

eThekwini's R31m *Top Gear* festival plans opposed

Plans by eThekwini Municipality to host a R31m *Top Gear* festival drew opposition at the council's first meeting of the year yesterday. Critics claim the provincial government signed the contract for the deal, without consulting with the city.



It emerged that the African National Congress (ANC)-run municipality and the provincial government had signed a three-year contract for the festival to be brought to Durban in June, with the two government authorities expected to share the cost.

Gauteng hosted the *Top Gear* festival for the past two years, first at the Dome in Northgate, then at Kyalami in Midrand.

Discussion about the festival in the eThekwini council yesterday followed a presentation on auditor-general Terence Nombembe's report for 2010-11, which showed that 364 tenders worth R126m were illegally awarded, and a host of other procedures were not followed despite some improvement on the reporting.

The mayor of eThekwini, James Nxumalo, said the city was committed to following due process, and aimed to obtain a clean audit opinion by 2014.

Provincial government erred?

Democratic Alliance (DA) councillor Tex Collins said the provincial government had signed the *Top Gear* contract without consulting the municipality.

He also said the event did not comply with the aims of the city's integrated development plan, and that there was no provision for it in the city's budget.

The event "may bring publicity to Durban, but it doesn't feed a family or build a house. Due process is not being followed," Collins said.

The DA's Ronnie Veeran said councillors battled to find money for infrastructure in their wards, and asked how the municipality had found the funding for the event so readily. He also said that the tickets of R250-R500 were too expensive for most.

"What happened to the infrastructure for the A1 Grand Prix?" Veeran asked, referring to the event held in the city in 2007.

Minority Front councillors said that the funds should rather be used to build a permanent race track, rather than the envisaged temporary track. "Why should the taxpayers' funds be used to mop the expenditure after events such as this?"

City now 'bound to fulfil contract'

The DA also questioned why Toyota SA - which has a large vehicle manufacturing plant in Durban - had not been "engaged" over the event.

ANC councillors said the benefits of the event would be akin to that of the 2010 Soccer World Cup and the COP-17 conference on climate change in terms of bringing additional revenue to the city, filling hotel rooms and stimulating tourism.

City manager Sibusiso Sithole said the decision to go ahead with the *Top Gear* festival was made on December 4 by the city's executive committee and was signed by former city manager Mike Sutcliffe, and the city was now bound to fulfil the contract.

Nxumalo said the city's treasury would be tasked to "look for savings" to obtain the funds for the event.

Legal advice was obtained to get an assessment of the council's legal commitments on the issue.

Tenders were advertised for the infrastructure for the event around the Moses Mabhida Stadium precinct on Friday.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

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