SERVICE DELIVERY PARTY
CROSS-PORTFOLIO POLICY FRAMEWORK

REBUILD THE SPINE

A Micro Urban Regeneration Zone for Cape Town's Township Economy

A developmental framework for integrated economic and spatial regeneration along the Spine Road corridor linking Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain.

MICRO URBAN REGENERATION ZONES

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A Developmental Framework for Integrated Economic and Spatial Regeneration in Cape Town's Township Economy

Abstract

South Africa's township economy remains one of the country's largest unrealised sources of employment, enterprise development and household income. Yet the physical environments in which township economic activity occurs frequently reproduce the conditions that constrain its growth. Derelict commercial premises, fragmented public infrastructure, inadequate pedestrian environments, poor lighting, weak public management, spatial isolation, limited access to capital and organised criminal extortion combine to suppress legitimate economic activity.

This paper proposes a new place-based development instrument for Cape Town: the Micro Urban Regeneration Zone (MURZ). The MURZ is a geographically concentrated, time-bound urban regeneration intervention designed to combine physical infrastructure, commercial property activation, enterprise development, public-space improvement, mobility, safety and institutional coordination within a single economic geography.

The proposed first major demonstration is REBUILD THE SPINE, a 36-month regeneration programme centred on the Spine Road corridor linking Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain.

The model draws on two international bodies of practice while adapting them to South African conditions. The first is the incremental development philosophy associated with Elemental's Quinta Monroy project in Chile, where the public intervention provides a high-quality structural platform capable of being completed and expanded by households. Research on Quinta Monroy demonstrates both the potential of this model and the importance of regulating subsequent expansion.

The second is Medellin's integrated urbanism, where infrastructure, mobility, public space, community facilities, economic opportunity and social interventions were deliberately combined within defined territories. Medellin's Integrated Urban Projects were explicitly designed to coordinate multiple government functions while adapting interventions to existing urban conditions.

REBUILD THE SPINE applies these principles to commercial regeneration. The municipality provides the productive platform. Local entrepreneurs provide the economic activity. Private capital is mobilised alongside public investment. Public infrastructure is designed to make legitimate economic activity safer, more accessible and more productive.

The programme is deliberately experimental. It would operate under a formal 36-month investment gate. At month 36 an independent evaluation would determine whether the programme should continue, be adjusted or be terminated. No automatic expansion would

occur.

The central proposition is straightforward:

A township should not merely be a place where people live. It should increasingly become a place where people work, trade, invest, learn, manufacture, provide services and build assets.

REBUILD THE SPINE seeks to demonstrate how that transformation can begin at street level.

A Resolution Revisited

In 2019, Councillor Farouk Cassim tabled motions before the City of Cape Town on both a Science, Technology and Mathematics Park and elevating Spine Road's status as a corridor connecting Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain. Both were unanimously supported by full Council. Neither carried his name into what followed.

Six years later, the City has begun treating Spine Road exactly as that motion envisioned: a 2025 Local Spatial Development Framework process for the Spine Road Development Corridor, and two completed MyCiTi depots at Spine Road and Mew Way supporting the expansion of public transport across the metro south-east.

> *REBUILD THE SPINE finishes what Council already agreed to once, and gives it the delivery mechanism it was always missing.*

Portfolio Alignment

REBUILD THE SPINE is not a single-portfolio proposal. It is put forward here as a cross-portfolio undertaking, circulated for comment. The associations below are suggested starting points, not final assignments. Each portfolio owner is invited to confirm, amend or contest their listed role before this framework is finalised.

Portfolio	Nominee	Association
Spatial Planning, Land Reform and Transformation	**Gary Lloyd Pothecary**	Anchor portfolio, sitting inside the Spine Road LSDF process; carries the Science, Technology and Mathematics Park hook.
Local Economic Development	**Anda Grobbelaar**	Enterprise cluster model, entrepreneur co-investment structure, business survival targets.

