

# KZN backing off refurbishment plans

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THE KWAZULU-Natal government is climbing down on its plans to splurge R32 million on refurbishing Premier Willie Mchunu's official residence in Pietermaritzburg after the move set alarm bells ringing.

In a joint statement by the offices of Mchunu and Public Works MEC Ravi Pillay, both leaders discussed whether it was necessary to build a swimming pool and a braai area, which would result in taxpayers forking out more than R1m.

Pillay said R32m was an estimation of what would be spent on the project over seven years.

"MEC Pillay said the projected cost of the renovations were the result of an exercise carried out by a full professional team.

"The projected costs for the renovations of the Parkside Residence are spread over a

## Monthly expenses

- Water and electricity: About R10 000
- Garden Service: R15 960
- DSTV: R1 755
- Household cleaning material and other consumables: R5 000 every four months.

period of seven years, and are in line with stipulations of Amafa Heritage Council regarding buildings that are over 60 years of age," read the statement.

The cost of the renovation was revealed by Mchunu when responding to the DA's written parliamentary questions.

The statement said the facility should be used as Mchunu's official residence "when necessary", for hosting his guests, for conferences, press conferences and official meetings.

According to a media report

late last week, the renovation of the bathroom would cost R540 000, R180 000 for electric light fittings, and a R1 010 000 for the swimming pool and braai area.

It is estimated that the work would be completed in 2023.

The statement said so far only R821 000 had been spent on the renovation of the 137-year-old residence, which comprises the main house, two conference facilities, staff quarters and office facilities.

The statement said it was former premier Senzo Mchunu who had requested the renovations in the 2013/14 financial year.

DA MPL Sizwe Mchunu said his party was concerned that the costs might spiral before 2023.

The DA's Mchunu said every month the government spent about R15 960 on garden maintenance, while the monthly electricity bill was

estimated at R10 000, although sources close to the premier said he had never lived in the facility since he took over two years ago.

The DA's Mchunu said the amount Mchunu's office had allocated for the work was a slap in the face "of every person in our province struggling to make ends meet".

"With KZN's current massive housing backlog every cent counts, and the R32m allocated to upgrade the premier's residence could have built more than 300 low-cost housing units. In short, it could have given at least 300 families some dignity and hope," he said.

ANC spokesperson Mdumiseni Ntuli said he would not comment on the matter since he did not have all the facts.

"I cannot speculate that R32m was too much because renovating an old property might be equal to rebuilding."