

Media invite: “Managing Urban Land: a guide for municipal practitioners”

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The functioning of any city’s land market is central to the lives and livelihoods of its residents – especially the poor. Actively influencing the way urban land markets operate is a crucial factor in improving our cities.

Yet there is a generally poor understanding by municipal officials of how urban land markets work, or the opportunities these markets offer for effective public investment to improve life for the poorest.

“Managing Urban Land: a guide for municipal practitioners”, published by Urban Landmark, offers an array of tools and techniques to stimulate creativity and help officials to meet the particular needs of their municipality.

Mark Napier, Programme Director of Urban LandMark, says the urban land market has a profound effect on poor households’ access to jobs, amenities and services.

“The way in which this market works frustrates attempts to open up better located living and business opportunities for poorer urban households and communities, despite government policies and programmes intended to address these challenges.”

He says the challenge is made greater by worsening poverty and inequality, and the continuing growth of cities.

“The difficult task here for local government is to balance the promotion of pro-poor outcomes while providing incentives which positively guide private investment.”

This is what the Managing Urban Land guide is about, says Napier. “With clear examples and available tools, it shows what you can do – practically – to manage urban land to achieve these outcomes.

“For example, the guide explains how informal land markets work and suggests approaches that could enable municipal managers to engage in these markets in positive ways.

“The guide also examines how optimal value can be captured in exchange for public investment in bulk infrastructure such as transport, and describes innovative mechanisms for releasing state-owned land for private development while ensuring that government priorities for affordable housing are met,” says Napier.

“Understanding and monitoring property and other markets operating in cities is core to the business of municipalities. If the skills and systems are built to do this better, it places municipalities in a much stronger position when it comes to negotiating with the many stakeholders who build and rebuild cities and towns.

Urban LandMark’s guide is published as the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Bill comes before Parliament. The Bill is the first national planning and land use legislation put forward since 1994. Its passage will trigger revised or new provincial legislation that will affect the work of municipal planners and officials.

The tools and techniques described in the guide give planners a concrete way to pursue the principles that underpin government’s responsibility in this field as described in the Bill – spatial justice, spatial sustainability, efficiency, spatial resilience and good administration.

Media are invited to the launch of the guide at a breakfast meeting at the Protea Balalaika Hotel in Sandton on 27 September 2012, from 8-10 a.m. Speakers at the launch will include Dr Mark Napier (Urban LandMark) and Dr Philip Harrison (National Planning Commission/Wits University), while Mirjam van Donk of Isandla Institute will facilitate the session.

Immediately after the launch, Urban LandMark will convene a workshop for relevant stakeholders to introduce them to the guide in greater detail, also facilitated by Isandla Institute. A series of four city-level workshops will also take place in Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town during October.

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