Council Meeting

22 February 2018

Speaker,

Chief Whip,

Alderman Hutcheson,

MMC’s, 

Alderman Ramushu, 

Fellow Councillors, 

Municipal Manager, 

HOD’s, 

Distinguished Guests, 

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon.

Two weeks ago many in our country were uncertain about the direction we were headed, and while many of us remained hopeful that the national executive would bring the widespread anxiety we had been plunged into to a close – there remained a level of doubt as to whether this would be realised. But, as we know, our fate as a country changed for what many would like to believe as the best a week later.

Today, we all gather here, with euphoria and an elevated sense of hope, not only for what’s to come, but also realising that South Africa is capable of achieving and becoming so much better than we’ve allowed it to become in the past few years.

I would firstly like to congratulate President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa on being elected President of the Republic and applaud him for restoring confidence and hope in our hearts and those looking at South Africa from afar.

Speaker,

I would like to reflect on the president’s state of the nation address and particularly three points that the president pointed to which I personally agree with and endorse.

Firstly, the stabilisation of state owned enterprises like Eskom, the National Prosecuting Authority and the Commission of Inquiry into SARS.

These are long overdue and will lift this dark cloud that’s been hanging over those government departments.
We can only hope that the President will appoint a capable minister to head up the Public Enterprises department and that the leadership of our public entities will be entrusted on people who recognise our mandate to serve the needs of South Africans and work towards building a better and more viable country.

Secondly, the President also spoke about restructuring and possibly reducing the size of government departments.

As you may know, we have one of the most inflated cabinets in the world, with 70 ministers and deputy ministers whose remuneration, perks and housing expenses are being funded by the tax payer.

This comes down to billions of rand that can be spared if we were to drastically reduce the size of our cabinet.

Understandably, this would not be an easy decision to make as an inflated cabinet would be good for patronage as we have seen in the past with former President Jacob Zuma, however – as we are being told by national government – we need to make tough decisions if we are to close our fiscal gap, stabilise our debt and get South Africa to where it should be in the next couple of years.

This unfortunately, Mr President is just one of those decisions you also need to make.

Thirdly, the President also made a commitment to fight corruption, fraud and collusion in government – but also importantly – in the private sector.

2017 has exposed not only the rot in government departments but also the private sector and like the President rightfully said – we need to work towards ensuring that corruption – fraud – colluding or whatever else you want to call it – is addressed with the same amount of vigour and intensity right across the industries.

When the year began I spoke of two things that we as Midvaal will be looking to focus on this year, which is GROWTH and JOBS and it appears the President is singing the same tune to the song we began last month.

So, I commend the President and wish him all the best as he takes on this mammoth task of restoring confidence in the executive but also in South Africa.

However, one cannot help but be cautious to start singing the President’s praises as the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We will afford the President time to settle into his position, but we will not hold back on keeping him and national government accountable to all the promises they have made to South Africa.

Speaker,

Yesterday was another important day for the country as the finance minister delivered his maiden budget speech.

I stand here conflicted at the minister’s pronouncements, especially the increase on VAT by a percentage point to 15% for the first time in nearly 25 years.
On the one hand the national budget appears well intended in terms of stimulating growth as well as attracting foreign investments – which we very well need due to our subdued growth in the past few years.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the possibility of what this means for the poorest in our communities – over and above the zero rating on essential items—because the reality is that even the poorest of the poor do not solely survive on basic household items, because added to that is the cost of transport, clothing, and other items which may not be regarded as basic but however are non-luxury items that are necessary for everyday living.

It may appear that while the minister allayed our fears – reminding us that “We gonna be alright” to quote him directly, it may appear that our rightful determination to drive economic growth is coming at the expense of the poor—especially in the short to medium term—due to national government’s lack of proper policies and execution in the past couple of years.

While South Africa needs to take these bold and tough decisions to put us back on the right economic trajectory, it is the everyday South African who will bear the brunt of government’s past mistakes.

At the same time, this also serves to teach us two things…

Firstly, that every decision one makes has consequences. As Isaac Newton puts it “…and to every action there is always an equal and opposite or contrary, reaction”

So it’s evident that we need to keep ourselves and others accountable for each decision taken, and call out potentially risky decision making when we witness it.

Secondly, this should also serve as evidence that we are where we are not because it was inevitable, but because we allowed it to get here.

