

# KZN legislature rejects reports on revamp of office

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The KwaZulu-Natal Legislature has rejected as "false" media reports that the Legislature intends to spend a whopping R9m on revamping the office of the Speaker.

According to media reports, there is a decision to spend R9m upgrading the Speaker's office. Reports also claimed that MPLs are unhappy with smelly and malfunctioning toilets.

According to the Legislature spokesman Wonder Hlongwa, the Legislature has spent approximately R5.8m on reinforcement and structural changes to the Tatham Art Gallery grounds, which the Legislature utilises for parking.

The cost included addressing security requirements and underground piping, as well as complying with Amafa (a body that regulates heritage buildings) and engineering requirements. The cost of R9m being bandied about was therefore incorrect.

Speaking to SAnews, Speaker Nkonyeni said: "This is not true. No money has been spent renovating the Speaker's Cottage."

## Urgent attention needed

However, she confirmed that the Legislature building as a whole, including ablution facilities, required urgent attention.

"We have applied to Amafa for permission to do renovations. It should be noted that the Legislature building is over a 100 years old and any renovations require permission so that the historical character and decorum of the building remains intact during and after renovations."

Furthermore, plans are afoot to find an alternate office for the Speakership. Once this has been secured, then there will be some renovations to the deteriorating Speaker's Cottage.

According to a Department of Public Works 2005 Commissioned Report on the Legislature Facilities, it was found that the all facilities are "inadequate for the needs of a modern Legislature". The report concluded that, "the office space of the present KZN Legislature is not adequate and needs more attention".

The report further said some offices were about 2m wide and, some were in an advanced state of disrepair. It concluded that repairing them, "will incur more cost with no significant change". It recommended that a new legislature building be constructed from scratch.

A subsequent 2008 KZN cabinet decision to build a modern Legislature precinct was later shelved due to the recession and other pressing service delivery needs of the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

## **Toilet troubles**

The Speaker noted that in any event, the initial purpose of the present Legislature facilities was to cater for 25 Members of the Colonial Natal Administration, not the presently 80 democratically elected lawmakers.

"There is indeed a need to revamp the facilities as a whole - this is not about the Speaker's office. The media misrepresentation of the Public Works Portfolio Committee deliberations is regretted.

"It is the duty of the Legislature's office bearers to make financial decisions about the extent of renovations after taking into account the need for adequate working space for Lawmakers and the urgent service delivery needs of our people."

Responding to the urgent matter of malfunctioning toilets, she said: "The Legislature will procure temporary toilets while the current ones undergo refurbishment, again with the necessary Amafa approval and subsequent to Public Works tender processes."

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