



Mayoral Report
to Council meeting
held 28 February 2022

WHEN THE TAPS RUN DRY IT IS TOO LATE

Submitted by
Dr Ruben Richards
Executive Mayor

CONTENTS

SALUTATION	3
1. WELCOME TO REALITY – a move back to basics	3
2. A MOMENT IN HISTORY	3
3. IDP – Statutory compliance versus actual service delivery	4
4. MAYCO FEEDBACK – challenging the frog syndrome	5
5. JOC MEETINGS TO DEAL WITH THE CRISIS	6
Declaring a Cederberg state of disaster	6
Operation Cleanup	6
6. WATER CRISIS IN CLANWILLIAM – some reflections	6
A community that held hands	6
Beyond life support: critical but stable	7
The crisis is not over	7
7. OTHER MATTERS	8
8. CLOSURE	8

SALUTATION

Mr Speaker

The Agenda for today's council meeting is full so I will try to be brief. I intend to cover four broad topics/themes: History making, IDP (Integrated Development Plan), the Water crisis, and the Adjustment Budget.

1. WELCOME TO REALITY – A MOVE BACK TO BASICS

In the midst of a gruelling IDP roadshow during this past month, and trying to complete adjustment budgets and other statutory compliances, the municipality was hit with a water crisis in Clanwilliam. The taps literally ran dry. The inescapable irony was that while the Clanwilliam Dam is full, the town right next door to the dam itself ran out of water. I have taken my cue from this crisis and entitled my address today: *“When the taps run dry it is too late.”*

But first, allow me to greet everybody in the meeting today.

2. A MOMENT IN HISTORY

I wish to greet all councillors, members of staff and the public in attendance today. It is worth noting that this is the first time a council meeting of the Cederberg Municipality takes place at this historic mission station called Wupperthal established almost 200 years ago in 1830 by two German missionaries of the Rhenish Missionary Society (Rheinische Mission), Theobald von Wurmb and Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt, grandfather of C. Louis Leipoldt. During the 1960s Wupperthal transitioned to become part of the Moravian Church. Today we are meeting in the newly built hall of this Moravian Church here in Wupperthal – newly built because of the devastating wildfire fire of December 2018 which swept through the village and surrounding area. As you know, the fire destroyed a majority of the buildings in the town, burning down 53 homes, a community hall, clinic, a restaurant miraculously leaving only the town's church and a few other buildings standing.

From my office as Mayor, I wish to thank the leadership of the Moravian Church for allowing us to have this historic council meeting in a place so embedded in the history and DNA of South Africa. I want to wish you well as you rebuild the town from the ashes of the fire.

Congratulations Mr Speaker for leading our new council in making history today by having our council meeting here in Wupperthal.

As I reflect on my diary for this past month of February 2022, I am left with one word – challenging. Despite my best attempts to plan and stick to the prearranged diary schedule, the pressure of statutory and organisational deadlines, coupled with unforeseen events and crisis overtook us. These events demanded immediate and prudent responses as well as flexibility and adaptability in terms of diary management. Of course, I soon learned that our municipal systems are not geared to respond effectively in a crisis situation. It is too bureaucratic and cumbersome (lomp as one could say in Afrikaans). But more about that in a moment especially given that the vast majority of municipalities around South Africa are in a permanent state of crisis in respect of the delivery of basic services and are plagued with poor financial management.

3. IDP – STATUTORY COMPLIANCE VERSUS ACTUAL SERVICE DELIVERY

As of 31 January 2022, through to almost mid-February I travelled across the municipality to every location where IDP discussions were scheduled and facilitated. My thanks to the municipal team for their inputs, participation and interaction with the various communities. No doubt each community has their unique set of circumstances and needs. But what is common to all is the need for the delivery of basic services. The irony is that either everybody is happy with the level of service delivery or communities have given up on demanding basic services and are instead focusing on provincial and national competencies such as housing, for example – a competency that sits outside the municipality but for which the municipality is unfairly held accountable. The unfolding environment catastrophe linked to the non-collection of garbage in an informal settlement like Khayalitsha in Clanwilliam, for example, does not seem to get onto top of the IDP agenda, unless I missed it. The ageing and unmaintained water infrastructure which places a town at risk also does not seem to reach the top of the service delivery agenda. Why?

A recurring complaint I heard from residents is that they have seen these IDP list of priorities for years and nothing has been done about them. While this is not always completely accurate, there is some truth in it. Consequently, trust has eroded the relationship between residents and the municipality. In Graafwater, I was told to my face by residents that we are a bunch of liars. In Clanwilliam, we were unable to continue with two scheduled meetings as these were vigorously (almost violently) disrupted by a small group of residents who booed the Mayor when he took the podium and when called to the second meeting, even though warmly welcomed by a round of applause as I entered the meeting, was not given a chance to address the meeting by the same group of disruptive elements in the meeting.

