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A SAFER DURBAN

Urban Improvement Precinct partnerships are restoring investor confidence

By Bonny Fourie

URBAN Improvement Precinct (UIP) partnerships are revolutionising Durban's previously decaying commercial and mixed-use nodes, and are believed to be the key to unlocking even greater investment potential throughout the city.

These public-private partnerships – referred to in KwaZulu-Natal as UIPs, and in Johannesburg and Cape Town as City Improvement Districts (CIDs) – are favoured area management systems that see government and private entities working together to tidy up specific precincts in order to attract new investments.

UIPs also focus on managing security concerns and other issues property owners may have.

The Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry believes UIPs in chosen precincts have

been "positive", with CEO Dumile Cele saying there have been significant improvements in safety and infrastructure maintenance within the precincts.

One of the downsides to UIPs, however, is the time it takes to set up one successfully and the processes to be followed.

But results make it worthwhile and one example is the Florida Road precinct which, says precinct manager Jarrod Evans, has been "radically transformed" since the UIP was implemented three years ago.

"A UIP's security plays a big part as does its cleaning and maintenance, eThekwin municipal service delivery, metro police and police.

"All contribute to creating a public space that is safe, clean, engaging and an attraction for the

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GROWTH AND CHANGE

Confidence in a zone leads to improvement

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city of Durban."

Since the UIP's formation, Evans says he has noticed an "incredible turnaround" in the road's safety and security.

"One's perception of Florida Road has changed for the better."

Umhlanga Rocks is also a success story, says Cara Reilly of Urban MGT which manages the Florida Road and Umhlanga UIPs.

She believes that UIPs, along with city investment and planning, are the solution for commercial hubs.

"UIPs are catalysts for investment in that well-used and well-managed urban spaces create a sense of confidence in a node... and this is what stimulates growth and change," she says.

Frank Reardon, chairman of the Umhlanga Village UIP and divisional director of brokering at Broll Property Group, agrees.

"While the precinct was already attracting

investment, much of which was driven by businesses fleeing the CBD, the area was becoming degraded.

"The impact of the UIP and the measures taken in partnership with the city saw better levels of cleanliness and safety, and a rise in people's perceptions of the area. Coupled with key investments in the node and an

improvement in the quality of tenants, these changes have led to increasing property values and additional investment," he says.

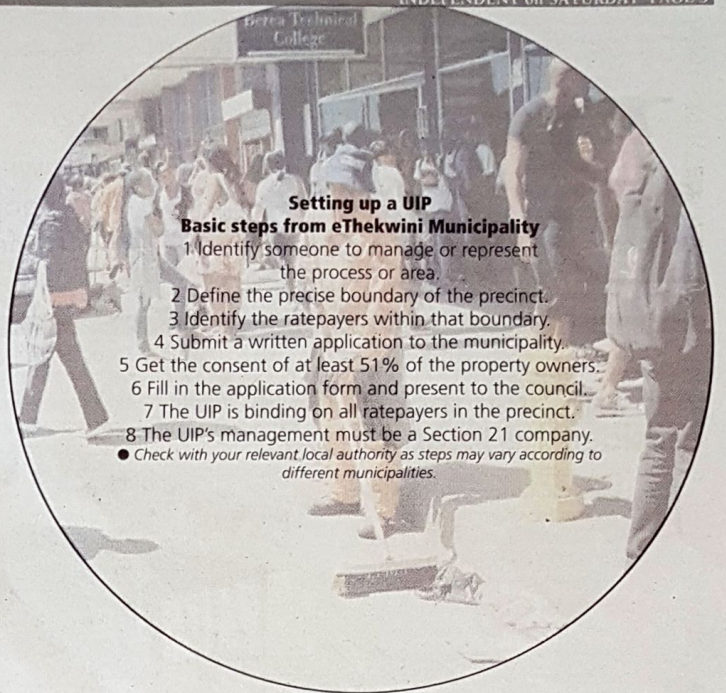
Such turnaround has also been seen in the various UIP precincts in Durban central, including the CBD, South Beach, and the North East Business District, says Ebrahim

Vadachia, chairman of the Urban Improvements Precincts Company which manages the three precincts.

"The situation was quite desperate. The rampant increase in crime and grime coupled with poor service delivery led to a corresponding increase in a wide range

UIPs are catalysts for investment; well-managed spaces create confidence.

— Cara Reilly of Urban MGT



Cleanliness and security boost confidence in an area.

of social ills that threatened to overwhelm these areas."

Vadachia says progress within the CBD has been slow as a result of factors such as illegal trading, overcrowding, general lack of accountability and poor service delivery. Despite these challenges, he believes that UIPs are the way forward. Yet, although UIPs are good invest-

ments where there are strong partnerships with the municipality, Cele says they are not the only solution as businesses can also take ownership of their immediate surroundings in other ways.

While there are areas where UIPs are "the way to go", other areas need alternate solutions as they face different problems.



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