Portfolio	Nominee	Association
Public Transport	**Sean Hendriks**	MyCiTi depot integration at Spine Road and Mew Way.
Safety and Social Development	**Shané Emily Sallons**	Spine Security Compact; zero-tolerance extortion protocol.
Informal Settlements and Street Trading	**Zukile Godfrey Makade**	Commercial Property Register; informal-occupancy resolution.
Water and Sanitation	**Monica Willem**	Productive Shell component: water and sanitation connections.
Stormwater and Flood Management	**Luciano Keyser**	Productive Shell component: drainage infrastructure.
Fire and Disaster Management	**Thembalethu Mangwana**	Productive Shell component: fire compliance.
Digital Access, AI and Municipal Records	**Marlon Phillips**	Productive Shell component: digital connectivity.
Contracts and Municipal Governance	**Morne Basson**	Structured-lease property model.
Municipal Finance	**Abubakar Abdullatief**	Micro Urban Regeneration Fund; leverage metrics.

1 The Developmental Problem

South Africa's spatial geography remains one of the most persistent structural constraints on economic development.

The country's post-apartheid urban form has not merely left poorer households geographically distant from economic opportunity. It has also concentrated disadvantage within neighbourhoods where the quality of public infrastructure, commercial environments and private investment is often substantially weaker than in wealthier parts of the same city.

Townships therefore face a paradox.

They contain substantial populations, significant consumer demand, large numbers of informal and formal businesses, extensive entrepreneurial activity and substantial human capital. Yet the environments within which these economic activities occur frequently lack the infrastructure, institutional support and investment conditions required for businesses to grow.

A business cannot become substantially more productive if its premises are structurally unsafe.

A trader cannot reliably expand if electricity is unstable.

A restaurant cannot operate effectively if sanitation is inadequate.

A retailer cannot attract customers if the surrounding public environment is perceived as unsafe.

A manufacturer cannot expand if transport connections are unreliable.

An entrepreneur cannot accumulate capital if extortion extracts a permanent informal tax from legitimate economic activity.

The problem is therefore not simply a shortage of entrepreneurs. It is a shortage of productive urban environments. This distinction is fundamental.

Conventional township development frequently treats infrastructure, housing, transport, social development, economic development and safety as separate policy categories. The result is a fragmented intervention architecture in which individual departments may complete technically successful projects without materially changing the economic trajectory of the surrounding neighbourhood.

REBUILD THE SPINE proposes the opposite approach. The unit of intervention should be the functioning urban ecosystem.

2 From Township Development to Township Economic Development

The purpose of urban regeneration should not be cosmetic improvement.

A regenerated street is not successful because it has new paving. A regenerated commercial property is not successful because it has been painted. A regenerated neighbourhood is not successful merely because crime statistics temporarily decline.

The ultimate test must be whether the intervention increases the productive capacity of the people and businesses operating within it.

This requires a shift from a welfare-centred conception of township development towards a developmental conception. The central question becomes: how can public investment create the conditions under which private initiative, household investment and local enterprise can generate progressively greater economic value?

That question connects REBUILD THE SPINE directly to the broader developmental objective of creating credible pathways towards substantially higher productivity and substantially higher incomes.

The programme therefore has five interconnected objectives:

- Increase the number of functioning businesses.
- Increase the productivity and survival rate of existing businesses.
- Mobilise private and household investment.
- Create employment and pathways into higher-value economic activity.
- Improve the physical and institutional conditions that make sustained investment possible.

The physical environment becomes an economic instrument.

3 The Micro Urban Regeneration Zone

A Micro Urban Regeneration Zone is defined as: a geographically concentrated urban area in which public infrastructure, commercial property activation, enterprise development, public-space improvement, mobility, safety and institutional coordination are deliberately integrated around measurable economic objectives within a defined implementation period.

The concept deliberately operates at a smaller scale than a conventional municipal development programme.

Large urban regeneration programmes can take decades to deliver. Their geographic scale creates institutional complexity. Benefits can become dispersed. Accountability becomes difficult.

A MURZ operates differently. It concentrates resources. It defines a physical boundary. It identifies specific properties. It identifies specific businesses. It identifies specific infrastructure deficiencies. It identifies specific security risks. It establishes specific economic targets. It establishes a defined budget. It establishes a defined implementation period.

The MURZ therefore becomes a form of urban development laboratory.

The objective is not to regenerate everything simultaneously. The objective is to demonstrate what can happen when sufficient resources and institutional authority are concentrated within a small enough geography to produce measurable change.

4 The Elemental Principle: Build the Platform

One of the most important lessons from Elemental's work in Chile is the concept of incremental development.

