



Cederberg Eerste

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Gemeenskapsorganisasie

Cederberg First Residents Association

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Open Letter

To supporters of Cederberg Eerste

Confirming successful MONC expelled CE-led coalition.

Good day to all our people of Cederberg Eerste

I must admit that the events of the past few days have been both disturbing and sobering. Thank you for your continued support and trust that you have shown towards me. I am deeply moved and pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming messages of support I have received.

We are a residents association – a community organisation. Our vision and mission is simple: clean towns, clean water and clean administration.

Upon reflection of the past few days, I realise that I have been naive and thought, like many of you, that we had everybody's support to deal with the complex challenges staring us in the face. I ask your forgiveness for being so naive.

Therefore, with this short message I wish to inform my CE people concerning the events that have taken place at the municipality during the last few days.

As you already are aware, the outcome of a special council meeting of the Cederberg municipality held 13th July 2022 was that I was voted out as executive mayor linked to a motion of no confidence which was tabled by the ANC and the Patriotic Alliance.

Surprisingly, the DA coalition member, Josef Farmer, chose to vote with the ANC and PA and this resulted in the loss of the majority vote held by the coalition. Consequently, the ANC is now in control of the municipality and CE occupies the opposition benches. Josef Farmer was nominated and supported by the ANC and PA and subsequently chosen as the new executive mayor, with Maxwell Heyns of the ANC elected as the new speaker of council.

Coalition government has its challenges. I am deeply disappointed concerning the intentional and blatant disregard of the coalition agreement and the unethical behaviour of the DA representatives.

My main concern is the now concerted smear campaign and lies that are being spread about me. According to media reports I am being investigated and/or charged for fraud and corruption linked to my position as executive mayor. I was already contacted by the Hawks in this regard.

I accept that politics is not easy and that one must develop a thick skin, like that of a rhinoceros, to cope with a variety of methodologies, personalities, ideologies and sentiments. But I do believe that there is a line that should not be crossed – even in politics. And that is what has happened here. Maybe I am being too naive again, but is it asking too much from public representatives such as municipal councillors to behave and act ethically?

What I can confirm is that the Cederberg council, now under the leadership of the ANC, has charged me for a breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors as set out in the Structures and Systems Act. This breach is linked to allegations that I have and/or continue to farm on municipal land without council permission. As you all know, and as disclosed to the council in November 2021 already, I am a director of an agricultural company called Namakwaland Sitrus here in Clanwilliam.

At the special council meeting of 4 July 2022, Josef Farmer (then still Speaker) together with the ANC and PA councillors strongly expressed their opinions which among others included that the executive mayor, Ruben Richards, should be charged criminally for **theft of land, unlawful** farming, land grabbing, fraud, corruption and misleading council regarding my business interests.

Let me unequivocally state that these allegations have no basis and are lies. I also want to place on record what I said to the council meeting of 13 July 2022, namely, that I am in full support of any lawful investigation into my person and businesses. I have nothing to hide, I said. As a result of the procedures followed at the council meeting of 4 July, my name has already been dragged through the mud without my being afforded an opportunity to defend myself.

Under the leadership of the then speaker, Josef Farmer, the council decided to refer the matter to a disciplinary committee as well as to the Financial Misconduct Committee to make a determination of the amount and/or fine to be paid linked to my illegal farming activities. It would seem that I have already been found guilty before a hearing has taken place.

In terms of the allegations regarding my illegal or unlawful farming activities I wish to say the following: In 2019 the municipality sold 45ha of agricultural land to Rooibos Limited as part of a tendering process. Namakwaland Sitrus currently farms on that 45ha of land as a tenant, given a lease agreement between Rooibos and Twee Riviere Trust, in which I have no personal interest. The municipality has not followed its own subdivision processes and in the last few weeks identified an alleged infringement of a thin strip of land associated with the 45 hectares sold to Rooibos Limited.

I can categorically say with a clear conscience that I am not involved in any land grabbing or land stealing or corruption.

Cederberg Eerste as a community organisation has tried its best in recent times to facilitate service delivery from within the municipal system. In light of recent developments, Cederberg Eerste will have to review its strategy and consider alternative ways to facilitate optimal service delivery for its residents.

My concluding remark is a request that everybody remain calm. There is a possibility of a by-election and a rearrangement of councillors. I will keep you updated on developments.

Goodbye and be blessed.

Dr Ruben Richards
Leader, Cederberg Eerste Residents Association