Call on residents to protect wetlands

KEN MCHUNU
SOME 2 500 shack dwellers of Lamontville, south of the city, are to become proud homeowners.

"That's the good news Mike Mabuyakhulu, KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Housing, and Local Government, gave to residents of the township last week when he announced that a R224.9-million urban renewal project would soon begin there.

Speaking at the KaIgijama sports grounds, Mabuyakhulu said the project would also lead to scores of long-time leaseholders being granted title deeds to homes that they have rented since 1954 "when council flat tenant who has rented since 1954 will finally get to own this flat. "It's a big relief to know that a R224.9-million urban renewal project was unveiled at a time leaseholders being granted title deeds to homes and flats that some have rented for more than 50 years.

This would happen through the government's enhanced extended discount benefit scheme.

He said it was fitting that the project was unveiled at a township with a history as proud as Lamontville.

"Observe the fact that was created by apartheid archi-
tects to serve as a labour pool for the apartheid govern-
ment, the township became a beacon of hope to those who in the jackboot of the oppressors," he said.

He said it was time to put apartheid-era anomalies that had left people receptor's houses that they never got to own, even after decades of tenancy.

Some of the tenants have paid for their properties over and over again, without even realising it," he said.

Residents were thrilled at the prospects of owning their properties.

Mzow Ngena, a long-time council flat tenant who has rented since 1954 "when council flat tenant who has rented since 1954 would encourage people to take pride in their properties.

Mabuyakhulu said the government's enhanced extended discount benefit scheme was a "critical pillar of housing delivery." It was even more important because "homeownership provides security and peace of mind to residents.

He said the project would also provide jobs for locals.

The KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act of 2006 allows that there can be no vacant land or buildings to be used for the purpose of dwelling or other purposes and that the owner's permission is illegal. It also prohibits owners from renting out substandard buildings or structures to those that do not have windows, running water, and working ablution facilities. Buildings that are in a health nuisance or are neglected are also considered substandard.

Municipalities are empowered by the Act to notify the owner in writing to evict occupants of a substandard building.

The Act also allows municipalities to remove people from slums. If they do so, they may have to make available alternative land or buildings. However, this must be carried out following reasonable measures guided by available resources.

The municipality must try to ensure alternative land or buildings are reasonably close to an economic centre. The Act allows municipalities to establish transit areas for temporary housing of people evicted from slums, pending the acquisition of land for their permanent settlement.

There is no time frame for how long people can be accommodated in transit areas. Vacant or unused land attracts illegal occupation. The Act has put in place procedures to keep this to a minimum. Owners of vacant land are expected to erect a fence around the land or building, put security personnel in place and take any other reasonable measures to prevent illegal occupation.

The municipality has the right to evict occupants of land for housing, which includes establishing transit areas, for the permanent settlement of people evicted from slums. This is consistent with the constitution.

The penalty for anyone who interferes with the reasonable measures adopted by the municipality is R20 000 or up to five years in jail.

In our next column, the role of the eThekwini Municipality and other important roleplayers in housing delivery will be discussed in detail.

Homes for shack dwellers

For shack dwellers in uMnini, KwaZulu-Natal, there is no time to lose.