

UMEDA NEWSLETTER



WELCOME TO OUR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency is a state-owned entity for the uMgungundlovu District Municipality and it was established as a result of the mandate of the decision taken at a Kwazulu-Natal Provincial Cabinet Lekgotla in September 2012.

Mandate

Our mandate is to implement and promote the economic development policies of uMgungundlovu District Municipality in the areas of economic production, investment and trade. This includes fast-tracking the implementation of strategic and catalytic local economic development projects within the District Municipality.

Vision

To be a dynamic Agency which acts as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and development thereby making uMgungundlovu District the investment destination of choice

Mission

To identify, facilitate and implement strategic projects which transform the District both economically and spatially. To become a self-sufficient and sustainable entities.

Values

- Transparency
- Integrity
- Innovation
- Inclusivity
- Consultative

COMING UP...



BROOKSIDE MALL EXPANSION : PAGE 13



UMEDA WON TWO AWARDS: PAGE 16



INVESTMENT ROADSHOW: PAGE 18

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uMgungundlovu District Mayor

Honourable Cllr Mzi Zuma

As we close the third quarter of the 2025/2026 financial year, we do so at a time where decisive action, resilience, and collaboration have defined our approach to economic development in the uMgungundlovu District. This period has not only required us to accelerate delivery but also to respond to emerging challenges that directly impact our communities and key economic sectors.

The district continues to assert its role as a strategic economic centre within KwaZulu-Natal, supported by a diverse and evolving economic base. However, recent developments such as the Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreak have reminded us of the vulnerability of critical sectors like agriculture and the importance of coordinated leadership in safeguarding livelihoods and economic stability. The collective response led through UMEDA and its partners demonstrates the strength of our institutional capacity and our commitment to protecting the local economy.

Encouraging progress has also been made in advancing new sectors of growth, particularly within the creative and film industry. The establishment of the Midlands Film Office and ongoing work towards a fully-fledged film studio signal a forward-looking approach to economic diversification, opening new pathways for youth employment, skills development, and investment attraction.

This quarter has reaffirmed the importance of partnerships between government, the private sector, and communities in driving inclusive development. As we move toward the final quarter, our focus remains on consolidating gains, strengthening implementation, and ensuring that economic opportunities translate into tangible benefits for all residents of uMgungundlovu



Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Mr. Michael Newton

The third quarter has been characterised by intensified implementation, strategic coordination, and a strong emphasis on impact. This period required the organisation to move beyond planning into accelerated execution, ensuring that key programmes and projects begin to deliver measurable outcomes.

Significant strides have been made in strengthening sector development initiatives, particularly in agriculture, investment facilitation, and the creative economy. UMEDA's leadership in coordinating the provincial response to the Foot-and-Mouth Disease crisis highlights the agency's ability to act swiftly in protecting economic value chains while fostering collaboration across multiple stakeholders.

At the same time, continued progress in establishing the Midlands Film Office and advancing partnerships within the media and film sector demonstrates our commitment to unlocking new areas of economic opportunity. These initiatives are not only about infrastructure development but about creating platforms for local talent, supporting enterprise growth, and positioning the district within emerging industries.

Institutionally, the focus has remained on maintaining strong governance, enhancing operational efficiency, and ensuring alignment between strategy and delivery. As we enter the final quarter, the priority will be on consolidating progress, driving implementation at scale, and ensuring that the work undertaken translates into sustainable economic impact for the district.



Chief Finance Officer (CFO)

Mr. Mpumelelo Hadebe

The third quarter has been a period of disciplined financial management, with a strong focus on aligning expenditure to strategic priorities and ensuring that resources are utilised efficiently to support programme delivery. Building on the foundation of a clean audit outcome, the organisation has continued to uphold the highest standards of financial governance and accountability.

During this period, emphasis has been placed on strengthening financial oversight, improving expenditure tracking, and ensuring that budget allocations directly support high-impact projects and interventions. This approach ensures that financial resources are not only managed responsibly but are also directed toward initiatives that generate meaningful economic returns.

The evolving economic landscape, including responses to sector-specific challenges such as agriculture, has required adaptive financial planning and prudent resource allocation. Through continuous monitoring and reporting, the Finance Unit has enabled informed decision-making that balances fiscal sustainability with development imperatives.

As the financial year progresses toward closure, the focus remains on maintaining compliance, improving efficiencies, and ensuring that all financial commitments contribute to the overall mandate of driving economic growth and development within the district.



General Manager: Trade and Investment

Mr. Sandile Gabela

Quarter three has underscored the importance of sustained engagement with investors, stakeholders, and industry partners in translating economic potential into tangible opportunities. While investment facilitation remains a priority, this period has placed equal emphasis on strengthening sector resilience and unlocking new markets.

Ongoing efforts to package and promote bankable projects have continued to position uMgungundlovu as a competitive investment destination. At the same time, targeted engagements within agriculture, film, and emerging industries have broadened the scope of investment opportunities available within the district.

The proactive role played in coordinating responses to economic disruptions, particularly within the agricultural sector, reflects a commitment to protecting existing investments while creating pathways for future growth. Investment is not only about attraction but also about retention, expansion, and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Looking ahead, the focus will be on converting engagements into transactions, strengthening investor confidence, and ensuring that investment flows contribute to job creation, enterprise development, and inclusive economic participation across the district.



General Manager: Projects Development

Mr. James Martin

The third quarter has seen continued progress in advancing catalytic projects that are central to the district's economic transformation agenda. Emphasis has been placed on moving projects from concept to implementation, ensuring that development initiatives begin to deliver visible and measurable impact.

