

POISED FOR GROWTH: RENEWAL OF DURBAN'S INNER CITY

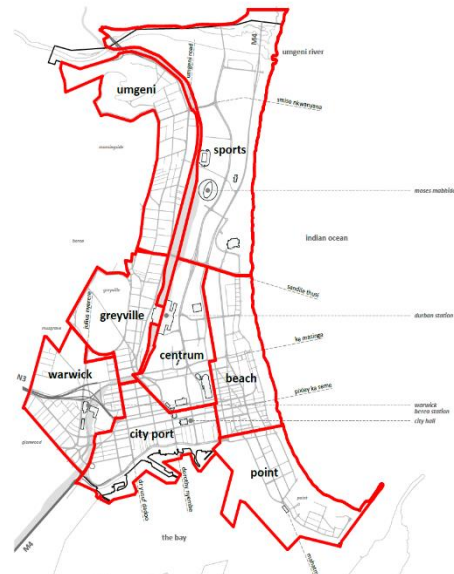
UNDERSTANDING THE INNER CITY'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE GROWTH POTENTIAL

By Ajiv Maharaj

"During different periods of its history, the Inner City has reflected the fractured and exclusionary structure of society, but its future is sure to be one of inclusivity and a celebration of the vibrant democracy that our children will inherit."

Introduction

Over the next 10 to 15 years the Durban Inner City is set to experience an investment of approximately R62 billion. This will include a dramatic increase in residential stock while tourism, retail and civic land uses will also receive massive investment. The Municipality is committed to working with smart investors that are willing to buy building stock and put together creative proposals that will capture the benefits of this new agglomeration of market potential. However, revitalising the Inner City is not simply about buildings and infrastructure; it is about people, for it is people that translate the space into a living feature in our collective identity. Over the last 150 years this space has meant different things to different people and in setting the course for the future, we must consciously acknowledge the past and build on it to create a future that reflects the vibrant and inclusive identity of our people.



SOURCE: Durban Inner City Regeneration Strategy Framework, 2017

Durban has a relatively large Inner City by comparison to the other metros in the country, second only to Johannesburg. Its Inner City is significantly larger than Cape Town's and Tshwane's Inner Cities and has a greater number of high-rise buildings than any other South African CBD. This represents a significant investment in infrastructure by both the public and private sectors, in uses that range from office, retail, hotel and accommodation to education, residential, recreation and warehousing.

Early Period

The Inner City has gone through periods of cyclical growth and stagnation which have reflected the economic climate in the country and the city. During Durban's early growth around the turn of the century, construction started on the current City Hall on 04 July 1905 as the old City Hall was allocated to the post office. This was a growth period in which the city wanted to cement itself as a fast growing urban centre in the country. While growth slowed following the great depression, government investment in infrastructure continued.



Durban Inner City Central Post Office (historic). SOURCE: EThekweni Municipality Archives, 2021

During the period of rapid economic growth following the great depression the Art Deco movement spread throughout the world between 1925 and 1940 and much of Durban's rich Art Deco architecture was constructed during this phase. On 12 May 1930 Durban received its first traffic lights which were installed at the corner of Pine and Field Streets, and in 1935 the borough of Durban was granted city status. The breakout of World War II resulted in a slowdown of development as resources were redirected towards military operations and businesses were reluctant to invest. In 1939 the Bluff and Battery beach military stations were established upon the breakout of World War II.

