

Sakhisizwe to break ground in December on Nelson Mandela Bay housing development

Developer Sakhisizwe will break ground in December on the first phase of the multi-billion rand Florida Heights integrated housing development in Nelson Mandela Bay.



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According to Sakhisizwe, more than 10,000 direct and indirect jobs will be created during the five-year roll-out of the first integrated development housing scheme for the Eastern Cape, on a hill overlooking Despatch, along the R367 across the Swartkops River.

The government-backed scheme – one of the catalytic projects identified by the national Department of Human Settlements throughout South Africa – is also set to be an economic injection for Despatch and neighbouring Uitenhage.

Attracting low to middle income residents, phase one will see 1,020 housing units developed alongside community and mixed-use facilities, with phase two – which is in the planning stages and is set to be completed in about 15 years' time – to include a further 12,030 residential opportunities. The entire project is set to accommodate approximately 45,000 residents.

Florida Heights will be profiled at the provincial housing indaba next month.

Thorough research carried out

“This is a critical and much-needed project for the Bay, and one we are excited to break ground on,” said Sakhisizwe chief executive William Charles, whose company was also involved in the development of the Port of Ngqura.

“As founders and proponents of the Sakhisizwe Trust, Sylvia Charles and I have spent many years thoroughly researching integrated developments abroad – especially those in Germany and the Netherlands – and tailoring this project to fit the needs of local low to middle income residents,” said Charles.



Sakhisizwe chief executive William Charles stands on the site of the R1bn phase one Florida Heights integrated development, overlooking Despatch. (Image: Brian Witbooi)

The Bay has a total housing backlog of over 80,000 units, according to the national Housing Development Agency's technical assessment framework report for the Florida Heights scheme.

Of the development, the agency's report also outlines intended benefits such as:

- **Economic growth:** “The construction sector will benefit from a development of this scale. The future incomes earned by these employees will translate into spending power benefiting businesses and entrepreneurs, not only in the area but the surrounding economies.”
- **Traffic:** “The existing road network will be upgraded in order to accommodate the additional traffic generated by the proposed development.”
- **Property values:** “The area is well located in terms of places of employment and main transportation routes. This will also contribute to secure property values. It can be concluded that the proposed development will have a positive impact on property values in the area.”

Phase one will comprise 1,020 housing units and will include:

- Commercial and mixed-use development opportunities, including space for a mall and other retail outlets,
- Landscaped public spaces, and
- Community facilities including schools, churches and clinics.

The development will be located on 50ha of land – 23ha of which will remain undeveloped. Of the phase one units, 740 will

be social housing apartments or “walk-ups” for rent; 100 will be Finance-linked Individual Subsidy Programme (FLISP) residential units – homes sold to residents with government subsidies on the bonds; and 180 will be RDP homes and military veteran units for those living below the poverty line.

Shift away from RDP housing schemes

Integrated developments such as Florida Heights are the first concrete moves away from government’s RDP housing schemes – a result of the Social Housing Act of 2009. Whereas RDP developments were relegated to the outskirts of cities – far from clinics, major employment hubs and convenience stores – integrated developments include such convenience and social facilities, as well as secure access, public transport nodes and landscaped public spaces.

According to one of the urban designers on the project, Clayton Johnson-Goddard, the move was a seismic shift in the government’s approach to addressing the housing backlog, and also to maximising limited resources within cities.

“At all times, integrated developments should focus on the users it serves. This approach is fundamentally different from previous planning notions,” said Johnson-Goddard, adding that, “Integrated developments should create neighbourhoods and communities that serve and benefit each aspect of a person’s livelihood – whether it be work, live or play.”

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