Key developments during this period include progress within the film and creative sector, expansion of agricultural initiatives, and ongoing work in tourism and infrastructure development. These projects are designed not only to stimulate economic activity but also to create opportunities for local communities, particularly in rural and township areas.

A strong focus has been placed on project readiness, feasibility, and partnership development to ensure that initiatives are sustainable and capable of attracting both public and private sector investment. Collaboration with municipalities and stakeholders continues to be a critical enabler in accelerating project implementation and ensuring alignment with local development priorities.

As the financial year approaches its final quarter, the priority will be on fast-tracking implementation, strengthening project pipelines, and ensuring that all initiatives contribute meaningfully to economic growth, job creation, and long-term development within uMgungundlovu.

UMEDA and The Witness Sign MOU to Strengthen Positive Growth Narrative



A new chapter in strengthening the region's economic narrative has begun with the formal signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UMEDA and *The Witness*. This strategic partnership is focused on reshaping how economic growth, investment, and opportunity are communicated, with a clear emphasis on building a more positive and forward-looking story for the district.

This milestone agreement marks a progressive step toward fostering a more balanced, accurate, and forward-looking portrayal of the region. At its core, the collaboration recognises the critical role that credible and responsible media plays in influencing public perception, building investor confidence, and highlighting development opportunities. By working together, UMEDA and *The Witness* seek to ensure that the story of uMgungundlovu reflects not only its challenges but also its significant progress and untapped potential.

UMEDA enters this partnership with a solid foundation of institutional credibility. The agency recently achieved a clean audit outcome, demonstrating its commitment to sound governance, transparency, and accountability. In addition, UMEDA was honoured as the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Business (PMCB) Business of the Year, further affirming its role as a trusted driver of economic development within the district.

The timing of this partnership is particularly significant, as the uMgungundlovu District continues to show encouraging signs of economic recovery and growth. Since 2022, the district's economy has expanded from 11.01% to 12% in Gross Value Added (GVA),

translating into approximately R6 billion in additional annual economic activity. This growth reflects ongoing efforts to unlock investment, support local industries, and create sustainable economic opportunities for communities.

Through this MOU, both organisations have committed to a shared vision of promoting development through accurate and impactful storytelling. *The Witness* will play a key role in amplifying positive, verified, and development-focused stories that highlight progress across sectors. In turn, UMEDA will provide access to credible data, insights, and information on key projects and initiatives that are driving growth in the region.

The partnership will also focus on promoting priority sectors such as investment, tourism, the creative economy, and catalytic development projects. By aligning communication efforts, UMEDA and *The Witness* aim to position the district as an attractive destination for investors, entrepreneurs, and visitors alike.

Importantly, this collaboration has been formally endorsed at board level by both institutions, underscoring a shared commitment to professionalism, credibility, and long-term impact. It reflects a mutual understanding that sustainable development requires not only strategic interventions on the ground but also a strong, consistent narrative that inspires confidence and encourages participation from all stakeholders.

As the partnership takes effect, it is expected to contribute meaningfully to changing perceptions, strengthening stakeholder confidence, and showcasing uMgungundlovu as a region of opportunity, resilience, and growth. Through this unified approach, UMEDA and *The Witness* are setting a precedent for how public institutions and media can collaborate to drive positive change and support economic transformation.

UMEDA Leads Coordinated Response to Foot-and-Mouth Disease Crisis in KwaZulu-Natal



A critical multi-stakeholder meeting was convened on 20 January 2026 at the UMEDA offices to address the escalating outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) in KwaZulu-Natal. The meeting brought together key stakeholders, including the MEC for Finance, Francois Rodgers, government departments, organised agriculture bodies, farmers, traditional leadership, technical experts, and legal advisors.

The engagement aimed to assess the severity of the outbreak, its rapidly growing economic and social impact, and the urgent need for decisive, coordinated intervention. Discussions highlighted the critical importance of the commercial agricultural sector as a key driver of the provincial economy. The sector contributes significantly to employment, value chains, food security, and overall economic activity, making it highly vulnerable to disruptions caused by the FMD outbreak.

Stakeholders raised serious concerns about the far-reaching consequences of the disease, noting its potential to disrupt processing, logistics, and service industries, while placing immense pressure on rural livelihoods. The outbreak not only threatens farmers and producers but also has cascading effects across the broader economy.

A strong consensus emerged from the meeting on the need for a unified provincial response. Key priorities identified included the acceleration of vaccination programmes, strengthened biosecurity measures, and enhanced collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders. Participants agreed that swift and coordinated action is essential to contain the spread of the disease, protect the agricultural economy, and safeguard jobs.

Timeline of UMEDA's Proactive Response

UMEDA has played a central and proactive role in mobilising stakeholders and coordinating efforts to address the crisis. Key milestones include:

- **08 December 2025:** Local farmers approached UMEDA seeking urgent assistance in response to the outbreak.
- **11 December 2025:** UMEDA convened an initial stakeholder meeting to assess the situation and initiate dialogue.
- **12 December 2025:** A follow-up engagement was held with key stakeholders, including H. Kuhn from the Office of the Premier (OTP), to strengthen co-ordination efforts.
- **12 January 2026:** UMEDA hosted a follow-up meeting and formally launched the KZN FMD Management Committee to drive a structured response.
- **19 January 2026:** The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) formally approached UMEDA for support in managing the crisis.
- **20 January 2026:** UMEDA convened the KZN FMD Committee
- **22 January 2026:** The KZN FMD War Room was established to coordinate rapid response measures and monitor progress.

This series of interventions demonstrates UMEDA's leadership in responding to the FMD outbreak and its commitment to protecting the province's agricultural economy. By fostering collaboration across sectors and facilitating decisive action. The establishment of the War Room and the Management Committee signals a shift toward a more structured, data-driven, and coordinated approach.

