

**Minutes of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) meeting for Thornville Development “The Square of Thornville” held on 8 April 2023 on site, Portion 104 (of 30) of the Farm Leliefontein No. 1175 at Thornville - [10.00am – 13.00]**

***Opening and introductions***

The meeting was officially opened at 10.15am by the Facilitator, Mr Thabethe, who requested for the volunteer to open with a prayer. He then introduced the visitors and the ward 18 Cllr to the meeting.

**Welcome**

Mr Mthoko Zungu, the proponent welcomed all the attendees.

***Presentation of the project***

Mr Madondo gave a broad overview of the development projects planned for the greater Pietermaritzburg area, and how this Thornville project fitted in the scheme of things. He stated that Thornville Development site is just over 2 HAs that is strategically located viewed from the broader planning perspective. Thornville is seen as a new node, based on the number of households, schools and businesses that have been built in the area in the recent past.

The proposed development is likely to be beneficial to the whole Thornville neighbourhood, motorists travelling along R56 to and from the Eastern Cape, and the whole precinct. He emphasised the position of strategic road networks in the vicinity of the project e.g. R56 and N3.

Mr Madondo further highlighted the activities that are proposed for the Centre, which includes the service station, retail centre with shops, restaurants and gymnasium. He indicated that they were already in discussion with a few anchor retail chains who have shown interest in the node. They are also in discussions with potential investors and tenants.

Mr Madondo indicated that they were targeting April 2024 for the operation of the service station, and June / July 2024 for the Shopping Centre.

He touched on all opportunities that will be created for the local people, including the estimated 200 – 250 jobs.

***Presentation (EIA Process)***

Mr Mthembu, the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) was then afforded an opportunity to present the EIA process to the meeting. He requested everyone in attendance to fill in the attendance register.

The EAP explaining that the process is based on legislation known as Environmental Management Act of 1998. He then explained the environment in broad terms emphasizing that the idea was to combine social, economic and environmental aspects in decision making for the benefit of the environment. He explained that the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (EDTEA) was the Department responsible for the issuing of an Environmental Authorization. He explained that his job was to merely assess environmental impacts in an objective manner not to decide on the project. He explained some of the methods used in assessing the possible environmental impacts. He further explained that the need for the project was also taken into account when making a final decision. He then described the physical characteristics of the site as observed during several site visits.

He touched on the possible environmental impacts especially the pollution of underground water. He emphasized that it was critical for the project of this nature to safeguard against the water resources, wetlands and vegetation on site. He outlined some mitigation measures in relation to the proposed project. He emphasized that the ultimate aim was to ensure sustainable development.

Mr Mthembu indicated that the various stakeholders were identified including the Msunduzi Local Municipality, Umgungundlovu District Municipality, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Department of Water and Sanitation, KZN Department of Transport, Department of Energy, KwaZulu – Natal Amafa and Research Institute, Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (Forestry Regulations), Fuel Retailers Association, Business, ward 18 Cllr, 100 m radius neighbors to the project and members of the public. Each of the identified stakeholders was expected to comment from their perspectives as may be necessary.

### ***Message of support from the ward 18 Cllr***

Cllr Buthelezi welcomed the presentations that were made to the community. He extended his gratitude that the project was mainly black owned, and see the project as having potential to create social cohesion.

He explained to the community that he was aware of their daily struggles with issues of access roads, water and electricity. He reported that Msunduzi Municipality has started with the mobile clinic as from 25 April 2023.

He saw opportunities for the unemployed and youth with regards to the proposed project.

He registered his full support for the project, including his ward committee.

***The meeting was then opened for questions and comments.***

***Questions / Comments and responses***

Question: Mr Nhlanhla Shange asked if the information relating to the project was readily available.

Answer: Mr Madondo explained that a website was already created, and gave a website to the attendees. He also emphasized that a database for the project was going to be created. Mr Mthembu added that it was compulsory for the project to open a register of interested and affected parties as part of the EIA process. He indicated that the project was to be advertised in the local newspaper, and the site notices were already erected on site. The attendance register of all the attendees was to be created.

Question: One Vukani thanked Mr Zungu for the project. He asked about the proposed sewer line.

Answer: Mr Madondo confirmed that his information was that a sewer pipeline was proposed for the area running from Willofontein to France area.