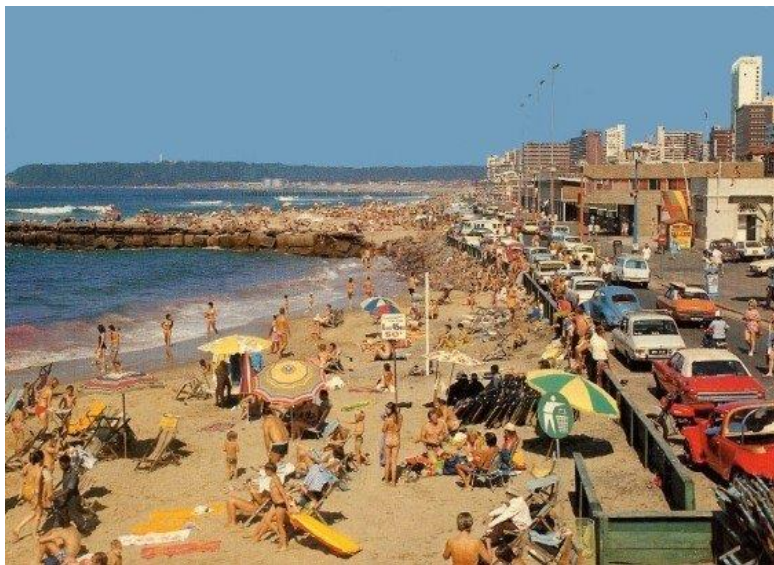
Apartheid

Upon the conclusion of the World War, the apartheid policies were introduced which had a major impact on the Inner City. Black residents were moved out of the city centre and the closest area where they could live to get access to the opportunities of the Inner City was in Cato Manor. The creation of KwaZulu townships resulted in the apartheid pattern of settlement where the poorest lived far from the city centre and were forced to commute. Indian traders were removed from the city centre to the fringe of the Inner City where they posed a lower risk to White trade. Despite this, a culture of work and life thrived which led to the creation of the Grey Street Casbah. The term denotes a market town, and as the Casbah evolved into this market town, it acquired a unique status of an in-between place, of being neither a village nor a town, as it remained on the fringes. While the area was settled on after the repeal of the indentured system in 1911, it experienced a lot of growth following the introduction of apartheid. For many, the Inner City represented a space of opportunity but exclusion.



Period of Rapid Growth

Despite apartheid policies, Durban experienced rapid growth in the 1960s and 70s as South Africa averaged economic growth of 5.7% in the 1960s slowing to an average of 3.2% in the 1970s. Many of Durban's buildings that define its skyline were constructed during this period. Space in the Inner City was deeply divided on racial grounds which also manifest in segregated beaches on the beachfront. During the early part of the 1980s there was rapid growth along Durban's Beachfront accompanied by the



Durban Beach Front (historic). SOURCE: EThekweni Municipality Archives, 2021

development of the promenade based on plans by the architects Revel Fox and Associates who were commissioned by the Municipality. Consequently, the areas set aside as White Beaches from Addington Beach to Battery Beach became known as the Golden Mile as there was growth in holiday apartments and hotels along this beach frontage.

Late Apartheid and Early Transition



The Mercury report on Magoo's Bar bombing (historic). SOURCE: IOL, 2017

In 1986 Morris Fynn, descendant of early pioneer Henry Francis Fynn, initiated a campaign of vandalising apartheid signs on Durban's Beachfront. The hacksaw he used has been preserved for posterity in the Old Courthouse Museum, in Samora Machel Street. The Magoo's bar bombing on the beachfront further highlighted the exclusive nature of space and the struggle against exclusion. The Asian crisis of the late 1990s pushed Malaysia to

bankruptcy and the plans that were developed to revitalise the Point area, which was substantially owned by the Malaysian State agency, were put on ice. Following the decline of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the City in partnership with business formed 'Operation Jump Start' which became a precursor to the Durban Growth Coalition (later KZN Growth Coalition). This led the Municipality to take a bold decision to establish the country's first International Conference Centre. November 1994 saw the turning of soil for the ICC by the then Premier Dr Frank Mdlalose.



