

Sewerage infrastructure backlog has Cape Town property developers up in arms

Western Cape Property Development Forum says 'the catastrophic sewage treatment situation' is taking on serious dimensions

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26 SEPTEMBER 2021 - 22:35 BEKEZELA PHAKATHI



A child crosses over tyres near sewerage water leaking from outdoor toilets in Khayelitsha. Picture: JULIEN BEHAL/PA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Cape Town property developers are up in arms over the city's recent decision to put the brakes on both new developments as well as those already under construction in some parts of the metro pending the upgrading of sewerage infrastructure.

The DA-run City of Cape Town recently issued a statement indicating that some construction projects around the metro, including Somerset West, Gordon's Bay, Century City, Parklands, Table View and surrounds would have to be delayed as it builds up the capacity of the sewerage system. The issue is set to take centre stage ahead of the local government elections on November 1 and could potentially be damaging for the DA, which often prides itself on clean and effective governance.

"The catastrophic sewage treatment situation in Cape Town is taking on serious dimensions not dissimilar to the recent Day Zero drought situation [the worst drought in a century that nearly caused Cape Town's taps to run dry in 2018]," said Deon van Zyl,

chair of the Western Cape Property Development Forum, which represents the property development and construction industry in the province.

The Cape Chamber of Commerce, which represents businesses of all sizes in the region, also weighed in on the matter saying this “sorry situation raises the suspicion once again that serving the ratepayers and the private sector that pays its rates has been forgotten by many of the council servants”.

“Highly paid officials in water and waste [department] appear never to have spoken to their colleagues in the spatial planning and environment department. Did the penny only drop when the sewage started to flow into rivers?” chamber president Jacques Moolman asked.

Responding to questions from Business Day, Xanthea Limberg, the city’s mayoral committee member for water and waste, said the council started capacity upgrade projects for both the Zandvliet and the Potsdam wastewater treatment works in 2009, having just completed a big plant capacity addition at Potsdam in 2008.

She said both of these upgrades have, over the years, been subject to protracted tender appeals from unsuccessful bidders, and a lengthy land claim determination process which led to a delay “as constrained municipal finances limit the number of upgrades of this magnitude that can occur simultaneously”.

“Even without additional delays, complex projects of this magnitude inherently have long implementation timelines, due to the technical complexity of upgrading a wastewater treatment plant while still in operation, and the many statutory obligations with which the city must comply,” Limberg said.

She said it would take a number of years before the capacity constraints were resolved, though the city’s water and sanitation department was trying to bring forward the completion dates as far as possible.

Limberg said over the next three years almost 50% of the city’s R25bn capital expenditure plan will be invested in water and sanitation infrastructure. The city is further projecting a minimum R8bn investment for big wastewater treatment upgrades over the next 10 years.

Marian Nieuwoudt, the city’s mayoral committee member for spatial planning and environment, said given that preparations for most large developments take years, developers can still go ahead and submit their applications to the city.

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