If the IDP is to be our strategy map then it must surely prioritise basic service delivery and of course the attendant enabling macro infrastructural needs? Nevertheless, I believe that once we “get back to basics” and deliver the services needed, we will be

in a better position to rebuild trust between ourselves as the municipality and the people who voted for us. We must surely move beyond statutory compliance and producing a wonderful IDP report to producing performance appraisals from citizens who say we are doing our core job and doing it well.

4. MAYCO FEEDBACK – CHALLENGING THE FROG SYNDROME

I won't repeat here all the detail discussed at the Mayco meeting held last week. Those minutes should be available soon. The administration is trying to keep up and complete the minutes of all the meetings of February.

The image I used in the Mayco meeting to describe the situation we face as a municipality is that of the frog in a pot of water which is beginning to get hot. I refer here to the frog syndrome. The otherwise agile frog adapts to the rising temperature and eventually drowns in its own environment (water). The Cederberg Municipality is at risk to the same fate. It appears that both the municipality and its clients have gotten used to poor levels of service delivery. The municipality (and dare I say the residents as well) are like that frog in the boiling pot – adapting to the rising temperature of the water and running the risk of eventually drowning in its own administration (or lack thereof).

The water crisis of Clanwilliam illustrated the frog syndrome very poignantly. I was alerted of the water crisis only when the water in the taps started running dry. By then it was too late. I should have been alerted when the first water pump broke not when the taps were running dry.

I have also now learned that the shocking state of the water infrastructure has long since been reported to the municipality but nothing was done about it. It therefore seems that for months (if not years) the municipality has been happy to continuously pay a supplier to repair pumps at double the price of a new pump, if one were to quote one example of the problem. I will not elaborate any further on these technical matters save to say that I intend to authorise a full-scale investigation in the water crisis so that we can, among others, extract lessons learned and codify a standard operating procedure for similar disasters in the future.

An alarming issue outside of the ageing and unmaintained water infrastructure is the poor quality of the water we are supplying to our residents and the extent of water losses. It will be irresponsible to not carry out a water-loss (unaccounted for water) investigation and even more irresponsible if we do not implement a water demand management system in order to reduce the unaccounted for water to less than 10% noting just how precious a commodity water is to our country. Of course, we need to refurbish and upgrade (or replace) the current pumpstation downstream of the Clanwilliam Dam and the Jan Dissels which must include a 100% standby capacity.

5. JOC MEETINGS TO DEAL WITH THE CRISIS

Declaring a Cederberg state of disaster

The Acting MM called a JOC meeting for Thursday morning – by which time the taps had run dry. The minutes of the JOC meeting are available for scrutiny. What is important is that the JOC identified at least two other potential emergencies which stare us in the face namely sewerage and solid waste collection and disposal. As we speak today, there is raw and untreated sewerage spilling into the Jan Dissels River. This is unacceptable and I have instructed that this matter receive immediate attention. Furthermore, as noted by the JOC meeting, our capacity to collect garbage is gravely compromised by the fact that our own trucks are mostly in the garage for repairs. This means we need to hire a truck at exorbitant rates in order to ensure the delivery of a basic service such as garbage collection.

Operation Cleanup

An outcome of the Mayco meeting was that I gave the acting MM seven days to provide me with a plan to deal with solid waste collection – an unfolding environmental disaster with particular reference to the informal settlement of Khayalitsha. Next week, I will be hosting a stakeholder meeting at the place of uncollected rubbish in Khayalitsha. This is no board room matter. It is a matter that requires action on the ground.

Let me now talk in a little more detail about the water crisis. As you will have heard, my office shifted briefly from 2 Voortrekker Street to the Clanwilliam Dam pumpstation. I refused to leave the pumpstation until our water crisis was fixed.

6. WATER CRISIS IN CLANWILLIAM – SOME REFLECTIONS

A community that held hands

I have reported elsewhere¹ that we have stabilised the water situation in Clanwilliam and will elaborate in more detail below. But I first wish to place on record my thanks to all who helped us resolve the water crisis. Private residents and farmers miraculously appeared and offered their help to fix the problem. From providing engineering services to supplying water and food – we all pulled together to rescue Clanwilliam from a very desperate situation. We were helped by Provincial government and the District municipality with water tankers and bottled water. Coca Cola, Gift of the Givers, private farmers like my farming neighbour, Dirkie Mouton, all did their bit to provide water. Even our Speaker did his bit from his hospital bed to arrange water tankers for us. Thanks also the municipal team – both technical and administrative. Well done Alonzo (our Technical Director).

On the engineering side of things, we benefitted from the expertise and good will of Smit Engineering and Johan Smit, and other individuals such as our own Councillor

¹ See Facebook page of Cederberg Municipality, media releases and press statements by the Mayor.

