

There shall be houses, security and comfort . . .

A community initiative for affordable housing in Alexandra could serve as a pilot development model for other low income areas in the Transvaal.

PATRICK BANDA reports

CIVIC organisations throughout the country are waiting anxiously for the Transvaal Provincial Administration to respond to an Alexandra Civic Organisation development proposal that could be a reconstruction milestone for South Africa.

Should the TPA respond positively, the way will be cleared for an African urban community to participate actively in developing their home base for the first time in the history of this country.

The ACO proposal for the development of the far East Bank of Alexandra — entitled "Affordable housing for all in Alexandra" — is an attempt to transform historic slogans like "there shall be houses, security and comfort" into a plan of action.

It was submitted by the ACO in conjunction with Planact (a service organisation dealing with issues related to design, housing and urban development) to the deputy director-general of the TPA at the end of July.

The proposal is based on the notion of community participation in, and control over, the development process. The emphasis is on the process of development rather than a precise and idealised picture of the final product.

In other words, the proposal flows from a rejection of the idea that a product can be designed and then produced by means of a purely technical process, as if this process had no bearing on the product. This technicist approach, coupled with "consultation" with the Alexandra community, is what most developers have in mind in their approach to the East Bank's development, according to the ACO.

The ACO proposal, on the other hand, stops short of specific designs and plans for the land on the far East Bank. Instead it suggests mechanisms, structures, processes and concepts that comprise an approach to "bottom-up" community-controlled development.

It was conceived through a process of workshops and discussion with representatives of various groups within the Alexandra community, particularly representatives of backyard shack-dwellers, residents from the free-standing shack areas and hostel committees.

MANY of the ideas contained in the document have been discussed with other community-based organisations in the PWV area. The hope is that it could serve as a pilot development model for low-income areas in other parts of the Transvaal.

The proposal is divided into four sections: development goals, development principles, structures and mechanisms for organising community participation and control, and a section

headed "Space and Community" which sets out the ACO approach to urban planning and design.

In the first section on development goals, the document argues that commitment to democracy means that development programmes should be democratically conceived and implemented. This entails the creation of decision-making mechanisms to fully involve the intended beneficiaries in their conception and



Alexandra: From historic slogans to plan of action.

implementation.

The second goal is expressed as "development for reconstruction", which recognises the needs of residents in Alexandra as being physical, social, economic and political. A development programme should seek to address these needs in an integrated way.

Declaring a commitment to non-racism, the document observes that development programmes conducted within the confines of the Group Areas Act, the Land Acts and racially-based municipalities will be limited in their effectiveness.

Posing empowerment and human development as a further goal, the document argues that development is not merely about building houses and basic infrastructure. It involves the design of a living environment, the creation of strong community structures and space for human beings to develop their individual capacities.

Finally, the proposal suggests that development should further both individual freedom and the collective good. People should have the opportunity of maximum individual choice, but within a context of providing for all, not just a few.

First among the development principles suggested by the proposal is community participation and control.

The ACO argues that development projects within Alexandra to date have been based largely on a "top-down" process, and have suffered accordingly. There is a direct correlation between active community participation within any development project and the chances of success for that project.

The ACO acknowledges that the existing managerial, financial and technical capacity of residents in Alexandra is very low. It therefore recommends that the development programme for the far East Bank should be accompanied by a large-scale, systematic education and training programme to upgrade skills within Alexandra and facilitate grassroots participation.

THE proposal also recognises the need for involving a wide range of professional consultants from outside the township in the process of planning and development, to ensure professional standards.

The second development principle suggested by the proposal is non-profit development.

It notes that the land and housing markets in and around Alexandra are highly imbalanced and subject to many pressures. Current estimates show that there are approximately 7 500 formal houses in Alexandra and about 15 000 informal shelters. In other words, there is an extreme demand for land and low-income housing, yet little or no supply.

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The ACO suggests that the far East Bank should be regarded as a scarce and precious resource for the people of Alexandra. Accordingly, the land on the far East Bank should not be developed according to conventional private sector criteria.