Mayor Mzi Zuma Visits UMEDA Midlands Film Office to Champion Creative Industry Growth



On 27 January 2026, the uMgungundlovu District Municipality Mayor, Honourable Cllr Mzi Zuma, paid an official visit to the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) offices to view the newly established UMEDA Midlands Film Office. The visit marked an important milestone in the district's journey toward building a vibrant and competitive film and creative industry.

The establishment of the Midlands Film Office represents a strategic investment in the creative economy, aimed at positioning uMgungundlovu as an emerging hub for film production, storytelling, and artistic innovation. The initiative is aligned with broader efforts to diversify the local economy, attract investment, and create meaningful opportunities for young people and creatives across the district.

During the visit, Mayor Zuma expressed his excitement and strong support for the Film Office, recognising its potential to unlock new economic pathways. He highlighted the importance of leveraging the creative sector as a driver of inclusive growth, noting that film and media have the power to not only tell local stories but also stimulate tourism, develop skills, and create sustainable employment.

"The establishment of this Film Office is a significant step forward for our district," the Mayor noted. "It opens doors for our local talent and positions uMgungundlovu as a serious contender in the film and creative industries. We are proud to support initiatives that bring innovation, opportunity, and hope to our communities."

The Mayor was accompanied by UMEDA Chief Executive Officer, Michael Newton, who led a comprehensive tour of the facility. Mr. Newton provided a detailed, step-by-step overview of the Film Office, outlining its core functions, operational framework, and long-term vision. He emphasised the role of the Film

Office as a central coordinating hub that will facilitate film permits, support production logistics, promote locations, and connect local creatives with industry opportunities.

The walkthrough also highlighted how the Film Office will serve as a gateway for filmmakers seeking to shoot in the district, ensuring a streamlined and professional experience. By providing structured support and access to resources, UMEDA aims to attract both local and international productions, thereby boosting economic activity and elevating the district's profile within the broader film industry.

In addition to its operational role, the Film Office is expected to play a critical part in developing local talent. Through partnerships, training programmes, and industry engagements, the initiative will empower emerging filmmakers, technicians, and creatives with the skills and exposure needed to thrive in a competitive environment. This focus on capacity building is central to ensuring that the benefits of the film industry are inclusive and far-reaching.

The visit also provided an opportunity to reflect on the broader vision for the creative sector within uMgungundlovu. Both the Mayor and UMEDA leadership reaffirmed their commitment to fostering an enabling environment where innovation can flourish, and where strategic investments translate into tangible socio-economic benefits for communities.

As the district continues to position itself as a destination for film and creative industries, the Midlands Film Office stands as a symbol of progress, collaboration, and forward-thinking leadership. The support and endorsement from the highest level of municipal leadership further reinforce the importance of this initiative and its potential to transform the local economic landscape.

Building the Future of Film in uMgungundlovu District



Momentum continues to build within the creative economy of the uMgungundlovu District, as strategic partnerships and forward-looking initiatives position the region as an emerging hub for film and media production. A recent engagement between the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) and Pambili Media marked another important step in advancing the development of the uMgungundlovu Film Studio and strengthening the broader film ecosystem.

The meeting served as a platform to formally introduce officials from Pambili Media, in alignment with the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two entities. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on progress made to date on the Film Studio project, as well as to share insights into the work of the Film Office housed within UMEDA. This Film Office continues to play a critical role in coordinating film-related activities, facilitating industry engagement, and positioning the district as a viable destination for productions.

Discussions highlighted a shared vision of unlocking the economic potential of the film and creative industries within the region. With growing recognition of film as a catalyst for job creation, tourism, and skills development, stakeholders are increasingly aligning efforts to ensure that infrastructure, partnerships, and knowledge systems are in place to support sustainable growth.

A key outcome of the engagement was Pambili Media's expressed interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the current status and future direction of the Film Studio project. This reflects growing confidence from industry players and signals the potential for meaningful collaboration that can accelerate development in this sector. To build on this momentum, both parties agreed to co-host a follow-up engagement scheduled for Friday, 30 January 2026.

The upcoming session is expected to focus on strengthening industry knowledge, with particular emphasis on insights related to e.tv Film Studios and broader trends shaping the film and television landscape. This knowledge-sharing approach is aimed at ensuring that the uMgungundlovu Film Studio is developed in line with industry standards and best practices, while also responding to local opportunities and needs.

In addition to these engagements, a structured action plan will be implemented to support the formalisation and operationalisation of the Film Studio. This will include refining governance frameworks, strengthening partnerships, and identifying investment opportunities that can bring the project to fruition. The collaborative approach between stakeholders is expected to enhance the long-term sustainability and impact of the initiative.

Further reinforcing this commitment to industry development, participation in the Durban International Film Festival scheduled for July 2026 has been prioritised. This platform will provide valuable opportunities to engage with filmmakers, producers, investors, and other key stakeholders, while also offering exposure to global trends and innovations within the sector. Insights gained from this engagement will contribute to shaping the strategic direction of the Film Studio and related initiatives.

The continued focus on building partnerships, enhancing knowledge, and developing infrastructure reflects a broader commitment to positioning uMgungundlovu as a competitive player within South Africa's creative economy. By leveraging collaboration and aligning efforts across the public and private sectors, the district is steadily laying the foundation for a vibrant and inclusive film industry.