Martin Bergh, and our technical director, Alonzo Allison, together with farmers such as Braam Mouton, and also Le Roux Burger, as well as engineers from the Department of Water and Sanitation (Rassie Nieuwoudt and Deon Liebenberg) supported by the efforts of Peet Viljoen, Schalk Boshoff, Johan van der Westhuizen and Eric Clackson, whose collective wisdom and expertise together with our municipal team saw a dramatic and speedy redesign of the pumphouse and its piping infrastructure.

Thanks also to suppliers such as Agri SA (we bought JOJO tanks from them) and Tobias Basson of Namakwaland Sitrus Boerdery (they supplied the crates on which the JOJO tanks were placed around Clanwilliam). Thanks to Jannie Swart, the owner of Spar, who co-sponsored us with meals over the weekend as we worked around the clock to avert a total disaster. Thanks to Mariaan and Sanet who interviewed me on site and in my new office, the pump station.

And so the list goes on. What a wonderful display of goodwill and working together as a community to resolve a crisis that affects us all. At least we diverted a total disaster. Thanks to all those who prayed for us. We needed those prayers.

What this crisis showed is that we can pull together, and we can solve any problem that faces us. And yes, I gave instructions from my new office, the pumpstation, as one of our councillors complained. I appeal that in the same way many previously uncooperative residents who were critical of the municipality, and preferred to be distant stakeholders suddenly rolled up their sleeves and helped resolved a crisis, all Counsellors should take the same approach and leave their ideological and even personal differences behind, take hands and work to resolve for the common good for all.

Thanks again to everyone.

BEYOND LIFE SUPPORT: CRITICAL BUT STABLE

The broken pumps have been replaced. We have needed to dramatically redesign the pump station and break through existing brick walls to reroute new pipes to a new source of water. We are no longer extracting water directly from the dam but instead from the Clanwilliam irrigation canal. This is a temporary solution. I will soon make a decision on a more permanent solution to resolve this crisis beyond its current critical status.

To use a medical analogy for our water crisis – *the patient is still critical but stable. The patient remains on life support.* We need to quickly find ways to take the patient off life support. I will soon announce emergency interventions to ensure that our water supply is secured and no longer under threat. But for now there is water in the taps.

The crisis is not over

I beg your indulgence Mr Speaker, and ask that we pause for a moment to take in what has just happened vis-à-vis the water crisis. Unfortunately, for as long as there is water coming out of the taps, the assumption is that there is no crisis. I want to emphatically alert council of the fact that the measures I have authorised during this crisis were designed to ensure that there is at least water in the taps.

Understandably, from a residents / inwoner point of view the crisis seems to be over. But Mr Speaker, I can assure you that our water supply situation is very precarious. The crisis is not over. It's like getting a puncture and you are forced to use that little biscuit spare wheel in your car boot to help you get your car to the nearest garage so that the puncture in the real tyre can be fixed as soon as possible. You cannot drive with that little biscuit tyre forever. You are simply placing your passengers at risk if you do so. The same applies to our water situation. We are drawing water from the irrigation canal using semi-submersible pumps at the moment. This is our version of a biscuit tyre. We must, as a matter of urgency, ensure that a more sustainable and safer solution to water supply is put in place. This is beyond an emergency. I am in the final stages of consultation with water engineers in order to make decisions on a solution. As I indicated by way of the title of my speech today: When the taps run dry it is too late.

A new factor influencing my decision-making is the announcement last week by the Minister of Finance in his budget speech that two billion rand has been allocated to the upgrading of the Clanwilliam Dam wall. Because we ordinarily draw our water through a pipe in the current dam wall, we will have to rapidly go to the drawing board in terms of building a new source of water for Clanwilliam. In short, this means the relocation and/or building of a new pump station: something that was inevitable but has now become urgent given the unfolding of events around the construction work needed for the raising of the dam wall. Please pardon me for sharing so much technical information but it is imperative that we understand these process as it affects budgets, timelines and urgency.

I will no doubt keep council appraised of developments as they unfold.

7. OTHER MATTERS

Mr Speaker, there are a range of other matters one could and should comment upon at this council meeting. However, our agenda today and its many reports are sufficient so I will resist the temptation to go into detail on other matters. I refer specifically to the Adjustment Budget which is before us for adoption.

8. CLOSURE

As I close, I am happy to announce that our new MM, Mr Dawie Adonis starts with us tomorrow (1 March). I will be introducing him to the municipality in various ways. Tomorrow I wish to introduce him to Mayco and the Directors. In time we will visit the various offices and meet the full staff and team – his team as MM.

We will soon host a strategic planning workshop (mid-March) to plot our collective way forward to a better and focused municipality which has a funded budget. This promises to be a rough ride.

I close with a word of thanks to all the Councillors and staff for their commitment to the Cederberg Municipality. I thank our residents for their support as illustrated through the water crisis. I know now that I can call on you in the future for further assistance. Be strong and healthy. As was said in the old days – Aluta Continua – the struggle continues. Alle sterkte vorentoe.

Ends