BRIDGE CITY – THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

THE MEGA TOWN IN THE INK AREA REDEFINES HOW PEOPLE LIVE, WORK AND PLAY IN FORMERLY NEGLECTED AND MARGINALISED TOWNSHIPS
The Dr Pixley Isaih ka Seme Hospital in Bridge City will open in a few months
An entirely new, mega town with a potential to stimulate regional economy through job creation is rising up north of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. Called Bridge City, the new town is a large-scale project that aims to build a mixed-use city centre within the Inanda/Ntuzuma/KwaMashu (INK) area as well as encompassing nearby Phoenix.

Bridge City will include commercial, offices, manufacturing, recreational, institutional and environmental facilities that cater to both large and small-scale entrepreneurs. Such developments would be on a large enough scale to have a sub-regional impact both in terms of economic revival and sustainability. The planning will build upon opportunities to create long-term sustainable development within the site itself and also in the surrounding communities. Bridge City also offers an opportunity to entrepreneurs and new entrants in the property development field.

The development, which is 53 ha in size, is a result of a forward-thinking public, private sector partnership (PPP) between eThekwini Municipality and TongaatHulett. Once finished, it is estimated that Bridge City will attract R10-billion in public and private sector investment and will play a pivotal role in the development of the city’s new public transport system, making the area sought after by businesses seeking a location in the fast-developing northern corridor.

But, more importantly, Bridge City completely redefines how people live, work and play in formerly neglected and marginalised townships. Through job opportunities that will be created and the lifestyle choices that will be on offer, Bridge City will directly enhance the lives of residents’ lives and reinstate a sense of dignity through public driven investment. It will have major economic and lifestyle impacts for people living in the surrounding areas. It represents a new vision for an African city through a successful PPP.

**PUSH FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Multi-level local economic empowerment is a key theme of the development and will be achieved through:

- Establishing large macro-scale infrastructure as generative elements beyond local project scope.
- Promoting broad-based economic development for region.
- Building confidence for investment to focused public driven investment.

The INK area has the largest residential concentration about 800 000 people in the eThekwini Metro Municipality. Bridge City’s size can cater for larger scale infrastructure and development opportunities that cannot be accommodated in the existing townships. Development is being externalised (as opposed to a historical internalisation) to integrate the surrounding residential areas.

The development is in line with eThekwini Metro’s Integrated Development Framework goals, which are as follows:

- **Spatial restructuring**
- **Promoting economic opportunities**
- **Providing appropriate community infrastructure**
- **Creating total living environments**
- **Promoting safe urban environments**
- **Promoting a healthy urban environment**
- **Managing transformation**

Some of the features that will service residents in the new town and surrounding areas will be:

- A regional hospital
- A business park
- Small businesses factories and shops
- A petrol station
- NJP Steel distribution centre that is expected to open in the next few months
Already there’s strong interest from the general public to be part of this new, ground-breaking city. According to Brian Iwe, a development executive at Tongaat Hulett Developments, 70% of the mixed-use residential, business and commercial site area has already been sold. “The site is very large,” Iwe said, “so we only expect all the plots to be sold by 2019.”

Meanwhile, Bridge City Mall, which opened in 2009, is operating well and has already extended its pool of shoppers from the immediate vicinity to outlying areas. The shopping centre already has a well-established taxi rank which will be incorporated into an intermodal facility complete with its own fully fitted-out railway station.

A VISIONARY PUBLIC, PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

The PPP between eThekwini Municipality and Tongaat Hulett is truly remarkable. Tongaat Hulett is the project manager responsible for implementation of the project and is the mandated sales agent for Bridge City. For Tongaat Hulett, Bridge City is part of a programme of releasing portions of its prime land for development. It’s a programme that has led to the massive development of the area north of Durban best represented by the phenomenal growth of the Umhlanga area nearby from what was once a sea of sugarcane fields.

Bridge City is being developed as the second leg of the Effingham Development Joint Venture Public Private Sector Partnership between the eThekwini Municipality and Tongaat Hulett. The first was the highly successful Riverhorse Valley Business Estate, just off the N2, near KwaMashu. However, while the latter is primarily industrial with a single hospital, Bridge City is a mixed-use development.

