



MATJHABENG MUNICIPALITY

PUBLIC NOTICE

NAMING AND RENAMING OF PUBLIC AMENITIES PART OF NATION BUILDING

The Council of Matjhabeng Local Municipality released a notice on the proposal to rename about ten (10) streets in Welkom, a public clinic in Odendaalsrus and the town of Odendaalsrus itself. Members of the public were afforded a period of fourteen (14) days until Monday, 18 May to react to the proposals. In addition, a schedule on public hearings was developed deliberately to further engage the citizens on these proposals.

As part of the reaction to the notice, we witnessed deliberate distortion of the democratic exercise of invited consultation in some quarters. Since then, a campaign was fabricated that sought to suggest that the Council has effectively taken a decision on these proposals. This is far from the truth.

Obviously, we understand that the point of communication is not innocent. The author intentionally chooses how s/he packages the message; the choice of words is fastidious; the point is made by the author that the reader understands his/her intended message. From this point, deliberate falsification and manipulation of information is done deliberately to attain a particular objective, which is the presentation of false information as conclusive truth. Carried out successfully, falsification at its highest level (propaganda) leads to massacres as was the case with holocaust in Germany.

Few principled issues need to be spelled out. First among them is the fact that the process of nation building and reconstruction post 1994 have not been abandoned. It is work in progress. When the citizens of this country voted for change in 1994, and have continued to reaffirm the agenda of change including in the last elections in 2014, that alone amounts to the acceptability of the idea of social transformation as part of nation building and reconstruction.

South Africa has a unique history of colonialism of a special type. While we have heard some suggestions that we cannot always refer to the past, the incontestable truth is that it is this past that informs particular present realities of our country. We would not be speaking of the grinding poverty, unemployment and inequality which are largely black and gendered if it was not because of apartheid. The persistence of its legacy finds expression in different facets of our being as an emergent nation. Consequentially, we are forced to respond to its legacy based on this unique dynamic of contact between whites and blacks.

A question therefore arises: do we need to name and rename our public amenities? We need to unmake, remake and make the new democratic edifice from the womb of apartheid vestiges. There are some aspects that need to be changed in order to reflect the new democratic ethos. Naming and renaming of public amenities is one of the mechanisms that become crucial in disconnecting with our sorry past and connecting with the future we want.

The second matter of principle is that ideas in public policy come from anyone on any matter. Once the idea is in the public domain, it generates enthusiastic debate. Since the release of public notice of the proposed changes, we have seen the unusually enthusiastic debate in our area on a matter of public policy. We all need to build on this important feature of having interest on matters of common concern and public good. It is through such robust debate that we deepen our understanding of our history and contribute to the kind of a future we all want. Proposed names are just not names; they carry important weight of our history. We can build united and cohesive communities arising out of appreciation of our divided past through meaningful research and exchange of information. The value of naming and renaming is in building unity of communities hence the centrality of debate.

The third matter of principle relates to the economy and affordability. The Council will relate to the question of affordability through its processes, which include endless discussion with communities (although good for democracy, 'endless' discussion must not impair the decision-making capacity for progress will elude us). However, it is important to appreciate the economic principle of scarcity of resources versus infinite needs of human beings. Do we assume other things to be constant (or in inertia) while addressing others? Definitely not. In theory, perhaps. In practice, nation building is achieved through brick by brick in the context of complexity than linearity. With this in mind, all of us need to agree that irrespective of the real or imagined financial cost, some projects are necessary. Indeed, we all have to be cautious to balance our act.

The last important principle relating to the essence of local government, our municipality and this exercise specifically is that of public participation. The basis of our governance system in the post 1994 period is people-driven and people-centred processes. We have consciously created invited spaces to ensure that we consult with residents on developmental projects and our challenges. Residents are important partners in our developmental coalition. In Matjhabeng, our interaction with communities transcends compliance. It is part of who we are and we will ensure that residents are part of this process all the way. There can be no development and genuine change without people engagement.

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SPEAKER**

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