Quinta Monroy demonstrated a radical departure from the conventional assumption that government must deliver the complete finished product. The project provided 93 households with structurally capable housing designed to permit subsequent expansion by residents.

The fundamental insight is transferable beyond housing. Government does not necessarily need to build the complete economic outcome. Government can build the platform from which people can create the outcome themselves.

This produces what may be termed the productive half. In housing, this means providing a structurally sound framework into which households can progressively invest. In township commercial regeneration, it means providing a structurally sound commercial platform into which entrepreneurs can progressively invest.

The municipality could therefore provide:

- structural remediation
- electricity connections
- water and sanitation
- drainage
- fire compliance
- basic accessibility
- lighting
- security infrastructure
- shopfront restoration
- basic flooring and walls
- public-space improvements
- pedestrian access
- signage infrastructure
- digital connectivity
- waste-management infrastructure

The entrepreneur then provides:

- business equipment
- furniture
- stock
- specialised fit-out
- branding
- working capital
- staff
- operating systems
- customer acquisition
- subsequent business expansion

This creates a development partnership rather than a conventional grant. The public sector creates the platform. The entrepreneur creates the enterprise. The distinction is crucial.

5 The Lesson Elemental Also Teaches About Regulation

Incremental development must not be confused with uncontrolled development.

Research examining Quinta Monroy fifteen years after implementation found that household expansion substantially exceeded the original expectations of the designers. Some unregulated additions compromised settlement liveability.

That finding is directly relevant to township commercial regeneration. REBUILD THE SPINE must therefore create regulated incrementalism. Every participating commercial property should receive a defined expansion framework.

The framework would specify:

- where expansion may occur
- maximum permissible floor area
- structural requirements
- fire-safety requirements
- drainage requirements
- electrical standards
- accessibility requirements
- signage standards
- public-space protection
- loading and delivery requirements
- waste-management requirements
- permissible operating hours where relevant

The entrepreneur receives freedom to grow within a predictable regulatory framework. This is preferable to either extreme. The first extreme is rigid municipal planning that prevents adaptation. The second is uncontrolled informality that eventually compromises safety, access and urban quality. The objective is structured flexibility.

6 The Medellin Principle: Urbanism as Social Infrastructure

The second major intellectual foundation is Medellin.

Medellin's transformation did not arise from a single infrastructure project. Its Integrated Urban Projects combined transport, public space, community facilities, education, economic development and social interventions within defined territories. The World Bank describes the approach as an integrated model combining basic infrastructure, health, education, employment and other interventions while adapting infrastructure to existing urban fabric.

The lesson is particularly important for South Africa. Infrastructure has social consequences.

A road can divide communities or connect them. A library can be a building or a civic institution. A transport interchange can simply move passengers or become an economic node. A public square can be an empty paved area or a platform for commerce, interaction and community life. A streetlight can simply illuminate asphalt or increase the hours during which legitimate economic activity can safely occur.

Medellin's experience demonstrates the importance of treating the public realm as an active component of social and economic development. World Bank research highlights the way mobility, public space, libraries, community facilities and economic opportunities were combined to reconnect marginalised communities to the wider city.

REBUILD THE SPINE adopts this principle. The corridor itself becomes an economic-development intervention.

7 Why Spine Road?

Spine Road presents an unusually strong opportunity for a Micro Urban Regeneration Zone.

The corridor physically connects Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain. It already possesses metropolitan significance. The City has also been developing a Local Spatial Development Framework for the Spine Road Development Corridor, with public workshops held in 2025.

The strategic transport significance of the corridor is also increasing. In October 2025 the City completed two MyCiTi depots at the corner of Spine Road and Mew Way between Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain. The R430 million facilities support the expansion of MyCiTi services connecting Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain with Wynberg, Claremont and other parts of the metropolitan area.

This creates an unusual convergence. Spine Road has:

- a major existing population catchment
- an established commercial environment
- existing public transport activity
- planned transport expansion
- existing public infrastructure
- spatial-development planning underway
- commercial properties with regeneration potential
- significant pedestrian movement
- strong community institutions
- an opportunity to connect Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain
- a visible development narrative

This makes Spine Road more than another township street. It can become a demonstrator corridor.

