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January 2022 OPEN NEWSLETTER TO ALL RESIDENTS of Cederberg Municipality

Issued by the Office of the Executive Mayor,
Dr Ruben Richards, 31 January 2022

Title of this message:

There's a hole in my bucket, Dear Liza

Dear Residents of the Cederberg

The first month of January 2022 is gone. WOW! Nevertheless, I hope that the start to your new year was filled with fresh hope and energy to tackle the challenges of life. I had COVID during January and, together with some senior managers, had to be in isolation for 10 days during January. I am now well and thankful that I have my health back. The senior managers are also well.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide you with a short update on what is happening inside the Municipality – our challenges, our dreams, our hopes, progress and so forth. It is my intention to write you a quarterly (but hopefully a monthly) newsletter just to keep you updated.

The theme/title of this January 2022 letter comes from a nursery rhyme and is a children's song with German origins dating back to the 1700's. It serves as an apt analogy for the challenges I face as the Mayor and we face as a municipality. The song describes a dialogue between two characters, called Henry and Liza, about a leaky bucket. Henry has a leaky bucket, and Liza tells him to repair it. To fix the leaky bucket, he needs straw. To cut the straw, he needs a knife. To sharpen the knife, he needs to wet the sharpening stone. To wet the stone, he needs water. But to fetch water, he needs the bucket, which has a hole in it.

The song describes a difficult (and almost impossible) challenge. Where do you start to fix the hole in the bucket – or must we buy a new one, with money we do not have? I, as Mayor, together with my team, face a situation like Henry and his leaky bucket. Despite of the challenges, I can assure you that we will fix the hole in the bucket as part of our promise to clean up of the municipality.

Enjoy the report and continue to pray for us.

Sincerely
Executive Mayor
Dr Ruben Richards

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UPDATE ON ISSUES THROUGH FORMAL REPORTS AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC

On 27 January 2022, I tabled my December/January Mayor's report to Council. That report is available on line. See the link <http://www.cederbergmun.gov.za/mayoral-report-council-meeting-27-january-2022> .

On 20 January 2022, I signed the half year review (June to December 2021) of the budget and performance of the Municipality. Council approved this report on 25 January. We call this a Section 72 report which is now also available on line. See the link below <http://www.cederbergmun.gov.za/resource-category/financial-reports?page=4>

Below is a summary of the content of those two formal reports and other news.

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Desmond Tutu condolences

During the first week of January 2022, we as Cederberg residents honoured Desmond Tutu through the signing of the Book of Condolences which I took to all the old aged homes in our municipality so that our “elders” could write a message of condolence to the family. What a privilege.

Systems Malfunction

I am sure you have heard the expression: “*Houston, we have a problem*”, with reference to the space exploration conducted by the USA. Similarly, as a result of our diagnosis over the past two months, I have to say, “*Cederberg, we have a problem*”. Or as I said in the title of this newsletter, “*There’s a hole in the bucket*”. I can now confirm with certainty that we have a systems malfunction within the Cederberg municipality. There are some deep structural challenges within the municipality, its administration and records. I call it systems challenges with particular reference to the integrity of our data/information. Fortunately, in October 2021 already, before the local elections, the municipality appointed a service provider to “clean up” the “dirty” data/information. This is an ongoing process. However, this is the third time in ten years such as a “data clean up” exercise is being done inside the municipality’s system. That is the worrying fact – the third time. I have asked: *How is it that the data gets “dirty” every time to the extent that it compromises the financial wellbeing of the municipality?* I need answers and will get answers and then ensure that it is fixed.

Mid-year budget and performance review

As Mayor, I am held accountable for the budget and performance of the municipality. On 25 January 2022, I tabled the prescribed Section 72 report which outlines the performance of the

municipality for the past six months (June to December 2021). Ironically for a large period of this time, I was not the Mayor. But, I am held accountable anyway.

In short, that report states that we have a budget deficit (shortfall) of around R17m (seventeen million rand) and that we are underperforming at the level of capital expenditure and the delivery of basic services. This is terrible and unacceptable. These are very serious matters – lack of service delivery and over expenditure or under collection regarding the budget. We will now have to drastically trim/cut the budget so that our income and expenditure ratios balance out. You cannot spend more money than you actually receive. And you cannot take money from the poor and vulnerable and basic services to subsidise other activities like salaries and car allowances.

SIU report

On 25 January 2022, the President of South Africa released the much-awaited SIU report concerning the alleged fraud and corruption linked to the PPE tender processes relative to combatting the Covid-19 virus. The report now makes it possible for the municipality to act decisively with regard to the allegations directed against certain employees of the municipality. And we are taking steps to address all the issues identified in that SIU report.

Turn-around plan – Back to Basics

Over the next few weeks, we will be engaged in strategic thinking and planning workshops all of which must produce a firm plan to fix our leaking bucket called the Cederberg Municipality. The current consultative visits to residents in all wards to discuss the IDP (Integrated Development Plan) is part of that planning process. We need your input and perspectives. So please participate and make your voices heard.

As Mayor, I have asked each Councillor to compile a consulted and consolidated list of at least 20 items or projects or “things to be done” that will improve the quality of life of residents in the Cederberg. This exercise is particularly poignant for the Ward Councillors. I look forward to receiving those “wish lists” and seeing the extent to which we will be able to meet those expectations as we firm up our strategy going forward for the next five years – our envisaged terms of office.

Conclusion

There is much to do and time is against us. Everybody wants a fixed municipality. Everybody wants their bills to be sorted out. Everybody wants their problems fixed yesterday. Unfortunately, and as they say, Rome was not built in a day. I undertake to fix the municipality as quickly as possible. We are putting together the team that will turn around the municipality. We will soon appoint a fulltime municipal manager. Please be a little patient. I will keep you posted by regularly communicating with you and updating you. Thank you for your support and understanding.

Be safe and healthy.

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