The New Millennium

The Monitor Group (a US based consulting firm established by Harvard Professor Michael Porter) was commissioned to undertake a detailed diagnostic and plan for the city. The summary report called “Durban at the Crossroads” called for urgent action to avoid potential decline of the city. In this period and amid uncertainties, Tsogo Sun invested R1.4bn in the development of the Suncoast Casino and hotel, while the Municipality kick-started development in the Point Area through a R700m investment into the development of Ushaka Marine World. The formation of the Point Development Company attempted to inject new impetus into the hidden gem of the Point area, but with limited success. Council recognised the importance of the Beachfront by establishing a separate sub-committee of Exco focussed exclusively on the Durban Beachfront, which was for the first time defined as stretching from Blue Lagoon to North Pier at the harbour entrance.



Skyline for Durban's sports, railway and beachfront precincts. SOURCE: Moses Mabhida Stadium, 2020

Leading up to the World Cup

Despite the investments in the Inner City, increasing levels of crime, litter and poor maintenance of buildings, led to an exodus of offices out of the Inner City and to the greenfields developments spearheaded by Tongaat Hulett around Umhlanga. The Kingsmead Officer Park was one of the few new office spaces created in the Inner City during this period. The 2010 FIFA World Cup brought renewed impetus to the Inner City through the construction of the Moses Mabhida stadium, redevelopment of the beachfront promenade and the construction of the Warwick Junction flyover. Despite this, there was no single plan for the Inner City which was agreed to by all stakeholders and development was noticeably ad hoc.

Post 2010

Post 2010, very little new investments were made in the Inner City. Tsogo Sun's R1.6 billion investments along the beachfront stands out as one of the few large private sector investments in the Inner City. Private education institutions and university investments in student housing count among the few new developments in the Inner City over the last 5 years, as the flight of offices out of the Inner City continued. Extensions of the Inner City into the surrounding Berea led to vibrant precincts like Davenport and Florida Road.



SunCoast Durban, Tsogo Sun. SOURCE: Hansueli Krapf, 2011

Turning the Tide



Durban Film Locations: Florida Road. SOURCE: Durban Film Office, 2018

When the Municipality and stakeholders considered how to reverse this decline, it was apparent that much needed to change. In all the plans and interventions that were implemented, little attention was paid to re-connecting people to the Inner City, and in creating an identity that reflected the free and diverse society that the country has worked hard in forging. Even though thousands of people visit the beachfront every weekend, most of them do so as visitors. A key feature of vibrant inner cities is the existence of people and families that live in the area, take pride

in the streets and amenities and work with business and local government in ensuring that there is a safe and clean environment.

Successful inner cities are home to a high density of people with an agglomeration of buying power that can demand new facilities, retail and entertainment. Vibrant inner cities are places where there are people employed and where wealth is created. With this in mind the Local Area Plan put forward the vision of creating "Africa's leading, most vibrant liveable and walkable city centre"

Back to Basics

The municipality has started building its internal capacity and expertise in urban renewal and programme implementation. In addition, programme capacity has been augmented to inform and accelerate delivery over the next 3 years. The starting point in turning around the inner city is in getting the basics right. Litter has become a huge problem, with negative behaviour being a major contributing factor. New litter removal contracts have been put in place to augment existing street



cleaning and waste removal efforts by the Municipality. Engagements with metro police and SAPS have been ongoing, with an emphasis on intelligent crime fighting in the Inner City. This includes closed circuit cameras, better urban design, outsourced augmented services and Metro Police ensuring high visibility. The Municipality is also supporting the establishment of urban improvement precincts as a mechanism for property owners to provide supplementary services and area enhancement in business precincts while business precincts must engender the inclusive nature of the city and build on the strengths of these areas.



Homelessness in Durban. SOURCE: eThekweni Municipality, 2020

Addressing Marginalisation

There are about 6000 homeless people living in the urban centres in eThekweni with many of them living in the Inner City. The Municipality has taken a decision to play a proactive role in providing integrated support that will include shelters, social support services, skills development, issuing of identity documents, and reintegration of homeless people into society. Drug addiction is an important factor that drives people to live on the streets, and hence, drug rehabilitation programmes will form an important part of the journey to re-empowering people direct their future.

