



MEDIA RELEASE

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PROPERTY FORUM TO ADDRESS FUTURE OF THE CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT SECTOR IN ONLINE SERIES WITH PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTOR

WESTERN CAPE PREMIER AND NATIONAL MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS & INFRASTRUCTURE TO TACKLE ECONOMIC RECOVERY AT INAUGURAL "IN CONVERSION" EVENT

Just weeks before Covid-19 struck South Africa with the first lockdown, the property development and construction industry stood on the brink of a breakthrough in terms of recovering from the eroding effects of bureaucracy and red tape that has plagued it for years and had seen giants in the industry close doors.

"We were already on our knees when the pandemic brought complete closure to construction sites across South Africa," notes Deon van Zyl, chairperson of the Western Cape Property Development Forum (WCPDF), which represents the development and construction sector across the full spectrum of those who participate in its economy.

"Very sadly, Covid-19 struck at a time when we were just starting to make significant breakthroughs at certain government levels, particularly provincial and national," says Van Zyl. "It's vital that we restart the conversations as soon as possible."

These breakthroughs included the formation of an Economic War Room by the Western Cape Government that had targeted the property and construction sector as one of five primary enablers for job creation in the province, as well as a groundbreaking ruling at national level that enabled a long-awaited extension of development rights to Western Cape developers.

The results of these initiatives and others were to be presented at the WCPDF's annual conference originally scheduled for May and cancelled due to the pandemic.

Says Alwyn Laubscher, chair of the WCPDF's conference committee: "It is however absolutely essential that we find new ways to continue to engage one-on-one with government and enable our members to speak directly to them as well. We have to not only kickstart the processes begun to save our industries pre-Covid-19, but now we have to face the additional challenges the pandemic has brought with it."

The WCPDF will therefore be hosting a series of online, interactive "In Conversation" engagements with key officials in the public sector as well as prominent representatives in the private sector. With four two-hour sessions to take place once a month from August to November, the first – scheduled for Wednesday 19 August - will kick off with Premier Alan Winde, under the topic "Kickstarting the economy".

Following a keynote from the Premier, the session (facilitated by Van Zyl) will then first be thrown open to a panel of experts to debate the subject with the Premier, before the virtual "floor" is opened to questions from delegates. Panellists for the first session include Geoff Jacobs (President, Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and Leon Cohen (CEO, Rabie Property Group).

Says van Zyl: "We've asked the Premier to address four key issues: how does provincial government intend to create a much needed culture of co-operation between itself and the private sector; how do we establish new

ways of doing business in the Western Cape; how do we use service delivery to stimulate the economy; and how does province intend to unite each of its municipalities to focus on growth?"

Future "In Conversation" sessions will feature Minister Patricia de Lille (National Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure), on Thursday 17 September, self-certification expert Rudolf Opperman (technical advisor: Architecture and National Building Regulations, National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications), on Thursday 15 October) and Dr Ron Watermeyer (Visiting Adjunct Professor, School of Construction Economics and Management, University of the Witwatersrand), on Thursday 19 November, speaking on the often contentious issue of procurement.

Notes Van Zyl: "While these conversations take the place of our own in-the-flesh conference this year, and are primarily aimed at our members in the Western Cape, the discussions being held and the calibre of both speakers and panellists we've secured represent the public and private sector across the country. We have no doubt that the content of each session will appeal to anyone involved in these sectors across South Africa and even abroad. Recovery from the pandemic is a universal economic challenge."

Commenting on the platform that has been sought by the WCPDF to deliver these conversations in the most interactive way possible for speakers and delegates, Laubscher notes: "We are all Zoomed out, and we are all missing the one-to-one engagements of real-life conferences. They have always been crucial in the past for helping us to call politicians to accountability and engage directly with the industry, and to enable networking among our members.

"The series is therefore being held on a highly interactive platform that allows delegates to engage in constant information sharing and networking opportunities prior to and after each session, and – most importantly - during each session through active Q&As with both keynote speakers and panellists."

While there is a fee involved to attend either one or all of the sessions (the latter at a highly discounted rate), the WCPDF is also highly aware of the plight in which many in the sector are currently finding themselves, notes Van Zyl: "For anyone who is legitimately struggling, we are offering discounted rates to let them know they are very important to the industry and their skills are needed.

"We're also calling on companies who are still operational and individuals who are still in employment to sponsor discounted fees for an unemployed colleague.

As an NPO, the organisation is also extremely heartened by the number of companies that have already come forward to sponsor the events, says Laubscher: "We've called for this in order to keep the costs of attendance for delegates as low as possible."

Gold sponsors that have already come forward to sponsor sessions include EFG Engineers, Power Developments and BPAS architects, while silver sponsors include Talani Quantity Surveyors, AL&A and Africa Collaboration Hub.

The "In Conversation" series is hosted by the WCPDF and SBS Conferences & Exhibitions, for more information or to register to attend, please visit <https://www.wcpdf.org.za/wcpdf-2020-series/>

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