8 REBUILD THE SPINE

REBUILD THE SPINE would establish a 36-month Micro Urban Regeneration Zone along selected sections of Spine Road.

The programme should not initially attempt to regenerate the entire corridor. The first phase should identify two or three Regeneration Precincts. Each precinct would contain a concentrated cluster of commercial properties, public spaces, transport connections and community activity. The intervention would then progressively connect these precincts into a coherent Spine Road identity.

The objective would be to demonstrate a new standard for township urban development. The ambition should be explicit: Spine Road should become a place where movement generates opportunity rather than simply movement between home and work elsewhere.

9 The Commercial Property Register

The first operational intervention would be the creation of a Spine Road Commercial Property Register. Every potentially relevant property would be mapped.

The database would record:

- ownership
- title information
- zoning
- rates status
- occupancy status
- lease status
- structural condition
- electricity availability
- water availability
- sanitation
- drainage
- fire compliance
- accessibility
- frontage condition
- pedestrian exposure
- vehicle access
- public transport proximity
- security risk
- extortion risk
- current use
- previous use

- vacancy period
- estimated rehabilitation cost
- estimated commercial potential
- potential enterprise category

The register would distinguish between:

1. occupied productive premises
2. underperforming premises
3. vacant premises
4. derelict premises
5. illegally occupied premises
6. properties subject to ownership disputes
7. properties requiring major structural intervention
8. properties with strategic regeneration potential

This database becomes the foundation of evidence-based intervention. Government should not begin by asking where it wants to spend money. It should begin by asking where a marginal rand of public investment has the highest potential economic return.

10 The Productive Shell

The core commercial intervention would be the creation of a Productive Shell. The Productive Shell is the minimum physical condition required for a commercial property to become safely and legally usable.

The City would potentially fund:

- structural repairs
- electrical infrastructure
- water connection
- sanitation
- drainage
- fire-safety measures
- basic accessibility
- security doors and shutters
- external lighting
- shopfront restoration
- basic internal surfaces
- public-facing paving
- waste facilities

The intervention would stop short of funding the complete business. That boundary is important. Public money should not normally purchase refrigerators for a butcher, ovens for a bakery, salon equipment for a hairdresser or stock for a retailer.

The City creates the platform. The entrepreneur creates the business. This establishes co-investment.

11 The Entrepreneur's Half

Participating entrepreneurs would be required to contribute meaningful capital or approved in-kind investment.

A business would therefore enter the programme with:

- a business plan
- defined capital requirements
- evidence of demand
- an operating model
- identified suppliers
- projected employment
- projected turnover
- own contribution
- management capability
- compliance requirements

The City could then match private effort through infrastructure rather than simply providing unrestricted cash.

For example: an entrepreneur might contribute R150,000 towards equipment, stock and fit-out. The City might invest R250,000 in the Productive Shell and surrounding public infrastructure. The combined investment creates a viable commercial platform worth substantially more than either intervention could create independently.

The precise matching ratio should vary according to the property and economic case. The principle should remain constant: public investment should leverage private economic effort.

12 From Individual Shops to Commercial Clusters

The programme should not simply refurbish isolated shops. Economic regeneration is more likely when businesses benefit from proximity to other businesses. The MURZ should therefore prioritise clusters.

Potential clusters could include:

- food and hospitality

- personal services
- repair and technical services
- construction suppliers
- clothing and textiles
- digital services
- logistics
- small-scale manufacturing
- professional services
- childcare and education services
- creative industries
- health-related services
- agricultural distribution

The purpose is to generate local economic ecosystems. A bakery benefits from nearby retailers. A clothing manufacturer benefits from nearby logistics. A restaurant benefits from foot traffic. A repair business benefits from other commercial activity. A digital services centre benefits from nearby businesses requiring bookkeeping, marketing and technology.

The goal is therefore not simply to increase the number of businesses. It is to increase the density of productive economic relationships.

13 The Street Becomes Economic Infrastructure

The commercial property cannot be separated from the street. REBUILD THE SPINE would therefore apply a defined Spine Road Public Realm Standard.