We allowed bad administration and poor decision making to triumph because many – not all of us- kept quiet.

A recent study which was published in the Economist has shown that South Africa’s economy is 25% smaller than what it would have been had there been better administration, systems and increased confidence in the country.

Speaker,

25% growth— that’s how much we have potentially lost to corruption, maladministration and essentially selfish and greedy leadership and we are now paying the price for those bad decisions.

So, it is evident that we need to buckle up and tighten our belts as things are not going to get any easier for municipalities either this year as we will still have less revenue to provide increased service delivery demands to our people.

However, our responsibility remains to find ways to maximise our revenue and ensure that the most essential needs of our communities are met.
This also means we need to be innovative and find ways to grow the Midvaal economy and create jobs for our people.

We also need to come up with systems that will ensure we retain and possibly even increase our collection rates to allow us to continue providing the level of quality services our communities have become accustomed to.

We have done it in the past, and I can assure each one of you that we can and will continue to do this despite the many challenges we are faced with.

Speaker,

We recently completed our rounds of IPD meetings across the municipality and I can say that public sentiment around the municipality remains cautiously positive.

IDP meetings are extremely important because more than being a platform for communities to air their grievances, they give communities an opportunity to hold the executive accountable; they also allow for discussions and engagements around possible growth prospects and broad challenges, as well as afford communities an opportunity to identify gaps in their wards that need our attention;

There were more cases than before where our public meetings lasted longer than was scheduled and we welcome this because it proves that there is an increased interest to engage and keep the executive accountable.

The issues raised during our IDP roadshow, which form part of our competency, can be summarised as follows:

- Increased maintenance on infrastructure
- Increased economic growth opportunities especially in settlements
- Youth, and general unemployment
- Increase in service delivery
- Human settlements plan
- Improved communication from council
- Better prioritisation of needs vs budget

Speaker,

We have noted that building up to the IDP meetings there was increased infrastructure sabotage across the municipality. We have realised that there are those working to deliberately sabotage and destabilise the work that the municipality is doing to serve their personal vendettas.

Yes, I will be the first to admit that our communities are rightfully frustrated and have raised genuine and legitimate grievances with us, that we have begun looking into.

However, as we have said and proven time and again, our vision here at Midvaal is to inclusively serve the needs of our people, and yes we have not fully realised that yet – however we believe that each day we are a step closer.

There is a worrying narrative that is being perpetuated by some that the municipality only serves the needs of a few, which is not true.
While I can admit to not being perfect, I cannot accept that we as a municipality would deliberately exclude any part of our community – and focus solely on others as some may suggest.

We have duly noted, and many times before admitted, that there are disparities in the levels of service delivery in our communities and we are working to ensure that all our communities are integrated.

More than it being a failure to deliver, I believe that it is more of a lack of constant communication between us and our communities, which may add to the frustration.

While it’s impossible for myself or anyone for that matter to be everywhere and address everyone’s concerns, I believe we would be in a better position if all levels of leadership within municipal structures worked as a unit for the betterment of our people, instead of others working against each other.

Speaker,

It is for this reason that I have proposed for the reintroduction of the IDP Steering Committee which will ensure that our ward councillors and ward committees engage with the executive more frequently and consistently.

We live in a representative democracy, which means that those elected by the people must consistently be seen on the ground, engaging with them regularly in order to ensure that there is a mutual understanding in terms of where the municipality is headed, as well as to discuss possible growth prospects.

It does not make sense that we learn of the issues facing a particular community for the first time when we arrive for the IDP meetings.

I believe that if we work together, setting aside our political divides, to ensure that services are delivered as and when they ought to be delivered, our communities would be able to recognise the work we are doing.

The Mayor is not the only councillor in Midvaal, therefore our residents do not need to see me specifically, or wait for me to come for the IDP meetings in order to have things done.

Yes, progress is gradual, and we cannot push beyond our weight, however our communities need to see us on a regular and have access to us in order for them to build trust and accept that we are doing as much as we can with the resources we have.

I also believe that if we have increased councillor visibility in our communities, allowing our people the opportunity to raise grievances as soon as they arise, we would have less volatility within our communities, and our public participations would run better as they would serve their primary goal.

