

Pietermaritzburg at risk from missing storm water drainage plans

Concerns that the loss of the plans was likely to affect the City's ability to properly and effectively perform urgent preventative maintenance or consequential repairs.

By Chris Ndaliso

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The Msunduzi City Hall.

The missing stormwater drainage plans for Msunduzi CBD is a disaster waiting to happen, the Msunduzi Association of Residents, Ratepayers and Civics (Marrc) said recently.

MRRC said the loss of the plans was likely to affect the City's ability to properly and effectively perform both urgent preventative maintenance or consequential repairs.

This follows the findings by the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) in November last year that the City had no direction with regards to planning and implementing projects.

During a roasting by Cogta acting chief director for infrastructure Chuleza Jama at the time, the department revealed that the City's grant funding was in jeopardy if they did not get their house in order.

Jama also revealed that Msunduzi had no plans for the storm water system for the CBD of Pietermaritzburg.

The outdated plans that did exist were sent away for scanning. Unfortunately they were never returned and there is also no electronic version. This poses a risk because it is impossible to maintain a system if you don't have a record of what exists.

"The effectiveness of a storm water system needs to be reviewed from time to time due to changes in run-off patterns caused by changes in infrastructure," said Jama in her presentation to the executive committee at the time.

She said knowledge of the system will also make monitoring and maintenance easier and also help with the pinpointing of leakage from the sewer reticulation system into the storm water system. MRRC chairperson Anthony Waldhausen questioned how a municipality could function without any plans.

"The lack of plans is very likely to affect the municipality's ability to properly and effectively perform both preventative maintenance or consequential repairs, which repairs may be urgent. It also critically affects the municipality's ability to properly plan future expansion of or changes to the network.

"These pose substantial potential legal and other risks to the municipality, in particular where the municipality's actions or omissions result in damages to affected residents or other persons. A municipality ought to know where all its underground services, and not only its storm water reticulation pipes, are located.

"In addition to the legal risk of the municipality being sued for delictual damages, the absence of plans also severely impacts on the municipality's ability to enforce

legislation such as the National Building Regulations, the Building Standards Act and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act in respect of any area where information on underground or other services is not available. The municipality has a legal duty to enforce such legislations,” said Waldhausen.

He said the fact that plans were not copied and stored electronically says a lot about how the municipality is run. Msunduzi spokesperson Ntobeko Mkhize said they do have plans for each street in the city. “Only the general layout plan was lost. There is available information to maintain the storm water system.

“The challenge with the CBD is not because of a lack of storm water maintenance, but it is due to the littering and illegal dumping that ends up in our drains which causes blockages. The general layout will be part of the deliverables when we update our storm water master plan,” she said.

IFP councillor Thinasonke Ntombela said the City has been without a general manager for infrastructure for a long time. Ntombela said the past problems would not disappear, but would need the attention of those in authority.

We just appointed a municipal manager who inherited all these challenges, so it would only be fair to give him time to deal with the various challenges. We have had no maintenance, meaning that there was no proper planning, hence the numerous grant funds that had to be returned to the Treasury

The DA’s Ross Strachan said plans for the maintenance and upgrades of storm water had been an issue since 2016 and before then. “If we ever had to have extreme flooding or disasters to the extent eThekweni have experienced, especially within our CBD, we would be in serious trouble.

“The fact that our current storm water infrastructure is not even being maintained or even worse, being compromised by our own employees, is even more serious,” said Strachan.