The standard should include:

- continuous pedestrian routes
- accessible pavements
- safe crossings
- tactile paving where appropriate
- adequate lighting
- stormwater management
- landscaping
- seating
- wayfinding
- street numbering
- waste-management points
- public transport integration
- loading arrangements

- controlled informal trading areas
- clear sightlines
- active frontages
- maintenance standards

The purpose is economic. A better street increases the effective trading environment. It makes premises easier to reach. It increases pedestrian confidence. It improves visibility. It supports longer operating hours. It creates space for lawful informal commerce. It improves the attractiveness of private investment.

Medellin's experience demonstrates why apparently modest elements such as paving, crossings, lighting, public spaces and street furniture can form part of a much larger inclusion strategy.

14 Transport as an Economic Multiplier

Spine Road's transport function provides another reason for concentrating investment here.

The completion of the MyCiTi depots at Spine Road and Mew Way creates a major transport investment already embedded within the corridor.

REBUILD THE SPINE should therefore deliberately integrate economic development with transport planning. Transport nodes should become economic nodes.

This means designing commercial activity around:

- passenger flows
- pedestrian routes
- safe crossings
- bus stops
- taxi interfaces
- loading areas
- commuter services
- food outlets
- convenience retail
- digital services

The objective is to capture a greater share of the economic value generated by movement. A person travelling from Khayelitsha to Claremont should not have to leave the township before encountering a high-quality commercial environment. The corridor should increasingly provide services that people currently travel elsewhere to obtain.

15 The Civic and Social Spine

Economic regeneration cannot be reduced to retail. A successful MURZ should contain civic infrastructure.

Libraries, community halls, training facilities, childcare services, digital centres, health services and public spaces should be connected to the economic geography.

Medellin demonstrated the importance of combining physical investment with institutions capable of strengthening community participation, education and social development.

REBUILD THE SPINE should therefore seek to create a network of: Enterprise, Mobility, Civic Life, Public Space and Safety.

The result should be a corridor that functions throughout the day rather than a commercial strip that becomes inactive once formal trading ends.

16 Skills Must Be Located Where Economic Activity Occurs

Training programmes frequently fail because they are disconnected from actual employment. The MURZ should reverse this model. Training should be connected directly to participating enterprises.

Potential programmes could include:

- bookkeeping
- digital payments
- stock management
- procurement
- customer service
- food safety
- electrical trades
- refrigeration
- construction
- digital marketing
- graphic design
- coding
- business administration
- logistics
- hospitality

The objective is not to create certificates. The objective is to increase productivity. Training should therefore be evaluated through business outcomes.

A participant who completes bookkeeping training should improve financial control. A participant trained in digital marketing should increase customer acquisition. A trainee in electrical work should progress towards paid employment. The programme should measure these outcomes.

17 Local Labour as a Development Instrument

The physical regeneration programme itself should create employment. Where legally and technically appropriate, procurement should create opportunities for local contractors and workers.

The programme could create pathways from basic construction work to skilled trades to subcontracting to enterprise ownership. This creates a developmental ladder.

The person repairing paving today could become a paving contractor tomorrow. The apprentice electrician could establish an electrical business. The local maintenance worker could form a facilities-management company serving the entire corridor.

The programme should therefore deliberately seek to create second-order businesses from the regeneration process itself.

18 Security Is Not an Add-On

The central risk to the programme is organised criminal extortion. South Africa cannot responsibly import an international urban regeneration model without adapting it to this reality. The security problem must therefore be treated as a programme condition.

The City should not expect communities or individual entrepreneurs to confront organised criminal groups. No entrepreneur should be required to negotiate with extortionists. No business receiving public support should be expected to make protection payments. No community leader should be placed in the position of physically confronting criminal organisations. The state must carry the responsibility for enforcement.

Recent experience with the Cape Flats MyCiTi expansion demonstrates the seriousness of the threat. In August 2026 the City reported that the High Court had granted a final interdict protecting MyCiTi construction projects from extortion, intimidation and unlawful interference.

This is precisely why security must be designed into the regeneration model from the beginning.

19 The Spine Security Compact

REBUILD THE SPINE should establish a formal security compact involving:

- City enforcement
- LEAP

- SAPS
- relevant provincial structures
- business representatives
- community structures
- transport operators
- intelligence and investigative authorities

The responsibilities must be explicit.

Municipal enforcement should address: by-law enforcement, visible patrols, public-space management, traffic enforcement and rapid response.

