



NELSON MANDELA BAY METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY



Improving ease of doing business through e-MAMS



OVERVIEW

This case study explores the importance of effective planning application processes for small businesses. Delays in processing land development applications have an impact on investment attraction and business expansion and growth, and are key indicators for the ease of doing business within a region. To improve planning processes and related communication and cooperation with the local business community, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) has introduced an Electronic Municipal Application Management System (e-MAMS), which includes the Electronic Land Applications Management System (e-LAMS) and the Electronic Building Plans Application Management System (e-BPAMS). The introduction of these systems represents an important mechanism to address existing shortfalls in the City's land-use application processes, which were exacerbated by closure and disruptions caused by COVID-19.

The importance of an effective land application system

Planning decisions are a key municipal function and require input from several internal departments. For years, such cross-departmental collaboration was hampered in the NMBM. This contributed to delays in approvals and a backlog of queries on planning applications. In 2020, the COVID-19 lockdown resulted in the closure of many City departments, causing further delays. A survey of the local business community conducted between 2019 and 2020 had already highlighted the significant impact of such delays on business viability and operations, illustrating how ineffective land application systems can affect a city's attractiveness for investment, business expansion and growth.

Introduction of the e-MAMS pilot project

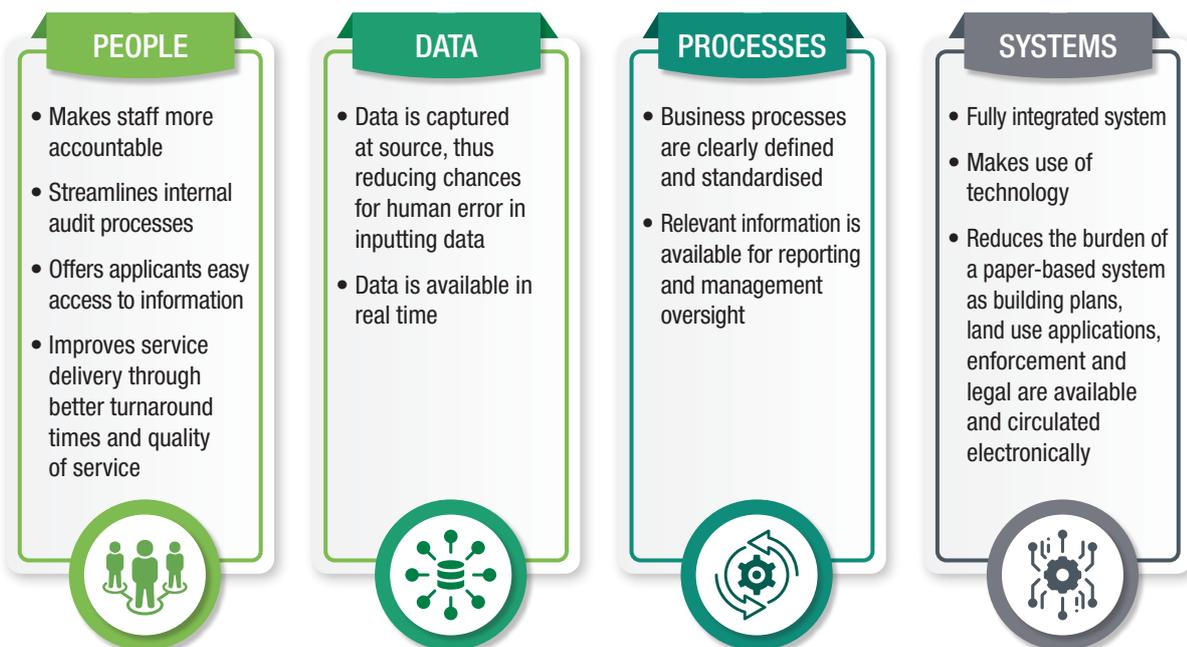
To improve application processes, the municipality introduced e-MAMS, which includes the Electronic Land Application Management System (e-LAMS) and the Electronic Building Plans Application Management System (e-BPAMS). This electronic system replaces the paper-based system, which had resulted in high workloads for staff, and opportunities for political interference and influence over applications by city officials and for applicants to bypass the system, resulting in decreased revenue from application fees and increased expenditure on law enforcement (to follow up on uncontrolled building and land developments).

The e-MAMS system provides a platform that enables the integration of city planning systems and the automation/digitisation of submissions, workflows and decision-making, with a step-by-step process that highlights fields to be completed, reducing the number of incomplete applications and associated delays. It also offers a document management system and can be integrated into performance management systems. Phase 1 of e-MAMS includes the e-LAMS and e-BPAMS functions. Applications can be submitted online, after which notifications of progress are sent to the applicants via email and SMS. Officials can track and extract current information related to the applications. The system also includes 'checkpoints' in the process to allow for authorised sign-off.



Taken together, this system brings benefits in four areas: people, data, processes and systems.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF E-MAMS



LEARNINGS

Towards stakeholder engagement in a post-COVID-19 city

The COVID-19 lockdown had a significant negative impact on municipal planning processes, budgets, timeframes, priorities and compliance reporting on project funding. At the same time, learning from this impact and the ways that were found to overcome it may offer important opportunities for significant shifts in focus, methods of working and approaches to political instability in the post-COVID-19 city. The practicalities of keeping the local authority working during the COVID-19 lockdown have been significant and unprecedented. The ways in which the local authority had to engage with civil society, communities and business during the lockdown, illustrate an important positive 'shift in focus' and way forward in future engagements.

Importance of intergovernmental collaboration to support local businesses

While more streamlined internal processes of coordination are central to improving the effectiveness of service delivery, collaboration between local and national government spheres is just as important. As legislation around spatial planning and land use management as well as around business largely sit with national government, national regulations can create obstacles for businesses that are beyond the scope of the local authority. There is therefore a need for more engagements between the municipality and national government around business regulations in support of local businesses.

Importance of sharing best practices for improving the ease of doing business

The experiences of the private sector differ from metro to metro, based on existing local processes, political leadership, staff capacity, technological systems and the ability to make decisions efficiently. South African cities have been slow to institute regulatory reforms to improve the ease of doing business, and yet such reforms can produce significant results. For example, by automating municipal processes, Mangaung Municipality was able to reduce the time taken to transfer property. The NMBM also improved its processes for getting electricity. As per a World Bank suggestion, metros will need to focus on improving lesson-sharing, learning from the best practices of other municipalities to improve their performance.