UMEDA Assesses Agricultural Innovation Project at Zethembe Learning Academy



On 5 February 2026, the Agency, led by General Manager of Trade and Investment Sandile Gabela, conducted a strategic site visit to Zethembe Learning Academy in the uMgungundlovu District. The purpose of the visit was to assess the readiness, scalability, and economic potential of the agricultural innovation project, which is emerging as a key driver of rural development and skills empowerment.

The UMEDA delegation was welcomed by project implementer Zethembe Nzimande, who provided a comprehensive tour of the expansive 800-hectare facility. The site encompasses a combination of training areas, production zones, and agro-processing infrastructure, all designed to create an integrated agricultural value chain. The visit offered UMEDA valuable insight into the operational model of the academy and its potential to contribute meaningfully to the district's economic growth.

At the core of the project is a strong focus on youth development and empowerment. The Zethembe Learning Academy is positioned to equip young people with practical agricultural skills, entrepreneurial knowledge, and hands-on experience in modern farming practices. By nurturing a new generation of farmers and agro-entrepreneurs, the initiative directly addresses key challenges such as youth unemployment, skills shortages, and limited access to economic opportunities in rural communities.

The project's integrated approach—combining training, production, and agro-processing—ensures that participants are exposed to the full agricultural value chain. This not only enhances their technical capabilities but also prepares them to participate competitively in the market. The inclusion of agro-processing further strengthens the initiative by adding value to primary agricultural products, increasing income potential, and creating additional employment opportunities.

During the visit, UMEDA assessed the infrastructure, resource capacity, and overall readiness of the project to attract investment and scale its operations. The findings confirmed that the initiative holds significant promise as a catalytic development project within the district. Its ability to simultaneously address skills development, food production, and enterprise creation makes it a strategic asset in advancing the region's agricultural economy.

UMEDA's involvement in the project extends beyond assessment. As a key economic development agency, UMEDA is actively facilitating partnerships, unlocking investment opportunities, and supporting the alignment of the project with broader district development priorities. By connecting the academy with potential investors, stakeholders, and technical partners, UMEDA aims to strengthen the sustainability and long-term impact of the initiative.

The visit also highlighted the importance of collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders in driving rural development. Through coordinated efforts, projects such as the Zethembe Learning Academy can be scaled to maximise their impact, ensuring that more communities benefit from economic growth and job creation.

Mr. Gabela emphasised the significance of investing in agricultural innovation as a means of building resilient local economies. He noted that initiatives like this not only contribute to food security but also play a vital role in revitalising rural areas by creating sustainable livelihoods and fostering entrepreneurship.

As uMgungundlovu continues to position itself as a hub for agricultural development, projects like the Zethembe Learning Academy serve as practical examples of how innovation and skills development can be leveraged to drive inclusive growth. The integration of training, production, and agro-processing creates a holistic model that can be replicated across the district and beyond.

Brookside Mall Expansion Signals Renewed Confidence in Pietermaritzburg's Economy



A wave of excitement swept through Pietermaritzburg as Brookside Mall officially unveiled its R100 million expansion, on the 27th of February 2026 marking a significant milestone in the city's ongoing economic recovery and growth. The development introduces 19 new retail outlets, including additional services such as an ATM, and is expected to generate approximately 200 permanent job opportunities, providing a meaningful boost to the local economy.

The expansion stands as a strong indicator of investor confidence in the city and its future. Property owner and developer Andrew Barnes described the project as a major step forward in the mall's evolution, reflecting a long-term commitment to both the retail sector and the broader Pietermaritzburg community. He emphasised that continued investment in the development demonstrates faith in the resilience of the local economy, particularly in the wake of the challenges brought about by the 2021 South African unrest.

Construction of the new extension was completed over a period of approximately twelve months, with a phased opening approach already underway. A number of the newly added stores have commenced trading, while others are expected to open their doors in the coming weeks. Plans are also in place to further enhance the mall's food offering, responding to growing consumer demand and improving the overall shopping experience. Strong support from national retail brands has further reinforced the mall's position as a key commercial hub within the city.

Beyond its physical expansion, the development has delivered meaningful economic benefits. While some specialised skills were sourced externally during construction, a significant portion of the investment was retained within the local economy, supporting businesses and creating employment opportunities for residents. This approach has contributed to stimulating economic activity and strengthening livelihoods within the district.

Collaboration between the private sector and government has played a crucial role in bringing the project to fruition. Appreciation was expressed for the support received from local government structures, highlighting the importance of partnerships in driving sustainable development and unlocking investment opportunities.

From a development perspective, the expansion represents more than just increased retail space. According to Mr Thabiso Molefe Trade and Investment Officer from UMEDA, the project is a clear demonstration of progress in rebuilding the local economy. He noted that facilitating investments of this nature is central to stimulating growth and creating opportunities, and that the successful completion of the expansion reflects the impact of coordinated efforts between development agencies and the private sector.

Community leadership also welcomed the development as a symbol of progress and shared ambition. Ward councillor Suraya Reddy highlighted that the occasion represents far more than the opening of new retail outlets. Instead, it reflects a broader vision of growth, opportunity, and confidence in the future of the community. She emphasised that each new store contributes not only to economic activity but also to job creation, ultimately improving the quality of life for residents.

Recognition was also given to the collective efforts of developers, architects, contractors, tenants, and workers who played a role in delivering the project. Their dedication has transformed initial concepts into a modern, vibrant retail environment that will continue to serve the community for years to come.

The Brookside Mall expansion stands as a powerful example of how strategic investment, strong partnerships, and community support can drive meaningful economic transformation. As Pietermaritzburg continues to rebuild and grow, developments of this nature reinforce the city's position as a destination for investment and a hub of opportunity within the region.