SAPS should address: organised crime, extortion, intimidation, criminal investigations, arrests and protection of witnesses where appropriate.

Private security may supplement the system around individual properties. Private security cannot substitute for the state.

20 The Security Surge

The first 18 months should include a concentrated security surge. The purpose is not permanent militarisation. The purpose is to establish legitimate state presence during the most vulnerable stage of regeneration.

A newly refurbished commercial area presents an attractive target for organised criminal actors. The state must therefore establish control before economic value accumulates.

The security sequence should be:

Months 0 to 6: Establish. Map crime. Map extortion. Identify hotspots. Establish reporting channels. Identify criminal interference risks. Coordinate SAPS and municipal enforcement. Establish visible patrol patterns.

Months 6 to 18: Protect. Concentrated enforcement presence. Rapid response. Targeted investigations. Business protection. Public-space enforcement. Transport-node protection. Extortion reporting.

Months 18 to 24: Transition. Gradually reduce exceptional deployment where conditions permit. Maintain visible patrols. Strengthen local institutional capacity. Increase private business security responsibility.

Months 24 to 36: Normalise. Return to sustainable operating arrangements. Retain LEAP presence. Retain SAPS investigative capability. Maintain intelligence monitoring. Measure whether legitimate commerce can function without exceptional intervention.

The test is not whether crime disappears. The test is whether legitimate economic activity can operate without criminal control.

21 Zero Tolerance for Protection Payments

The programme should adopt a simple rule: no public regeneration funding should subsidise an economy controlled by extortion.

This does not mean abandoning communities. It means refusing to normalise organised criminal taxation.

Any credible evidence of systematic extortion should trigger an escalation protocol. That protocol should include: confidential reporting, intelligence referral, law-enforcement investigation, protection mechanisms, legal support where appropriate, review of affected projects and temporary suspension of new investment where necessary.

The programme should never create the perverse incentive that successful businesses attract greater criminal extraction followed by greater public subsidy.

22 The Property Model

Government should avoid simply giving renovated properties away. The preferred model should be long-term occupation under structured leases.

Potential arrangements could include:

- 5 to 10-year leases
- renewal subject to performance
- affordable base rent
- stepped rental increases
- turnover-linked components where appropriate
- maintenance obligations
- employment commitments
- compliance conditions

The property remains a public or institutional asset where appropriate. The entrepreneur gains a secure platform from which to build a business. This creates an asset-based developmental model rather than a once-off grant.

23 The Public Investment Principle

Every rand invested in a MURZ should answer one question: what productive asset or economic capacity does this rand create?

Potential public investments include: infrastructure, public space, security infrastructure, commercial-property remediation, digital infrastructure, transport integration, enterprise support, skills development and project management.

Public investment should be assessed against: jobs created, private capital mobilised, business survival, additional turnover, property activation, pedestrian activity, household income, rates base where applicable, crime reduction, reduction in vacancy and reduction in municipal maintenance liabilities.

The programme should therefore move beyond conventional capital expenditure reporting. A completed pavement is an output. A pavement that enables ten new businesses to operate is an economic outcome.

24 Financing the MURZ

A dedicated Micro Urban Regeneration Fund should be established within the municipal budget framework.

Funding could combine: municipal capital expenditure, operating expenditure where justified, provincial funding, national urban-development programmes, development finance, corporate social investment, institutional investment, private property investment, philanthropic capital and impact investment.

The City should deliberately use public money to crowd in private investment. A central programme indicator should therefore be: private capital mobilised per rand of public investment.

A programme that requires R1 of public expenditure to generate only R1 of total investment would be fundamentally different from a programme that uses R1 of public infrastructure to mobilise R3 or R5 of private investment. The latter is the developmental objective.

25 A Potential Pilot Envelope

The first pilot should remain deliberately small. A reasonable starting framework could comprise:

- 2 to 3 regeneration precincts
- 20 to 30 commercial properties
- 3 to 5 major public-realm interventions
- 1 integrated security command structure
- 1 enterprise-development platform
- 1 shared digital and data system
- 36 months of implementation and evaluation

The final number of properties should be determined through the property register and feasibility assessment.

The principle should be concentration rather than dispersion. Twenty successful businesses clustered within a transformed economic environment may produce more demonstrable impact than 200 isolated interventions scattered across the city.

