

# Concerned Citizens Committee to Save Makana

Representing Members of:

Grahamstown Residents Association, Grahamstown Business Forum & Makana Unity League

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## To Residents and interested parties of Makana

11<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Dear resident,

This letter tells you a sad story that goes to the core of why Makana looks the way it does. Please do take five minutes to see what we have to say.

We conditionally dropped our call for full administration because Province and Makana agreed instead to appoint a Specialist Turnaround municipal manager with the necessary skills set. We are saddened to inform you that we have all been badly let down by our Councillors and we reiterate our demand for intervention at Makana municipality to turn the municipality around.

We planned to hold a rally on **Saturday morning at 9am outside City Hall**. Red tape means that we can only have a crowd of 15 people, so we are going to use Saturday as a dress rehearsal. If you come, please don't look like a crowd!! Seriously please don't form a crowd on Saturday – but do it on Thursday by which time we'll have sorted out the red tape.

The main rally will now take place at lunchtime on **Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> at lunchtime outside City Hall** – when you are welcome to look like a crowd!

### **Local Government at war with the Community?**

A defence lawyer will often advise the guilty to remain silent. Ignoring questions, muddying the waters and delaying procedures are very effective for preventing justice.

Whether it is our current State President or the Executive Mayor of Makana, Nomhle Gaga, both are masters at smokescreens and delay tactics. She withholds information, fails to acknowledge or answer emails, doesn't pick up phone calls and ignores questions and requests. It makes engagement difficult and frustrating, the opposite of what is desirable in a mayor.

Makana residents have come together since June 2017 to try and help the Mayor to reverse the decline in Grahamstown and solve the financial and service delivery problems that beset the city. Over the past few years we've reached a critical point where jobs and livelihoods are being lost in Grahamstown. Action is needed by our community to arrest the fall. Words uttered by the Mayor to full council 'the municipality must not collapse' are not going to solve the problem.

At face value, EC Provincial government in the form of Mr. Zandisile Qupe, has listened to our concerns and understood the gravity of the situation. In July 2017 they undertook (together with the Makana political leadership) to install a specialist turnaround manager to deal with uncontrolled debts, a disaffected and oversized workforce, and gross mismanagement. Concerned Citizens of Grahamstown accepted Provincial promises and tentatively hoped they were making progress. We were let down and lied to.

Our community was further assured personally by the Mayor that the Specialist Manager sourced from Durban would arrive on 1<sup>st</sup> December. But then, at the eleventh hour, she announced that she had secured a resolution from Sarah Baartman District Municipality that they would send their municipal manager, Ted Pillay. Despite the sudden change of course, because Mr Pillay enjoys a very good reputation, everyone

was pleased with this news. Consequently the Specialist manager who had taken months to secure was cancelled.

There was a small problem. The Mayor had lied. She had no such agreement in place with Sarah Baartman DM. Ted Pillay had never been approached for agreement, Sarah Baartman Council agendas show that the issue of secondment has not been considered. The best that SBDM can say is that they are aware of the request – seconding Ted Pillay was first suggested in 2016, so that doesn't give us any reason for confidence. What this means is that after all this negotiation the Mayor has pulled the rug from our feet and Makana is no nearer solving its crisis. We can only speculate on the motives of our Mayor.

The municipality starts 2018 more than R170 Million in debt compared to R86 Million a year ago. The streets and all infrastructure is collapsing, even rubbish collection and cutting grass is a challenge with broken down vehicles. The municipal web site is offline. Endless burst pipes and wasted water are of particular concern as our main western water supply dam sits at less than 18%.

#### Message to EC Provincial Government

It is striking how much damage incompetent people can do when they are put in charge. Come on Provincial government! Give us leadership with integrity, honesty and the skills to run this little municipality.

If you can't run a small city with all the advantages of an internationally renowned University, prestigious private and public schools and the biggest Arts Festival in Africa, what can you do? There's very little hope for other municipalities if you can't get it right in Grahamstown.

We will write and advertise again for the Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> January rally to take place in Church Square. This Saturday will be a warm up at 9am.

Yours sincerely,

*Ron Weissenberg*

**Concerned Citizens Committee to Save Makana**

Per: Ron Weissenberg, Chairman