

Preparing Sedibeng for 2010 and Beyond

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MORE than R15 billion will be pumped into the South African economy from tourism generated by the 2010 FIFA World Cup Soccer tournament and Sedibeng Municipal District, with its host of pivotal cultural and political sites, was primed for securing its share of opportunities.

Tourism minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk has indicated the soccer showcase will contribute an estimated R50 billion from construction investment and a further R15,6 billion from tourism. This will be another cushion for South Africa against the broader global economic crisis, softening the effects of the meltdown on local job losses.

The country is gearing to receive 3,5-million participants during the month-long event of which 1,3-million will be tourists. The touring British Lions in June this year attracted 40000 international supporters and generated more than R1 billion for the local economy.

Sedibeng Executive Mayor Mahole Simon Mofokeng says the region is richly endowed with a variety of natural and cultural heritage resources dating more than 2,5-million years ago and now represents South Africa's deep-rooted natural and social history and cultural diversity.

Established in 2000, the district evolved from the rich history of Evaton, Heidelberg, Sharpeville, Boipatong, Sebokeng, Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark, Vaal Oewers, Vaal Marina and Suikerbosrand.

There are 456 known places of heritage significance, including paleontological and archaeological sites, graves, historic buildings, public monuments and spaces of importance to local communities. Although not a host city during the soccer tournament, Mofokeng says Sedibeng is centrally located between Bloemfontein and Johannesburg to offer diverse tourism experiences.

"The FIFA World Cup Soccer provides a strong focus for local government and other players to develop, improve and enhance Sedibeng and the opportunity for securing thousands of visitors via accommodation, heritage tours and fan parks cannot be overlooked," he says.

Consequently, the municipality is investing millions of rand into a range of urban upgrades ahead of 2010, but with the long-term vision for recognising the value of either cultural tourism or dark tourism (the travel to sites associated with death and suffering). Sharpeville commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in March 2010.

The main focus areas for urban development include the Vereeniging civic centre, Sharpeville and the waterfront, but broadly across the municipal district will be investment into paving, lighting, signage and landscaping to boost the tourism potential within the region. Three inter-related Sharpeville precincts – heritage in the vicinity of the Sharpeville monument, sport and recreation around the George Thabe soccer stadium and recreation along the dam – will bring to the key cultural and historic node an essence of harmony after a troubled past.



Mofokeng says the municipality will develop four waterfront projects along the Vaal River in the vicinity of Vereeniging that includes upgrading Dickenson Park; developing a business park alongside Dickenson Park; building an iconic water tourism hub and constructing a boardwalk encompassing both sides of the river.

In extending the existing park and creating a landmark landscape, the Dickenson Park project will improve the symbiotic urban relationship between the park and the city. The Vereeniging central business district development is aimed at creating a vibrant, well-utilised and well-managed civic precinct.

Inherent in its development will be a mixed use government and cultural precinct as a platform for private sector investments and public private partnerships. Mofokeng says this project will provide opportunities to the private sector for housing and office development as a catalyst for urban renewal.

“These initiatives will boost job creation, employment and business opportunities while addressing the legacy of apartheid and apartheid settlement patterns. Integrating the waterfront to the city by enabling access to the river by the public and upgrading the quality of life for citizens within the greater Sedibeng municipal district will play a significant role in realising the potential of this corner of Africa,” Mofokeng says.

He adds that in providing redress to the communities who suffered from the brunt of apartheid exploitation, the investment will be a catalyst to overcome the ills imposed by apartheid while leaving behind a legacy beyond 2010.

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