



Vusi Xaba reports on the City of Johannesburg's plans to develop the famous cultural precinct in the historical township of Soweto

BILLIONS TO TRANSFORM JABULANI INTO A CITY



PROGRESSIVE: The Jabulani CBD boasts mixed use services and facilities such as a shopping mall, hospital, theatre and apartments which attract further investment to the township

PHOTO: BRETT ELOFF

ONCE an ordinary part of a sprawling township, Jabulani in Soweto is gradually growing to become a vibrant city.

Situated in the heart of the world famous township, Jabulani already boasts the first shopping mall in Soweto that has various retailers as well as lifestyle facilities such as a gym.

Across the street are big red, blue and yellow toy-like marble structures making Soweto Theatre.

Among other forms of entertainment, the venue is popular for hosting Johannesburg's local version of the music talent search show, *Idols*.

It also hosts local festivities such as choral music events, a cappella shows and dance competitions.

However, apart from existing amenities, the City of Johannesburg's property agent, Johannesburg Property Company (JPC), has unveiled plans to further develop the area.

Through its township revitalisation programme, work will start soon to revamp the old Jabulani Amphitheatre, JPC's chief executive Helen Botes said on Tuesday.

The theatre would be linked to the Soweto Theatre. Together these will form part of the cultural precinct.

In its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, the amphitheatre used to be a hive of activity with big names in the local music scene thrilling audiences there. P J Powers, Steve Kekana, Joy and Soul Brothers



KEEPING FIT: Victoria Mnsi works out at Virgin Active gym outlet at Jabulani Mall, Soweto

PHOTO: VELI NHLAPO

ers were among popular musical acts who rocked audiences at the outdoor theatre.

The venue was also home to political parties and civic movements who hosted rallies there. Boxing matches were also held at the venue.

According to Botes, the precinct's expansion programme would be completed by July.

"We have been waiting for funding. Now that it has been secured, we are ready to start the project and [it] must be completed by July 2016. The design has been done. The amphitheatre will link up with the theatre," Botes said.

A 36-hectare piece of land across the theatre was also

earmarked for a R3-billion development project, she said.

This, according to Botes, would include 18 000m² of Bolani Mall, 30 000m² of a business office park, hotel and space for other commercial use.

“Precinct will be completed in the next 5 to 10 years

When you look back in history, the city had the idea to revitalise all the townships, turning Jabulani into a vibrant central business district that could stand on its own.

"There is already existing Jabulani Mall, which is close to the BRT system. In the next two months, we will make an announcement regarding new developments," said Botes in an interview with Sowetan.

She said the City of Johannesburg Region D offices in Koma Road would also get a face-lift. Botes said the development of Jabulani business district had helped small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs) to find business.

"R40-million has been spent on SMMEs [and] on local contractors for projects already done and those on the go such as the amphitheatre, as will happen with the new mall.

"The whole precinct started in 2010 and will be completed in the next five to 10 years," she said.

The developments had caused the value of properties in the township to shoot up, with the starting price of ordinary four-roomed houses ranging from R350 000 to R500 000, according to Botes.

From a sleepy area to buzzing suburb

BETHUEL Sithole of Jabulani, Soweto, never thought his neighbourhood would transform into the city that it is gradually becoming.

Sithole, 59, remembers when he was younger how the township, which has steadily developed into a central business district, was once like a rural village with houses spaced far apart.

The father of four has seen all the developments unfold before him.

"I was very young when we [and my parents] arrived in Jabulani. I did my lower primary school here. Back in those days, houses were far apart from one another.

"They were like homesteads in a rural area. There was a communal tap from which we all drew water," Sithole remembered.

Although he could not recall the exact time lines, he still remembered that the first structure he saw going up was the City of Johannesburg's region D council offices. The structure, less than a kilometre from his home, was the Bantu Urban Council's offices, built under apartheid's segregation urban planning policies.

"As children, we heard that people like Hastings Banda [former Malawian president] visited the place," he said.

Sithole recalled that the other part of Jabulani, near Doornkop cemetery, was an informal settlement.

That is where Pace College, a private high school for the children of the township's middle classes, was built in the 1980s. Jabulani Technical College on Koma Road, had already been built.

There was also a police station at the corner of Bolani and Koma roads and a few hundred meters down was Jabulani Hostel.

However, post 1994 heralded what appears to be an era of unstoppable development. Sithole can now get all his necessities a stone's throw away.

"This area has developed very fast. Roads were once untarred but now there are double lanes with robots. You can not imagine a robot in a township during apartheid.

"There was a time we used to buy groceries in the Joburg CBD, but now all we need is here. There is also a hospital here.

"I hear that there is more development coming. Development in this area is part of the benefits of living in a democracy," Sithole said.

The first mall in the township, Jabulani Mall, Bheki Mlangeni District Hospital, a fire station, residential housing stock comprising blocks of flats and the Soweto Theatre, have sprung up.

Bolani and Koma roads have been extended from single lanes to double lanes, with the latter boasting a rapid bus transit system.



PROGRESS: Bethuel Sithole has seen Jabulani in Soweto develop into a busy city since the advent of democracy in 1994

PHOTO: VELI NHLAPO