

Bay housing projects on fast-track

March 28, 2018 Siyabonga Sesant

Municipality ready to move with several failed developments, town planner says

The Nelson Mandela Bay metro is ready to fast-track failed housing projects, municipal town planner Meshack Baloyi said. Baloyi, who works in the municipality's human settlements department, was speaking at the Urban Land Dialogues hosted by the South African Cities Network in Port Elizabeth yesterday.

“When the issue of land expropriation without compensation was mentioned we were very happy as a city,” Baloyi said.

“We are thinking about all the things we were not able to achieve over the years. For example, we have a lot of failed housing projects, some that have been dragging for seven or eight years,” he said.

“We also have a number of unused buildings, so the issue of expropriation will move us closer to taking over those buildings to the benefit of our people.”

Under the theme “Inclusive land transformation”, the dialogue aimed to build a better understanding of the issues that underpin urban land relationships.

A similar dialogue took place in Gauteng on Monday, with another planned for the Western Cape today.

The Economic Freedom Fighters last month claimed the victory after its motion for land expropriation without compensation was overwhelmingly adopted in the National Assembly.

It was, however, criticised by the DA, with the party's leader Mmusi Maimane describing it as state-sanctioned theft.

Senior specialist for sustainable settlements at Afesis-corplan, Roland Eglin, said expropriation was just one part of the issue.

“The other thing is who gets the land once it's obtained,” Eglin said.

“We all have heard stories of housing waiting lists and things like that, so talking about getting the land – either through expropriation below market-value or through negotiation – that's one thing.

“But the more important question is who gets the land? “We're not having that debate.” Baloyi said the municipality was looking at issues of land ownership and to ensure there were housing projects for people who could previously not afford to stay in so-called white areas.

Professor Nomalanga Mkhize, a history lecturer at Nelson Mandela University, also said more debate was needed on the issue.

“We can't be misguided about it. The constitution is not just there to protect [owners of] big properties, it's also there to protect the average person from not having their property arbitrarily deprived.

“In fact, that is what the constitution says, that you may not have property taken from you arbitrarily.

“So it makes a small provision for just and fair compensation, which doesn't have to be market-value,” Mkhize said.

“The issue about no compensation has to do with the political force of whether we're going to do this expropriation or not.”