

Housing minister commissions review of legislation

By Roy Cokayne

Pretoria - Housing minister Lindiwe Sisulu has commissioned an urgent review of existing legislation that could negatively affect affordable housing delivery.

Ndivhuwo wa ha Mabaya, a spokesperson for the national housing department, said last week that the review was aimed at assessing all legislation in place and how it affected housing delivery.

Mabaya said the housing department would consult with other departments if the review concluded that certain legislation needed to be amended to ensure and enhance housing delivery.

"The review has started with an analysis of all national, provincial and municipal legislation. I'm not able to give a date when the review will be completed, but the minister has indicated it is an urgent matter and it would be given the urgency it deserved.

"But we also want to do a thorough job. It's very serious work we're talking about, especially as it covers all three levels of government," he said.

There was insufficient affordable housing stock for more than 2 million people looking for this type of housing.

Mabaya's comments follow the Banking Association last week blaming local authorities for the slow pace of housing supply, particularly for lower-income groups.

Jopie van Honschooten, the co-ordinator of the lower-income housing unit of the financial sector for the Banking Association, said this slow pace of delivery had become a threat to the commitment by the banking sector in the financial services charter to provide R42 billion to finance low-cost housing by 2008.

Van Honschooten said the biggest constraint to housing supply was the poor planning and execution of land proclamation, and delivery of stands for a new house, a process that was under control of local authorities and which had increased the risk to developers and increased the price of housing units delivered.

However, a town planner, who did not want to be named, said there were not any basic problems with legislation. The crisis was caused by the inability of civil servants to administer it. "Existing legislation can always be improved but if local authorities got their act together, there would not be delays.

"There are two major problems. There is a lack of skills and expertise, [and there are] people in positions who just can't do the job. The other problem is the whole planning and development approval process, which is a nightmare and means you're lucky if you can get a project started 18 months later," the town planner said.

Mabaya said the housing department had a number of other interventions to ensure there was sufficient affordable housing stock.

He said these included support for emerging contractors through the National Home Builders' Registration Council and the National Housing Finance Corporation; the social contract signed at the National Housing Indaba in Cape Town last year, in terms of which developers would set aside a proposed 20 percent of developments for low-cost housing; and the renovation, upgrading and

development of flats in the major cities for rental, such as the Brickfields project in Johannesburg.

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