South African law defines a PPP as a contract between a public sector institution/municipality and a private party, in which the private party assumes substantial financial, technical and operational risk in the design, financing, building and operation of a project. There’s recognition that PPPs enhance service delivery and, are ideal for South Africa given the country’s pressing socio-economic development challenges. Economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation are such immense challenges that government cannot meet alone. By their very nature, PPPs lead to improved efficiency, affordability, reduced risk perception and thus better delivery cost.

So, eThekwini Municipality’s partnering with Tongaat Hulett represents visionary and strategic leadership that will change the lives of millions of residents in the province, particularly those in the INK area. This partnership to develop Bridge City demonstrates the essential nature of a PPP – that the diverse interests of the public and private sectors can be harnessed for the collective good.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN BRIDGE CITY

Business opportunities in Bridge City will come from the creation of a 17 ha business estate that will house many small businesses, ranging from IT to manufacturing and small start-ups. The location of these businesses will benefit from a new, integrated transport network currently being developed to make accessing Bridge City easy.

Indeed, Bridge City has been identified as a key node in the much-anticipated R20-billion Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network (IRPTN), which is founded on the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) system. This world-class public transport network will integrate bus, rail and taxi transportation, providing reliable and affordable commuter transport that will benefit residents, workers and businesses. Once fully developed in 2027, the intermodal system is also expected to serve approximately 1 000 000 commuters per day.

Overall, the new transport system is expected to connect 600 000 commuters across the city to nine public transport corridors.
The BRT routes are expected to connect commuters from Bridge City to Durban Central, Pinetown, Cornubia and Umhlanga.

There are also plans to upgrade the road network around the new town. eThekwini Municipality and Tongaat Hulett intend constructing a new half diamond interchange off the M25 that will give dedicated road access to the Bridge City development and to KwaMashu. This is expected to attract not only logistics and distribution centres but also labour-intensive businesses such as call centres as Bridge City will be easily accessible to workers not only from surrounding areas such as INK but also from further afield.

Improved commuter transport is also expected to facilitate further development of Bridge City as a retail hub and accelerate the planned development of residential and office blocks opposite the Bridge City Shopping Centre and Magistrate’s Court. More efficient transport will also assist professionals and patients using the R2-billion Dr Pixley ka Seme Hospital that is under construction and is due for completion in the next few months. “The building of the hospital did not only focus on delivering a world-class product, but involved the community through a community-based body known as the INK Community Trust. As a result economic opportunities were created when contracting work, greatly benefitting locals,” says Councillor Sduduzo Khuzwayo.

Zimele Ndlovu, a board member of the Trust, weighs in: “In fact, the INK Community Trust has created opportunities beyond the contractual obligations of the main contractor. For example, the Aveng-Enza JV contract stipulates that 30% of business opportunities need to be set aside for companies who reside in KwaZulu-Natal, and 15% should be for companies based in eThekwini Municipality area. The INK Community Trust has raised the bar to ensure that 30% of business opportunities have been attained for the eThekwini area, and 15% specifically for the INK area.”

A DEVELOPMENT MODEL TO EMULATE

The Bridge City development is an exciting and appropriate response to some of the most pressing needs in the metropolitan area. It will benefit the poorer townships to the north of Durban and fits in with initiatives such as the municipality’s INK Area-based Management effort which seeks to uplift and improve the quality of life for the large numbers of people living and working in INK areas. “We see the development of this critical node, Bridge City, as an important contribution to the transformation of the apartheid city. In many ways, the INK development is creating significant opportunities and is transforming township spaces into vibrant and dynamic areas that inspire bigger and better investment,” says Linda Mbonambi, Head Area-based Management Unit of eThekwini Municipality. “We are inspired by new investment stories such the recent acquisition of the mixed-use service station site by two young entrepreneurs, Mr Siyabonga Hlengwa and Mr Wandile Zulu, from the INK area. We are inviting other entrepreneurs and professionals to see value in investing in this growing but still underinvested township property market.”

No doubt, Bridge City will be a success and it could very well serve as a PPP model for similar initiatives of empowering communities around the country.

For more information on land sales contact Brian Ihe on 031 560 1900.

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