The ACO stresses that it is not suggesting that private sector developers have no role in a low-income development programme, nor that development projects should not be based on efficiency, cost-recovery, sound management and professional expertise. However, special conditions should pertain to ensure fair and equal distribution of scarce resources, to ensure affordable housing for all in Alexandra, and to avoid speculation.

The suggested "special" conditions are:

- The land on the far East Bank should be placed in a non-profit Community Land Trust, rather than being allocated directly to private developers. The main function of the Trust would be to prevent land speculation, including the resale of stands for profit and the holding of land allocations by private developers for profit.

- Serviced stands and houses on the far East Bank should be allocated to Alexandra residents only.

- No residents should be allowed to buy or own more than one house or serviced stand on the far East Bank.

THE ACO proposal also argues for affordability as a development principle, on the basis that housing is a human right and that most residents are poor.

It suggests that low-income housing and serviced land should be developed at cost. It rejects as contradictory and unacceptable that low-income and unemployed residents should have to cover high interest repayments and profits of private developers in order to have houses.

The proposal also calls for the subsidisation of low-income development, in the form of grants or subsidised loans. Such subsidies should not be viewed as hand-outs but as compensation to urban residents who have contributed their labour and spending power to the city, yet who, up to now, have housed themselves at very little cost to the city.

The ACO proposal calls for a development programme that integrates the provision of community facilities like creches, clinics, schools, recreational areas, halls and so on, with the construction of residential accommodation.

It therefore suggests that the planning process should include guidelines for determining priorities.

The TPA was due to respond to the ACO proposal a few days before publication. Here's hoping that we've seen a breakthrough! □

Patrick Banda is regional co-ordinator of Idasa in Johannesburg.

New-look NP stress party politics

By Paul Graham

POLITICAL parties - not groups based on ethnic identity - will be the crucial "groups" in the exercise of constitutional political power, according to the Deputy Minister of Provincial Affairs, Tertius Delport.

Addressing an Idasa "Future Forum" in Durban, Delport said in laying down two basic tenets for the reform process he was speaking as a member of the National Party rather than expressing the "sentiments of the government in its role as administrator of the Republic".

Commitment to the principles of non-discrimination and freedom of association were the base from which commitment to multi-party democracy should flow, he said.

"A constitution may have safeguards for the protection of individual rights, it can protect freedom of religion, language and culture, and it can protect principles such as culturally oriented education. What it cannot do is guarantee a particular language, culture, or racial group leadership or decisive political power."

"Therefore, the political choices of the future will be between the principles of the various parties, between the different values they represent and defend and between the different policies they pursue."

This emphasis on the party as the necessary expression of people's political interests ran throughout his speech.

"When I refer to power-sharing," he asserted, "I refer to the concept of power-sharing between political parties."

His audience, many of whom had expected only a discussion of development proposals, warmed quickly to what was clearly for them an entirely new approach to constitutional development. He was challenged repeatedly to clarify this position.

"Is the party talking about the identification of ethnicity with party affiliation?" asked one

person, who pointed out that Zulu-speaking persons supported a range of political organisations.

Delport replied that this separation of party affiliation from ethnicity was exactly his point and re-iterated a commitment to a constitution which encourages multi-party democracy.

"Are minority rights protections then necessary, rather than a strong protection of individual rights?" asked another person.

"The individual right to speak a particular language cannot be exercised other than in a group," Delport replied, "but this cannot be seen in the same light as constitutional power arrangements."

Power-sharing in this concept could be achieved in two practical ways: it could be devolved to regional and local governments, and/or electoral procedures which "allow representation of all parties with substantial support" could be adopted.

This would reject the policy of "winner takes all" and make it possible to choose a system which accepts the fact "that we have many (conflicting) interests and that these interests must be represented in government".

A strong commitment to individual rights, which enables the exercise of rights which have community or group significance, and the creation of a constitution which not only allows for but encourages multi-party democracy, seemed to lie at the heart of the discussion which Delport had with his audience.

A number of questioners wondered whether the National Party and the government would be able to move in this direction in the face of right-wing and constituency dissent.

"How will you deal with the threat from the right?" was one question.

"We will outpace them," Delport declared. "Politics is about results, and we intend to get the necessary results." □

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