

R4bn waterfront plan on cards

By [Xolisa Phillip](#)

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A major Chinese engineering firm is interested in investing about R4bn in a waterfront-type development in Port Elizabeth.



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A delegation from China Harbour Engineering Company held a meeting with Nelson Mandela Bay metro officials on Tuesday, 11 November, to express interest in the project and gauge how to cut the red tape involved, municipal chief financial officer Trevor Harper said.

It was the second meeting on the plan after the metro has previously looked to Cape Town's V&A Waterfront as a potential model.

The project would encompass the area beginning at the Port Elizabeth Harbour entrance but excluding the ore berths and oil tank farm.

"Planning processes were, for example, fast-tracked for the Boardwalk's recent work," Harper said.

"But I want to place on record that the land is not being sold or given away.

"The Chinese consortium has expressed interest and put forward R4-billion as the amount that could go into the venture."

Harper said the Baakens Valley precinct harbour development was one of four mooted projects in the Bay with potential to create jobs.

The other projects are Telkom Park's refurbishment, the Nelson Mandela statue, and the Project Mthombo oil refinery.

Port manager Rajesh Dana said there was an immense appetite for the harbour development and land had been earmarked for it.

"We are in the final stages of concluding a commercial agreement with a service provider which will conduct a comprehensive feasibility study," he said.

"Transnet is responsible for the management and development of land within the ports and, in planning this development, has been working closely with the Mandela Bay Development Agency [MBDA] and the municipality to ensure the integrated planning and development of a leisure and recreation node within the city.

"Our initial market assessment has indicated that retail, office and other light industries will potentially anchor this development." Transnet viewed this as a catalyst for economic growth in the city, Dana said.

The development would unfold in two phases - a planning stage and a development phase - with the planning phase guiding Transnet on the full nature and extent of the development.

The project would be implemented in accordance with Transnet's governance framework.

MBDA chief executive Pierre Voges said the private sector always followed good public investment. The agency was looking to emulate its development successes in the Baakens Valley precinct and had worked closely with Transnet to achieve this objective.

"We have been tasked with developing from the freeway to Bridge Street Brewery," Voges said.

Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber president Mandla Madwara was excited about the potential investors' meeting with city officials and said he hoped it was the next step in creating the waterfront development.

"We are looking forward as the chamber to interacting with these potential investors and to working together to make this a reality," he said.

"We recently launched our business vision for 2030 for the city and part of that is the realisation of a waterfront development."

Madwara said it was encouraging that an international company was interested in investing and this confirmed that the chamber, Transnet, municipal officials and the MBDA were on the right track.

"Transnet has already identified an area for a leisure and retail node and we hope to integrate this with the Baakens Valley precinct," he said.

Former Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism board chairman Odwa Mtati said the city needed to increase its product offering to locals and visitors to boost job creation and tourism growth.

Mtati said studies had shown that working harbours generated interest. "If we have a working harbour and offer it as an attraction, it would be a great mix as locals would visit there and visitors tend to go where locals do," he said.

DA ward councillor Dean Biddulph said a waterfront development had been mooted since the 1980s "and we should fully support this kind of investment, especially in terms of infrastructure.

"Investors are hard to find and these types of projects can create jobs, from the construction phase and also in the long term."

Biddulph said with the demise of the Apple Express and fewer attractions at Bayworld, the city needed to boost its offering to attract more tourists. - Additional reporting by Lee-Anne Butler

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