Bad Buildings

Work has begun in identifying and profiling bad buildings with the pilot being in Mahatma Gandhi Road. Presently, 30 buildings have been identified and profiled and 13 contravention notices issued with 4 legal interventions underway. The city will work with stakeholders in turning around bad buildings and incentives are offered to those that wish to do this. However, action will also be taken against those that have contravened the by-laws and where appropriate, buildings will be seized.



Bad buildings in Durban. SOURCE: eThekweni Municipality, 2020

Key Investments

Priority zone 1 is from the City Hall eastwards to the Durban Beachfront and stretching to the Point Area. This zone will attract the largest investment with an estimated R36 billion worth of private sector investment planned. The Municipality would have spent about R400m on the Beachfront and extending the promenade including R61m budgeted over the next 3 years. Development at the Point Area will be reinvigorated through a R2.8 billion investment by the private sector into retail and residential apartments. The project was expected to be launched in 2020 and will take four years to be completed. This will form the catalyst for further private sector investment into the Point Area.

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A further R88.5 million is budgeted over the next 3 years for various Inner-City upgrades. Included in this zone is the Rivertown development which we see a complete redevelopment of the area immediately east of the ICC. The Municipality will spend R44 million in upgrading this area over the next 3 years in preparation for large scale investments by Urban Lime into residential and retail developments as well as the development of an artistic hub. It is envisioned that the quality of urban space in this area will be enhanced to bring out the vibrancy of inner city living with an emphasis on creativity and artistic fervour that is unique to authentic urban environments.

Priority zone 2 stretches from City Hall westwards to the Warwick triangle, where they will spend about R30 million over the next 3 years in upgrading the Warwick Junction markets. In addition, a comprehensive assessment is underway to determine the development needs of the area which will inform the budgeting process of the next medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF). Quality social

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housing in the form flats are currently being planned for the Albert Park area as well as the bus depot in the Warwick area. The City will also work with tertiary education institutions in the development of student housing and improving the quality of the urban environment.

Priority zone 3 stretches from City Hall to the port. Presently, planning is being done in this area and depending on what development options are chosen, a programme of development projects will be put in place.

Priority zone 4 stretches from City Hall to the Umgeni River. The Municipality is working to unlock the development of the Centrum site located adjacent to the Workshop mall. Apart from the municipal land-uses that will be located on the Centrum site, there will be a call for proposals for private sector interest in this strategically located site. Over the next 8 to 10 years it is estimated that there will be R2 billion worth of investment from the City that will go into this site which will see the development of a major transport hub as well as civic land-uses. Construction is planned to commence in July 2020.

In addition to the above, the Durban Film City project to be developed on the former Natal Command site will consist of a modern film studio as well as resort and entertainment hub. However, this plan has been challenged by the South African National Defence Force which seek to retain the site for



Military use. Apart from this, R30 million will be invested in further developing the Blue Lagoon area while Beachfront maintenance and upkeep will be supplemented through top-up service contracts which will ensure that this area is maintained as a world class tourism asset. Quality high density social housing are to be developed on Block AK, Umgeni road, Victoria Park and the drive-in site.



Inner City development block. SOURCE: eThekweni Municipality, 2020

Conclusion

The City, working in partnership with stakeholders are planning on fundamentally improving the space we call the Inner City, through making it the first choice as a place to live, while strengthening its role as a business and tourism destination. In doing so, the history and culture of the Inner City needs to be preserved and celebrated. During different periods of its history, the Inner City has reflected the fractured and exclusionary structure of society, but its future is sure to be one of inclusivity and a celebration of the vibrant democracy that our children will inherit. No other space in the city is capable of playing this role, as the focal point for our collective identity as the people of this beautiful city.

*Produced by **The Durban EDGE** Team of the
Policy, Strategy Innovation and Research Department of
The Economic Development Unit of eThekweni Municipality
For more information, contact edge@durban.gov.za*

Dr Ajiv Maharaj is eThekweni Municipality's Deputy Head: Economic Development Unit, heading up the Policy Strategy Information and Research Department.