Most importantly, we would have a fully functioning and more efficiently run municipality.
This means that we also have to continue holding each other – as councillors – accountable in order to ensure that we are all doing what needs to be done, and when it needs to be done.

Speaker,

Following the public meetings, the executive and senior management of the municipality engaged in a two-day strategic meeting to discuss a way forward, taking into consideration the issues raised during our IDP meetings, as well as prepare for the next financial year.

Speaker,

We will be implementing the new General Valuation Roll in the upcoming financial year which begins on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of July 2018.

We have engaged with our communities on the new valuations and what they mean for property owners.

The roll is open for inspection from 1\textsuperscript{st} March 2018 to 30\textsuperscript{th} April 2018.

We have urged property owners who feel that the Municipal Valuation is overstated or that have any other grievances related to this matter to lodge an objection before the closing date to ensure their grievances are duly addressed before the new roll comes into effect.

We have made the grievance process simpler by allowing our residents to raise their objections electronically on our website, but insist that due process be followed in order to ensure that all objections are able to be addressed.

Section 49 notices which will indicate the new valuation of properties will be sent out to residents in the coming week.

Fellow Councillors,

On the agenda today, we are proposing that the draft property rates policy period be extended to the 15\textsuperscript{th} of March to allow residents more time to deliberate and consider the policy before giving feedback.

Speaker,

Earlier this month we had the misfortune of having to dismiss one of our senior officials in the Waste Management department over tender irregularities amounting to more than R1 million.

Following an internal disciplinary hearing, the employee was found guilty on charges relating to the failure to disclose a conflict of interest and not recusing oneself as a member of the Bid Evaluation Committee during the process of awarding tenders in the Waste Management department where the employee had a personal and/or business relationship with the bidders.
The official was also found to have breached the employer's Code of Conduct, Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy, Supply Chain Management Policy and related fiduciary duties in terms of Schedule 2 of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000.

Speaker,

I am, however, excited to share that earlier this week we had the honour of presenting four youth owned businesses from our Kgetelopole Youth Development Programme with subcontract agreements contracts by one of our partners, Re-solve Consulting for the War on Leaks Programme.

The Programme is aimed at training and equipping artisans to carry out the task of repairing water leaks at indigent properties in Sicelo and Lakeside.

As sub-contractors, our young (and mostly female participants, might I also add) also have the opportunity to create employment for others in their communities.

This excites me for two main reasons. Firstly, because as I have mentioned many times before, we are a youth biased municipality and we mean it when we say we want to unlock increased opportunities for young people living in our communities.

Secondly, because this is also in line with our main goal to grow the Midvaal economy and create jobs, and this is putting us one step closer towards realising that objective.

So, I would like to congratulate Cypure Poultry Farm, Goes Painting and Tiling, Woodpeckers Garden Tree Services and Livestock and Poultry Butchery on being awarded these contracts and wish them all the best as they begin this new entrepreneurial journey.

Speaker,

On the 5th of February I was invited to deliver the keynote address at the PMR Africa Business Excellence Awards for the Sedibeng District.

Once again, our municipality was recognised as the best performing municipality in the region.

We were honoured with three overall awards, including one for the most pro-active Mayor in the district.

We were also recognised for our efforts in creating jobs, social upliftment and crime fighting.

We have also been rated the best performing municipality in terms of attracting foreign and local investments, infrastructure development and having a clean and conducive environment.

We welcome such accolades because not only do they remind us that we are doing a great job, more importantly they prove to us that the work we do has impact and is changing people’s lives.
And I think we can all agree that this is the main reason why many of us are here: to change the lives of as many people as we can with the resources that have been entrusted to us.

So, I would like to dedicate these accolades to every one of us who plays a role in making Midvaal what it is, and what it will grow to become.

These awards are a recognition, not only of myself, but of OUR collective efforts, because even if I tried – I wouldn’t be able to run a fully functioning municipality by myself.

As I close, I call on each one of us to consider what role we have to play in this ‘new South Africa’ so to call it and do what needs to be done in order to move our country forward.

I believe that the worst is over, and our country has proven its resilience yet again and that we are capable of far more than what we have subjected ourselves to in the past few years.

But, let us begin to be cognisant of our actions and the repercussions thereof and choose to do what’s right, even when it’s the tough way out, because we owe it not only to ourselves but future generations too.

Thank you!