Strengthening Strategy and Governance for Sustainable Growth



A successful Hybrid Board Strategic Session was recently convened by the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency, bringing together Board Members and Management both physically and through the Microsoft Teams platform. The session created an inclusive and collaborative environment that enabled meaningful engagement on organisational performance, governance matters, and strategic priorities for the 2026/2027 financial year.

The strategic session served as an important platform to reflect on progress achieved to date while setting a clear direction for the future. Through structured discussions and presentations, participants reviewed key performance indicators, assessed operational efficiencies, and examined areas requiring improvement. This comprehensive approach ensured that both leadership and management remained aligned on the organisation's goals and responsibilities.

Central to the engagement was a strong focus on strengthening economic development planning within the district. Deliberations emphasised the importance of designing and implementing programmes that respond effectively to local economic challenges while unlocking new opportunities for growth. By prioritising targeted interventions, the agency aims to accelerate development across key sectors and enhance the district's overall economic competitiveness.

Governance, compliance, and risk management also featured prominently in the discussions. The session underscored the necessity of maintaining high standards of accountability and transparency, particularly in an evolving economic environment. Board Members and Management collectively explored strategies to improve compliance frameworks, mitigate potential risks, and ensure that all operations are aligned with regulatory requirements and best practices.

In addition, the session highlighted the importance of integrated planning and collaboration in achieving sustainable outcomes. By aligning programmes and initiatives with long-term development objectives, the organisation is better positioned to deliver measurable impact. The engagement reinforced a shared commitment to ensuring that all strategic efforts contribute meaningfully to job creation, investment attraction, and inclusive economic growth within the district.

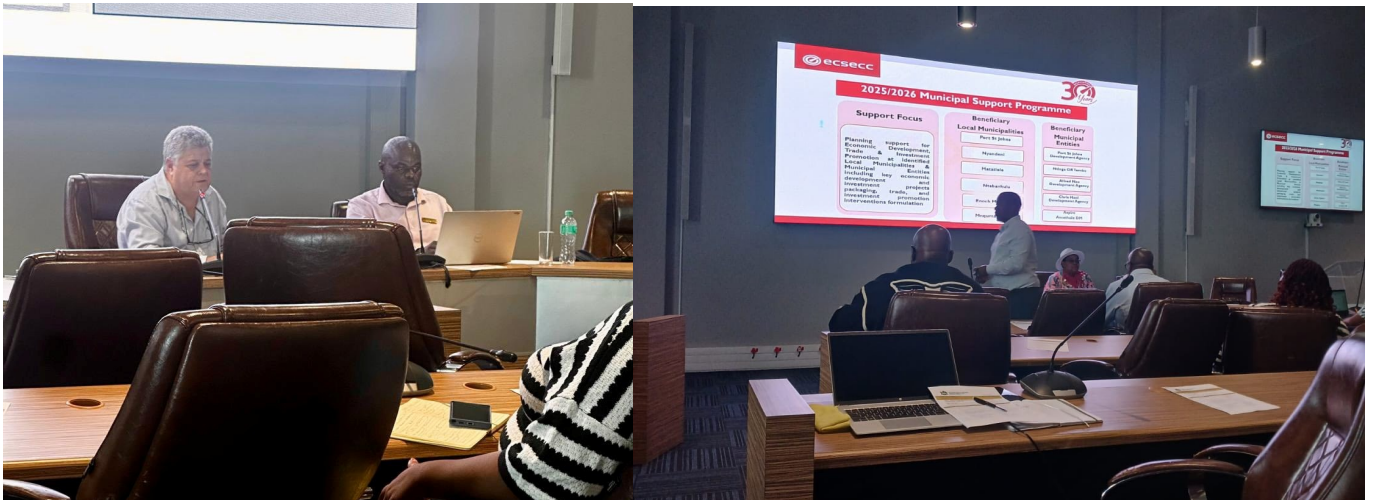
The hybrid format of the session demonstrated adaptability and inclusivity, allowing participants to engage effectively regardless of location. This approach not only enhanced participation but also reflected a modern and flexible way of conducting high-level strategic engagements.

Forward-looking planning was a key outcome of the session, with clear priorities identified for the upcoming financial year. These include strengthening partnerships, enhancing operational efficiency, and ensuring that projects are implemented with greater impact and sustainability. The discussions also reaffirmed the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation to track progress and inform decision-making.

The session ultimately served as a critical step in guiding strategic decision-making and reinforcing institutional cohesion. By fostering open dialogue and collective input, the agency continues to build a strong foundation for effective governance and impactful service delivery.

With a clear strategic direction in place, the organisation is well-positioned to drive its mandate of economic development with renewed focus and purpose. The outcomes of the session are expected to translate into actionable plans that will support long-term growth, strengthen stakeholder confidence, and contribute to a more resilient and prosperous uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Engages in Benchmarking and Information Sharing Session with Eastern Cape Delegation



A spirit of collaboration and shared learning took centre stage during a Benchmarking and Information Sharing Session held on 11 March 2026 at the Provincial Disaster Management Centre in Mkhondeni, Pietermaritzburg. The engagement formed part of an official exposure visit by a 25-member delegation from the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC), aimed at strengthening inter-provincial cooperation and enhancing approaches to socio-economic development.

The session created a valuable platform for meaningful dialogue, bringing together development practitioners, government representatives, and key stakeholders to exchange best practices and explore innovative strategies for driving inclusive economic growth. The visiting delegation demonstrated a strong interest in understanding institutional frameworks, governance models, and implementation strategies that have contributed to development successes within KwaZulu-Natal.

