



Mercury Chief Reporter TONY CARNIE looks at Portnet's Victoria Embankment project

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Changing the face of Durban Bay

DETAILS of the proposed R450 million Victoria Embankment Waterfront Project — which would dramatically change the face of Durban harbour — have been unveiled by Portnet.

Described as 'the most ambitious and exciting development ever proposed for Durban', Portnet says the project is the result of several months of negotiation and planning intended to revitalise the area and re-instate the city firmly on the local and international tourist map.

However, approval is still required from the directors of Transnet and Durban City Council.

Apart from significantly altering the shape and size of the harbour by reclaiming land for entertainment, accommodation and a yachting marina, one of the most striking

and dominant features will be a massive 'Tower' of Durban which will be named officially after a name-tower competition involving city residents.

Portnet estimates that about R120 million of the total cost will need to be spent on basic infrastructure, including road and railway realignment and dredging. 'This would hopefully be borne jointly by Portnet and the council, with the remaining R330 million coming from private sector developers.

Three islands — Festiva Island, Club Island and West Island — would also be created, covering 19 ha of land and encircling about 27 ha of water.

The entertainment area

would include shops, cinemas and an hotel and conference centre.

The development appears to be greatly influenced by Victorian, Edwardian and Eastern architecture.

Portnet says the project presents a rare opportunity to 'transform the city's largely uncoordinated waterfront into a vibrant, exciting precinct for leisure and recreation... a focal point for commercial, industrial and tourist development.'

The benefits of the project claimed by Portnet include:

- Greatly reducing traffic flow on the re-aligned Victoria Embankment.
- 5 200 new parking bays.

- 5 ha of public parks.
- Public access to 4,3 km of the water's edge.

- Doubling the permanent water area in the Basin through a massive dredging operation.

- R3 million a year revenue from rates.

- R5 million a year revenue from utilities.

- 5 000 new permanent jobs.

- R140 million plus annual retail-entertainment turnover.

- Improved control of Bay pollution.

Port Manager Captain Jan Mors says the Festival Market concept, which had enjoyed immense success in many in-

ternational waterfront developments, would form the central planning scheme.

He believes the Durban projects will compare favourably with international waterfront developments in Sydney, San Francisco, Baltimore and London.

Portnet emphasised that an important design consideration was to retain uninterrupted views of the harbour from surrounding buildings and from main city centre streets.

The three main nodes of development proposed are:

Festival Island: This will be the main shopping and entertainment area, providing for speciality shopping areas, cinemas, restaurants, a festi-

val arena for markets and street theatre, offices, an hotel and conference centre, an aquarium and maritime museum, and commercial marinas for about 108 craft.

Club Island: This would be a controlled access area for sailing clubs, providing moorings for 639 craft, dry berthing, parking areas, ramps and haul-out facilities.

West Island: Approached over a drawbridge, this area is planned for three zones: The Village (next to the fishing harbour with informal and rustic shopping, arts and crafts stores, galleries, offices and a residential area); the Office Park (office blocks); and the Waterfront Dwellings (residential accommodation).

There would be underground parking and garaging at each of the three islands, and limited open parking.

Municipal Reporter TANIA BROUGHTON outlines the case against more reclamation

'There's been too much shrinkage already' claim

STOP any further reclamation of Durban Bay — that's the message from a forum of concerned professionals, Durban architects, planners and urban designers who believe there are viable alternatives to the Portnet's proposed Victoria Embankment proposals.

The d'Urban Changes Forum, which wants to see Durban developed responsibly for the benefit of all, are especially concerned with the environment and the effect any further reclamation of land will have on the bay.

The forum says since 1854, when the city inherited this 'wet park', the harbour had been slowly shrinking away.

'At present 53% of the original bay has been reclaimed.

'The Portnet proposal involves further expansive and massive landfill of open water while large areas of derelict land lie vacant on the Point.

'There is a danger of eventual choking of the spacious natural bay to a narrow river mouth,' the forum says.

It has likened the harbour to Cape Town's Table Mountain and questioned how the public would react if part of the mountain were demolished to make way for houses, shopping centres and museums.

'We believe a balanced view of the bay and city is needed. We need maximum cargo handling together with maximum public access to the water.

'To achieve this there has to be a holistic approach to the planning of the harbour and disjointed, piecemeal development of the urban environment must be avoided.'

Using this holistic approach, the forum has drawn up its own proposals for the harbour which, by using existing vacant sites from the Point to Wilson's Yard for development, does away with the need to reclaim any further land.

The forum has presented its proposals to many groups and already has the backing of the

institutes of architects and town planners, harbour user bodies including the yacht clubs and the Victoria Embankment Resident's Association.

It is to make a presentation to the city's Management Committee soon.

The forum suggests that any redevelopment of the Victoria Embankment area should be low-key and 'passive'.

'That area is already highly developed. We believe it should be cleaned up but there should be no great de-

velopment, only an upgrading of existing facilities'.

The forum has already identified two areas it feels would be suitable for development — Wilson's Yard and Cato Creek.

'Both are under-utilised and, being prime land, would be suitable for all types of development including hotels and shopping centres.

'The Point area is the historical heart of the city and harbour and as such it could be developed as a unique tourist attraction — it seems the logical place for the Mari-

time museum, commercial facilities and high-density residential development.

'We believe there should be a thorough professional analysis of existing vacant land in the Point area and around the bay.'

The forum says in Cape Town a tailor made 'package of plans' approach was jointly employed by the city council, the state and private enterprise to unlock the potential of the successful Victoria and Albert waterfront development.

'As yet Durban has no similar approach — delay and confrontation could result and once again Durban is the loser as development goes ahead in another city.

'We urge all interested parties to resolve their differences and combine their efforts to avoid any further delay in vital developments,' it concluded.

