

Bulawayo battles housing backlog, unpaid bills

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In an effort to clear a housing waiting list of 100,000, the City Council has embarked on a low-income housing scheme.

In a wide-ranging interview, the mayor, Thaba Moyo, said council had gone into partnership with residents on the waiting list.

“People on the waiting list will be asked to pay a certain amount towards the servicing of the stands. Once this money is received, the council then allocate stands. The rest of the money will be paid in instalments as agreed between the council and individuals concerned,” explained the mayor.

Council has already started allocating stands in Mahatshula, Pumula South and Emgwanwini high density suburbs. It had also resolved to extend the arrangement to small and medium-sized companies who wanted to invest in the city.

“At the moment we are focusing on luring small industries because big companies have disappointed us. The council is providing land for such industries at very low cost, with affordable repayment terms. We want to fully support this sector because we have realised a lot of people in the city have lost employment and cannot pay their monthly rentals,” he said.

Commenting on the city’s antiquated sewerage system, the mayor said the recently acquired high-pressure sewerage jetting machines had completely eliminated the problem of burst pipes in the high-density suburbs, which had gone for years without repair.

“All that is left for us is to rehabilitate some manholes which are spilling raw sewage into streams,” he said.

Concerned about the city’s water situation, the mayor called on residents to conserve water as supply dams continued to dwindle.

“Umzingwane dam is at 12, 03 % and, being the one with the lowest inflow, it is likely to be decommissioned in mid-February if there are no significant inflows. Decommissioning of the dam occurs at 4,2%,” he said.

The mayor also revealed that the local authority is owed \$60 million by residents, government, industry and commerce.

“People are not paying for their services .The city’s residents owe council \$34 million while industry and commerce owes us \$21 million. The government owes \$5 million. This means we are struggling to provide services and pay our workers on time,” he said.

Asked to comment on whether his council faced interference from the Minister of Local Government, Ignatious Chombo, the mayor said Bulawayo was a no-go area for the minister.

“This council has never clashed with the minister. We do what we think is right for the residents who voted for us. We do not entertain political interference from anyone even our party, the MDC,” said Moyo.

When Chombo tried to impose Zanu (PF) activists in the council under the guise of special councillors, Moyo wrote a letter asking for the profiles of the councillors.

“I told him to indicate the special skills of the people whom he had appointed to be councillors. Some of the people whom he had appointed were losing candidates of a certain political party. From that time the minister never came back to council,” he said.

Moyo, who is also the chairperson of the Mayors Forum and the first vice president of the Urban Council Association of Zimbabwe, urged local authorities to shun corruption and conduct business in a transparent manner. Bulawayo was recently described by President Robert Mugabe as one of the most professionally run cities in the country.