26 Three-Stage Implementation - Stage One: ESTABLISH

Months 0 to 6. The first six months are fundamentally about preparation.

Actions should include: establish the MURZ governance unit, define the geographic boundary, map all relevant properties, establish ownership, conduct structural assessments, conduct security assessments, map pedestrian movement, map transport flows, identify existing businesses, identify entrepreneurs, establish baseline economic indicators, establish baseline crime indicators, establish the security compact, develop the public-realm design, identify initial enterprise clusters, conclude property agreements, establish procurement arrangements and establish reporting mechanisms.

No major commercial investment should occur before the baseline is established.

27 Stage Two: REBUILD

Months 6 to 18. This is the visible transformation phase.

The City undertakes: infrastructure remediation, commercial-shell rehabilitation, public-realm upgrades, lighting, drainage, pedestrian improvements, signage and digital infrastructure, alongside security deployment.

Entrepreneurs undertake: business fit-out, equipment acquisition, stock investment, recruitment and operating preparation.

The first businesses open during this phase. The objective is to create visible proof that the model works.

28 Stage Three: GROW

Months 18 to 36. The third stage tests whether the economic ecosystem can sustain itself.

Activities should include: business expansion, private investment, new enterprise entry, supplier development, skills programmes, cluster development, commercial partnerships, reduced exceptional public subsidy and transition towards normal security arrangements.

The City should increasingly move from direct intervention towards enabling conditions. The test is whether the economic system is becoming progressively less dependent on extraordinary public support.

29 The 36-Month Investment Gate

The programme must contain a hard decision point. At month 36 an independent evaluation should determine whether the MURZ should continue, be adjusted, or be terminated.

There should be no automatic extension. There should be no political assumption that once a programme has started it must continue. Public money deserves an honest test.

30 GREEN: Continue

The programme should continue if: businesses demonstrate sustainable survival, private investment is increasing, employment is increasing, property vacancy is falling, pedestrian activity is increasing, legitimate trading hours are expanding, public-space quality is improving, crime is declining or becoming more manageable, extortion is contained, municipal subsidy per business is declining, businesses are independently investing, and surrounding property values and commercial activity show positive movement.

The programme can then enter a controlled expansion phase.

31 AMBER: Adjust

The programme should be adjusted if the economic model demonstrates potential but material weaknesses remain.

Examples could include: weak business selection, insufficient working capital, poor property management, inadequate skills, inappropriate tenant mix, insufficient public transport integration, excessive municipal bureaucracy, or security problems that remain manageable.

An amber finding should produce a defined corrective plan. The programme should not simply receive another three years without modification.

32 RED: Kill

The programme should be terminated if: organised crime effectively controls commercial activity, extortion remains endemic, businesses cannot operate independently, public expenditure produces no meaningful private investment, businesses repeatedly fail despite reasonable support, municipal subsidy remains structurally excessive, the physical environment deteriorates rapidly after intervention, or the intervention fails to improve economic productivity.

A red finding would not represent a failure of the residents of the area. It would represent a failure of the intervention model under the prevailing conditions.

The City should then withdraw programme funding rather than indefinitely subsidise an environment in which legitimate economic activity cannot operate. The security failure should be transparently documented and escalated to the appropriate provincial and national law-enforcement authorities.

This is precisely why the programme requires a formal exit mechanism.

33 Measuring What Matters

A peer-reviewable programme requires measurable outcomes. The evaluation framework should therefore distinguish between outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Physical outputs: premises rehabilitated, metres of pavement improved, lighting installed, public spaces upgraded, drainage infrastructure completed, properties activated.

Economic outcomes: businesses opened, businesses surviving after 12, 24 and 36 months, private capital invested, turnover growth, employment created and retained, business productivity.

Spatial outcomes: vacancy reduction, pedestrian volumes, public transport usage, commercial footfall, property utilisation, operating hours.

Social outcomes: perceptions of safety, public-space usage, participation, access to services, skills progression.

Security outcomes: reported and verified extortion attempts, violent crime, business robberies, vandalism, response times, successful investigations, business closures attributed to crime.

Fiscal outcomes: public expenditure per activated property, per job created, per surviving business, private capital mobilised per rand of public investment, municipal operating cost trajectory.

