

Estcourt encouraged to invest in a vision

NETWORK REPORTER

PRESIDENT of the Estcourt Chamber of Business Zamokuhle Zwane has thrown down the gauntlet to big business in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands' town to procure goods and services locally to help in "reinforcing and promoting of inter-business trade".

Zwane was addressing emerging entrepreneurs and big business leaders last week at a business breakfast in the town, which is the commercial hub of the KZN Midlands' historic battlefields.

The event was organised by the chamber in a bid to put big business and small business under the same roof as provincial and local government to discuss their challenges and vision. KwaZulu-Natal Finance MEC Ina Cronje represented provincial government at the event.

Zwane said the relationship between the local municipality and business sector was in a poor state.

"There is no communication whatsoever. The infrastructure is dilapidated and businesses have to stand up. We request the provincial government to advise us on how to access funds to promote business in a small town like ours," he said.

"There is a need for a supplier development programme. This will enable SMEs to access contracts from the bigger, established local businesses and be competitive with other suppliers.

"We also want the provincial government to seriously consider cutting down on importing goods because it kills local industries.



Zamokuhle Zwane, president of the Estcourt Chamber of Business, centre, with Estcourt municipal manager Nonhlanhla Njoko and KZN Finance MEC Ina Cronje at a business breakfast in the KZN Midlands town

"The big businesses need to also stop buying goods that are available in Estcourt from out of town... We would like to see three major factories being built in this town to supplement those that exist and which can create more jobs. Then only can this town realise the call by the government to create more jobs," said Zwane.

Estcourt municipal manager Nonhlanhla Njoko admitted that the municipality had many challenges that "ends up infringing

service delivery" in town.

"There are challenges when it comes to collecting debts. Some of the other challenges are to do with high cost of services like electricity provision... Most upcoming businesses face serious difficulties in this regard.

"The poor service delivery in terms of water is still a challenge in this area. However, we are inviting business to use vast industrial land that we have in town to build factories and companies that can

boost the economy of this town," Njoko said.

Meanwhile, Cronje was invited by the Estcourt Chamber of Business to the forum to address local business leaders on opportunities within provincial government. Zwane said that the idea was to identify how local business could benefit from government and to assist in the economic growth of the town.

Cronje said that there were many programmes in different de-

partments where local business could benefit directly, including money for infrastructure. She welcomed the vision of the chamber to attract investment into the town.

She advised the chamber to "sit down and put your heads together" to come up with a plan highlighting what kind of businesses or factories they would like to see in the area.

"Put down in writing the vision of the Estcourt chamber, something reasonable and achievable... Once the plan is in place, let us talk about it. However, I must be clear that we as government do not build factories for the private sector and it is not our mandate to fund private sector in that regard. But the role we can play is one of ensuring a viable environment to attract industries and factories for your vision to be realised," said Cronje.

Speaking on behalf of one of the biggest employers in the area, Silindile Manyathi of Nestle acknowledged that there was high unemployment in the area, but also a high shortage of skills.

"Most industries in Estcourt, including the Nestle factory which produces Ricoffy, have to import the skills from out of town and even from other countries," she said.

"We have programmes in partnership with local schools to encourage young pupils to pursue careers in line with scarce skills. This is so that local industries can benefit from the pool of local skills, which is already bearing fruit," said Manyathi.