Question: Brenda Sokhela emphasized the issue of local skills, youth and construction projects.

Answer: Mr Madondo confirmed that they were to take into consideration the issue of local labour and skill base.

Question: Mr Nhlanhla Dlamini asked the EIA timeframes, and how the project was to be funded? He also asked about corporate social investment programmes when the project is operational?

Answer: Mr Mthembu gave how the process was to unfold providing timeframes for the EIA process. Mr Madondo indicated that the project was to be funded through different mechanisms costing a total of about 60 – 70 million rands. He further highlighted that the project will consider community social investment when it's operational.

Comment: Mr Thabethe emphasized the importance of having a ward Cllr and his ward committee at the meeting, to also answer and engage with regards to issues affecting the area.

Question: Mr Gift Nzimande asked if there will be proposals and Request for Quotations (RFQs) in terms of engaging service providers when the construction starts. He also asked if the project will adopt green solutions initiatives.

Answer: Mr Madondo confirmed that RQFs will be requested at the appropriate stage of the project. He also confirmed that the project will definitely consider green technology as may be appropriate. He further emphasized that Msunduzi Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan (IDP) encourages developers to adopt such initiatives.

Question: Mr Sphamandla Mkhize asked what programmes were in place to assist youth? He also asked how they can prepare themselves as youth for the project.

Answer: Mr Madondo highlighted some of the skills that will be required during the operational stage of the project, and encouraged youth and members of the public to position themselves and engage with the project drivers as early as possible. He emphasized that this was part of an ongoing stakeholder engagement. He also touched on the national / local content ratio for projects. He also explained franchise procedures.

Question: Mr Zamakahle Zuma asked if there was any chance of owning shares. He emphasized that this was important for defending the Centre in case of looting.

Answer: Mr Madondo indicated that this will form part of the ongoing discussions with interested local stakeholders. He confirmed that there will be a local committee at the appropriate stage of the project, and project meetings will be ongoing.

Question: Mr Lucky Mbanjwa welcomed the proposed development in the area. He requested the project to prioritise ward 18. He requested the Cllr to call meetings and engage the community in order to avert frustrations.

Answer: Mr Thabethe acknowledged the question and comment.

Question: Ms Akhona Makhawule asked the ward Cllr if it was possible to change the location of the mobile clinic, as in her view the current location was not suitable?

Answer: The ward Cllr explained what informed the current location, and indicated that it was going to be difficult to change the location as they wanted an area that was accessible from all sides.

Comment: The ward Cllr Buthelezi pleaded for the cooperation of the community. He highlighted that meetings were held on the last Tuesday of the month.

Comment: Mr Buthelezi welcomed the project. He commented that people do not want to do hard labour and challenged anyone who wanted manual work to register with him as he wanted to hire 10 people.

Comment: Mr Thabethe emphasized that the project was to benefit a lot of stakeholders including taxi associations.

Comment: Mr Nhlanhla Ngubane emphasized the issue of communication as critical. He stated that at times people talk and complain without adequate information.

Comment: Mr Dlamini emphasized that this was a private development that needed not to be confused with government projects.

In the absence of further questions and comments, the Facilitator, Mr Thabethe asked if the community supported the project.

The project was unanimously supported by the community.

### **Way forward**

Mr Mthembu had earlier provided timelines with regards to the EIA project. He estimated that the necessary authorizations and permits are likely to be completed during 2023, and if approved by the various Competent Authorities this may pave way for 2024 commencement that Mr Madondo was talking about.

Mr Mthembu explained that the report was to be lodged with the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, and on acceptance the authorization is issued if the Department is satisfied that there would be no damage to the receiving environment. He explained that the process was open ended in case of other inputs after the meeting. He indicated that all government Departments with jurisdiction on site were also going to be afforded an opportunity to comment on the draft report. He also explained the appeal process available to the public once an authorization is issued by EDTEA.

### ***Closing and vote of thanks***

In the absence of further comments and questions Mr Thabethe thanked everyone who attended the meeting. He commended the people of Thornville for coming in their numbers to hear with their own ears what was proposed in their area. He requested a volunteer to close the meeting with a prayer. The meeting was then formally adjourned at 12.10.