Representation at the session included the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Michael Newton from UMEDA, who delivered an insightful and impactful presentation showcasing the agency's work and achievements. The presentation outlined key programmes and strategic interventions that have contributed to stimulating economic activity, attracting investment, and creating sustainable opportunities for communities across the district. Emphasis was placed on the importance of partnerships, highlighting how collaboration with local municipalities, private sector stakeholders, and other institutions has strengthened the delivery of development initiatives.

A key focus of the presentation was the integrated approach to economic development, which prioritises long-term sustainability, innovation, and community empowerment. Practical examples were shared to demonstrate how targeted projects and initiatives have translated into tangible socio-economic benefits, particularly in unlocking investment opportunities and supporting emerging sectors within the local economy.

The session further benefited from contributions by other development agencies, including South Coast Tourism and Investment Enterprise, Umhlosinga Development Agency, and Harry Gwala Development Agency. Each agency provided valuable insights into their respective mandates, operational models, and the impact of their programmes in advancing local economic development within their regions. This collective sharing of experiences enriched the discussions and provided the ECSECC delegation with a comprehensive understanding of the provincial development landscape.

Engagements of this nature play a critical role in fostering knowledge exchange and building networks that extend beyond provincial boundaries. The opportunity to benchmark against existing models enables institutions to refine their strategies, improve efficiency, and adopt innovative approaches that respond to evolving socio-economic challenges.

During the discussions, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) reaffirmed the strategic importance of development agencies within the broader government framework. It was emphasised that development agencies serve as key vehicles for implementing economic development programmes, facilitating investment, and bridging the gap between policy and execution at a local level. Their role in driving coordinated and responsive development was highlighted as essential in addressing unemployment, inequality, and poverty.

The reaffirmation by COGTA underscored the need for continued support, capacity building, and strengthening of development agencies to ensure they remain effective and responsive to the needs of communities. The importance of aligning development initiatives with national and provincial priorities was also emphasised, ensuring that efforts contribute to broader economic transformation objectives.

UMEDA Shines at the Municipal Excellence Awards



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency proudly celebrated a remarkable milestone after receiving two prestigious accolades at the Municipal Excellence Awards, held on 12 March 2026 at the iconic Durban International Convention Centre. The event brought together key stakeholders in local government to honour institutions that exemplify excellence, accountability, and impactful service delivery.

The evening was a moment of pride and recognition for UMEDA, as the Agency was honoured with the following awards:

- **MFMA Clean Audit Award for the Financial Year 2024/2025**
- **Silver Recognition as the Most Functional District Development Agency**

These awards stand as a testament to UMEDA's unwavering commitment to good governance, financial discipline, and sustainable economic development within the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA was proudly represented at the ceremony by its leadership, including CEO Michael Newton, His Worship the Mayor Mzi Zuma, Board Chairperson Dr Sihle Ndlovu, and District Municipal Manager Dr Muthwa. Their presence underscored the strength of leadership, collaboration, and shared vision that continues to drive progress across the district.

The atmosphere at the awards ceremony was filled with excitement and celebration, reflecting the significance of the achievements. For UMEDA, these accolades are more than recognition—they are affirmation of the Agency's role in advancing inclusive economic growth, strengthening institutional performance, and creating meaningful opportunities for communities.

Achieving a Clean Audit is a significant accomplishment that highlights UMEDA's dedication to transparency,

accountability, and sound financial management practices. It signals to stakeholders, investors, and the public that the Agency operates with integrity and maintains the highest standards of governance. In an environment where financial oversight is critical, this recognition reinforces trust and confidence in UMEDA's operations.

Equally important is the recognition as the Most Functional District Development Agency, which affirms UMEDA's position as a leading catalyst for sustainable development. This award reflects the Agency's ability to effectively implement programmes, foster strategic partnerships, and respond to the socio-economic needs of the district. Through its initiatives, UMEDA continues to unlock investment opportunities, support local enterprises, and contribute to job creation and economic resilience.

These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of the entire UMEDA team, whose commitment to excellence continues to drive the Agency forward. Furthermore, the support and collaboration of stakeholders—including government partners, municipalities, and the private sector—remain instrumental in achieving shared development goals.

As UMEDA celebrates this milestone, the Agency remains focused on building on this success by strengthening its programmes, enhancing service delivery, and continuing to make a meaningful impact in the lives of the people of uMgungundlovu.

These accolades are not only a celebration of institutional excellence but also a reflection of a collective vision to create a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for the district.

Strategic Dialogue Strengthens Collaboration to Address Rail Security Challenges



His Worship the uMgungundlovu District Municipality Mayor, Mzi Zuma, together with UMEDA senior management, recently participated in a high-level strategic dialogue on security challenges affecting the Transnet railway network. The engagement was hosted at the elegant ANEW Hotel Hilton, bringing together key stakeholders from government, business, and infrastructure sectors.

The dialogue formed part of ongoing efforts to address the growing concerns around railway infrastructure security, which continues to impact economic activity, logistics efficiency, and regional development. The session created an important platform for open discussion, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem-solving among stakeholders who are directly affected by the challenges within the rail network.

In his keynote address, Mayor Mzi Zuma emphasised the critical importance of safeguarding infrastructure, stating that road and rail networks are the lifeblood of the economy. He highlighted that the sustainability and growth of the district's economy are closely linked to the efficiency and reliability of these systems. Mayor Zuma further called for urgent and coordinated efforts between government, law enforcement, state-owned entities, and the private sector to protect these essential assets from vandalism, theft, and operational disruptions.

Representing the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency General Manager James Martin noted that the dialogue was made possible through a strategic partnership between UMEDA and The Witness. He highlighted that the initiative was aimed at strengthening collaboration with the business community and creating a platform where critical economic issues can be addressed collectively. This partnership reflects UMEDA's ongoing commitment to facilitating engagements that drive practical solutions and foster inclusive economic growth.

