWI properties are taking place all over the country, and the DPWI seems incapable of and disinterested in preventing these. Case in point, Waterloo Green in Wineberg, Western Cape, the property owned by DPWI has three abandoned houses on it of which two are currently occupied by homeless people and criminals.

A resident identified one of the occupiers as a person who mugged her, and there was a murder on the property and there have been two fires. Since the occupation of the property, crime has escalated to such an extent that the local schools have had to hire security guards to protect their learners from muggings.

The DPWI has been making empty promises to the residents that the vandalised houses will be demolished and that security will be upgraded. 18 months since it was first reported, there has been no action taken.

Chairperson, because DPWI has lost control over their properties, effectively, they've lost control over their Asset base. In terms of their own expropriation bill, the effective loss of control over properties would justify the expropriation thereof without compensation. It's unacceptable that the custodian of government immovable assets has done so little to protect the value of its properties. Furthermore, this negligence has placed the financial burden on local government which is in the form of an unfunded mandate.

The lack of interest the department demonstrates in preserving the condition of its properties, can be highlighted in the case of Rashoop Shooting Range, in Brits North West.

Since 2019, the Marcus Arms Shooting Club has been trying to get permission to lease this property with the permission from DPWI not forthcoming. This is despite the commitment to do the necessary repairs to the property in order to render it fully useable. Important to note minister is that, currently the SAPS in Brits have to travel to Potchefstroom which is around 140 km away to use a shooting range to maintain their mandatory competency.

The Real Estate Management Services, a programme within the Property Management Trading Entity (PMTE) has a budget allocation of 13.9 billion for the 2023/2024 financial year. And yet, it is unable to fulfil its mandate of managing government properties.

As your department's buildings are overrun by vandals, and homeless people continue to live in squalor, the DA run Western Cape Department of Infrastructure and the City of Cape Town recently handed over 204 Social Housing project units in Maitland. The project is part of a bigger precinct development called Maitland Metro which will deliver more than 1 200 new units over the next 8 years. This is just but one of the signature projects under the Western Cape government's Infrastructure Framework which will see targeted investments in energy, water, transport, human settlements and ICT.

In February, the City of Cape Town Mayor launched a R120 billion infrastructure portfolio, which is set to form the foundation for economic growth in the city over 10 years.

This is by far the largest infrastructure investment plan ever announced by any metro in South Africa. With the national government issuing infrastructure plan after infrastructure plan, with no discernible action to implement them, the City of Cape Town is on course to increase infrastructure investment by 110% in three years.

This unprecedented investment will drive economic growth, provide sustainable jobs for Capetonians and attract more investment in the region. DA governments don't just talk, they act – and the results are there for all to see.