During the session, Transnet presented a detailed overview of the key security challenges facing the

railway network. These include infrastructure vandalism, cable theft, operational disruptions, and broader safety concerns that have a direct impact on the movement of goods and services. Transnet emphasised the need for stronger interventions and coordinated responses, particularly at the municipal level, and called for increased collaboration with businesses to protect rail infrastructure and ensure continuity in operations.

The dialogue was further enriched by the presence of prominent leaders and stakeholders, including His Worship the Mayor of the Msunduzi Municipality, Mzimkhulu Thebolla, Deputy Mayor Sandile Mkhize, and Melanie Veness, CEO of the Pietermaritzburg & Midlands Chamber of Business. Their participation, alongside members of the business community, demonstrated a shared commitment to building a safe, secure, and resilient economic environment within the region.

The engagement underscored the importance of public-private partnerships in addressing complex infrastructure challenges. It also highlighted the need for innovative solutions, improved coordination, and proactive measures to safeguard strategic assets that are essential for economic growth and investment attraction.

As a key driver of economic development in the district, UMEDA continues to play a pivotal role in facilitating such dialogues and strengthening partnerships that deliver tangible outcomes. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the Agency is helping to shape a collective response to critical challenges, ensuring that infrastructure systems remain functional and supportive of economic activity.

This strategic dialogue marks an important step towards building stronger collaboration, enhancing security measures, and ensuring that the rail network continues to serve as a backbone for economic development in uMgungundlovu and beyond.

Trade and Investment Roadshow Unlocks Opportunities for Inclusive Growth



A renewed sense of optimism and collaboration filled the room as key stakeholders, investors, and development partners convened for the Trade and Investment Roadshow, hosted in the uMgungundlovu District on 25 March 2026. The engagement, held at the prestigious Golden Horse Hotel, created a dynamic platform to explore practical solutions aimed at unlocking economic opportunities and accelerating development across the region.

The roadshow formed part of a broader strategic initiative to position uMgungundlovu as a competitive investment destination, while also addressing pressing socio-economic challenges facing the region. It provided a valuable platform for engagement, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas on how to stimulate sustainable development and attract meaningful investment.

In his keynote address, His Worship the Executive Mayor, Mzi Zuma, highlighted that the uMgungundlovu District Municipality is the second-largest contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in KwaZulu-Natal. He emphasised that, despite this strong economic standing, the district continues to face the persistent challenge of high unemployment, which requires urgent and coordinated intervention.

Mayor Zuma stressed that platforms such as the Trade and Investment Roadshow are essential in identifying practical, implementable solutions to these challenges. He further underscored the importance of directing investment towards township and rural economies, noting that inclusive growth can only be achieved when development efforts reach all communities. By prioritising these areas, the district aims to create opportunities that promote shared prosperity, economic participation, and social upliftment.

Adding to the strategic vision, UMEDA CEO Michael Newton reaffirmed the Agency's core mandate of stimulating and facilitating investment across the district. He highlighted that UMEDA continues to play a

central role in creating an enabling environment for investors by fostering partnerships, supporting enterprise development, and unlocking catalytic projects.

Mr Newton further revealed that uMgungundlovu is positioning itself towards the establishment of a Massive Creative Economic Zone, a forward-looking initiative aimed at unlocking new opportunities within the creative and cultural industries. This initiative is expected to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation, particularly among the youth, while also enhancing the district's competitiveness in emerging sectors of the economy.

The engagement also featured a series of insightful panel discussions, where experts and stakeholders explored critical themes such as the investment climate, infrastructure financing, and the importance of strategic partnerships in accelerating economic growth. These discussions provided practical insights into overcoming barriers to investment and highlighted the need for collaborative approaches between the public and private sectors.

Participants engaged in meaningful dialogue around the challenges and opportunities within the district, with a strong focus on creating actionable solutions that will translate into tangible outcomes. The roadshow not only showcased the district's investment potential but also reinforced the importance of alignment between government priorities and private sector interests.

The success of the Trade and Investment Roadshow reflects the district's commitment to building a resilient, inclusive, and future-focused economy. Through continued engagement and collaboration, uMgungundlovu is positioning itself as a hub for investment and innovation, capable of delivering sustainable growth and improving the quality of life for its communities.

Strengthening the Midlands Film Industry Through Strategic Collaboration



A recent strategic site visit to the Durban Film Office provided valuable insights into the structure, operations, and impact of a fully functional municipal film office. The engagement formed part of ongoing efforts by the UMEDA Midlands Film Office to deepen its understanding of best practices within the film and creative industries, with a view to enhancing service delivery and strengthening the Midlands as a competitive filming destination.

The visit offered a comprehensive perspective on how Durban has successfully integrated film services, marketing, and development programmes to both attract large-scale productions and nurture emerging local filmmakers. A key takeaway was the importance of establishing streamlined permitting systems, which enable efficient processing and coordination of filming activities. Equally critical is the development of strong working relationships with municipal departments to ensure seamless support for productions, as well as maintaining accurate and accessible databases of locations, crew, and service providers to facilitate smooth operations.

Beyond operational efficiency, the engagement highlighted the significance of long-term, research-driven planning in building a sustainable film industry. Durban's approach demonstrates how targeted interventions—such as micro-budget funding, skills development workshops, and incubation programmes—can play a transformative role in bridging the gap between aspiring creatives and established professionals. These initiatives not only support talent development but also contribute to the overall growth and resilience of the local film ecosystem.

Another key area of learning was the role of active and strategic marketing in positioning a region as a preferred filming destination. Through consistent promotion of locations, strategic partnerships, and participation in industry festivals and markets, Durban has successfully elevated its profile within both local and international film sectors. This proactive approach

ensures visibility, attracts investment, and creates opportunities for collaboration across the value chain.

Building on these insights, the UMEDA Midlands Film Office is working towards evolving from a primarily facilitation-focused entity into a more integrated and development-driven film office. The vision is to create a film-friendly environment that not only attracts productions to the Midlands but also supports the growth of local talent and enterprises within the creative sector.

This transition will focus on strengthening industry capacity, improving systems and processes, and introducing programmes that encourage both inward investment and local content development. By aligning with best practices and fostering collaboration with key stakeholders, the Midlands is well-positioned to become a vibrant hub within the broader film economy.

Ultimately, these efforts are aimed at ensuring that the region remains competitive, sustainable, and inclusive, with the film industry serving as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and cultural expression. Through continued learning and strategic partnerships, the Midlands Film Office is laying a strong foundation for a thriving creative sector that benefits communities across the district.

UMEDA Supports the Launch of the Legends Music Experience



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) proudly participated in the official launch and media briefing of the Legends Music Experience, held at the uMgungundlovu District Council Chamber. The engagement brought together artists, stakeholders, and media representatives in celebration of the district's rich cultural heritage and in preparation for a landmark event that seeks to honour music legends while empowering the next generation of creatives.

The Legends Music Experience forms part of a broader initiative to recognise the contributions of iconic artists and to strengthen the role of the creative industry as a key driver of economic development within the district. The platform not only celebrates excellence but also promotes mentorship, collaboration, and knowledge sharing between established legends and emerging local talent.

Delivering the keynote address, His Worship the Mayor, Mzi Zuma, emphasised the critical role that artists play in shaping society. He highlighted that artists carry the responsibility of using their lived experiences to empower, guide, and inspire upcoming talent within their communities. The Mayor stressed that through music and creative expression, artists have the power to influence positive behaviour, challenge societal norms, and contribute towards building a better future.

Mayor Zuma further urged artists to use their platforms to address pressing societal issues affecting communities today. He noted that music and art remain powerful tools for raising awareness, driving social change, and promoting unity, particularly in addressing challenges such as youth development, social cohesion, and community wellbeing.

In reaffirming the District's commitment, Mayor Zuma emphasised that the uMgungundlovu District Municipality will continue to actively support both the arts and sports sectors, recognising their significant contribution to local economic upliftment. He further highlighted that the Municipality will work closely with

both legendary figures and current artists to explore innovative and impactful ways of positioning uMgungundlovu as a hub for creative and sports-driven economic growth.

The launch event was further enriched by the presence of prominent legends in the music industry, including Nomalanga Hlubi, Themba Mokoena, and Mvuselelo Buthelezi. Their participation added immense value and inspiration to the engagement, symbolising the importance of honouring those who have paved the way in the industry while fostering a spirit of mentorship and legacy-building.

The event served as a reminder of the vital role that the creative sector plays not only in preserving culture and identity but also in contributing to economic growth, job creation, and community development. UMEDA's participation reflects its ongoing commitment to supporting initiatives that unlock opportunities within the creative economy and empower local talent to thrive.

As the district prepares for the main event, anticipation continues to build for what promises to be a memorable celebration of excellence and heritage.

Main Event: Legends Music Experience Awards

- **Date:** 30 April 2026
- **Venue:** Pietermaritzburg City Hall

The Legends Music Experience Awards will honour the icons of the music industry while inspiring future generations to pursue excellence and contribute meaningfully to society through their craft.

Unlocking the Economic Potential of Midmar Dam Through Strategic Partnership



Over the past two decades, Midmar Dam has experienced a notable shift in demand for water-based sports and recreational activities. Once primarily recognised as a scenic leisure destination, the dam is now increasingly viewed as a strategic asset with significant untapped economic potential. In response to these evolving trends, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), marking the beginning of a collaborative effort to reposition the Midmar precinct as a vibrant hub for investment, tourism, and recreation.

At the heart of this partnership lies a shared vision to unlock opportunities that will not only enhance the visitor experience but also stimulate economic growth and job creation within the district. The MOU focuses on strengthening collaboration between the public and private sectors, with a particular emphasis on attracting investment into water-based activities and associated developments around the dam.

A key focus of the collaboration is to revitalise and expand the range of activities available at the dam. Planned upgrades include the development of hospitality infrastructure, which will enhance accommodation and visitor services, as well as the introduction of residential components that can support long-term investment and economic activity. In addition, efforts are underway to restore and increase game numbers on the Mpophomeni side of the dam, further strengthening the area's eco-tourism appeal.

Water-based sports and recreational offerings also form a central pillar of the development strategy. Over the past two years, UMEDA has been actively working to attract investors and operators in this space, recognising the growing demand for activities such as boating, kayaking, and other adventure-based experiences. These initiatives are expected to diversify the dam's offerings, attract a broader visitor base, and create new opportunities for local entrepreneurs and service providers.

Importantly, the impact of this partnership is not limited to Midmar Dam alone. The collaboration between Ezemvelo and UMEDA is set to extend to other properties owned by Ezemvelo within the uMgungundlovu District. This broader scope opens the door to a range of development opportunities across multiple sites, further enhancing the district's tourism and investment landscape.

The enthusiasm surrounding this collaboration was evident as UMEDA CEO Michael Newton and Ezemvelo CEO Sihle Mkhize marked the beginning of what promises to be a productive and impactful partnership. Their shared commitment to innovation, collaboration, and long-term growth sets a strong foundation for the successful implementation of the MOU.



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