These indicators should be published.

34 Establishing a Counterfactual

A credible evaluation should not merely compare the pilot with its own baseline. Where possible, comparable commercial areas outside the MURZ should be identified as control areas. This permits analysis of whether observed changes are genuinely associated with the intervention.

For example, if business survival rises by 20 percent within the MURZ while comparable areas rise by 5 percent, the programme has stronger evidence of additionality. If both areas rise by 20 percent, the effect may be attributable to broader economic conditions.

A quasi-experimental evaluation would therefore strengthen the credibility of the programme. The independent evaluator should ideally include expertise in urban economics, spatial planning, development economics, crime and security, enterprise development, public finance and statistical evaluation.

35 Governance

The programme requires a single accountable delivery structure. The traditional departmental model should be avoided.

A Spine Road Regeneration Office should coordinate: spatial planning, transport, infrastructure, economic development, property, safety, social development, environmental management, finance and procurement.

The project director should have authority to coordinate departmental implementation against a single approved programme plan.

This is one of the clearest lessons from Medellin. Integrated projects require institutional integration. The World Bank's analysis of Medellin specifically identifies project management structures capable of coordinating multiple government agencies as a critical component of Integrated Urban Projects.

36 Community Participation

Participation should not mean allowing community meetings to become substitutes for delivery. Community participation should occur at defined decision points.

Residents should participate in: identification of priorities, public-space design, enterprise selection criteria, safety planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Business owners should participate in: commercial cluster design, trading-hour decisions, loading arrangements, security protocols, maintenance and expansion planning.

The objective is co-production rather than consultation without consequence.

37 A New Compact Between State and Entrepreneur

REBUILD THE SPINE represents a different relationship between government and the township entrepreneur.

The state says: we will provide the infrastructure, the public realm and lawful security; we will remove avoidable administrative barriers; we will help create the conditions for enterprise.

The entrepreneur says: I will invest, operate, employ, comply, grow and reinvest.

This is not a grant relationship. It is a development compact.

38 From Regeneration to Asset Creation

The most important long-term objective is asset creation. A successful MURZ should produce assets at several levels.

Individual assets: skills, businesses, equipment, savings, property interests.

Household assets: higher income, business ownership, employment stability, improved financial resilience.

Community assets: public spaces, community institutions, commercial clusters, improved infrastructure.

Municipal assets: improved public infrastructure, higher-value property utilisation, stronger economic nodes, potentially broader rates revenue.

Economic assets: supply chains, local enterprises, skilled workers, commercial networks, investment relationships.

This is why regeneration should be understood as economic development rather than beautification.

39 The Wider Spatial Strategy

REBUILD THE SPINE should ultimately become a prototype rather than a standalone project. If the model succeeds, MURZs could be established in other areas of Cape Town.

Potential future applications could include Khayelitsha, Mitchells Plain, Delft, Gugulethu, Nyanga, Manenberg, Philippi, Bonteheuwel and Bishop Lavis.

The programme should not automatically replicate the exact Spine Road model. Each MURZ should be designed around its own economic geography.

The common architecture would remain: defined place, productive infrastructure, enterprise, public realm, security, measurement, private investment and a 36-month gate.

40 Why This Model Is Different

REBUILD THE SPINE differs from conventional township regeneration in six important respects.

First, it starts with economic productivity rather than cosmetic improvement. Second, it treats commercial premises as productive assets. Third, it combines public investment with entrepreneur investment. Fourth, it integrates infrastructure, transport, public space, enterprise and security. Fifth, it operates at a sufficiently small scale to make outcomes measurable. Sixth, it contains an explicit mechanism for termination.

These features make the proposal more disciplined than conventional regeneration programmes.

41 The Strategic Significance of Spine Road

Spine Road offers an opportunity to connect several policy agendas that are too often treated independently.

It can connect: housing to employment, transport to commerce, public space to safety, infrastructure to enterprise, skills to jobs, entrepreneurship to investment, and townships to the metropolitan economy.

This is the deeper meaning of a spine. A spine does not merely connect two points. It provides structural support.

REBUILD THE SPINE should therefore seek to create an economic spine for Cape Town's south-east. The existing transport investment provides the physical foundation. The MURZ model provides the economic development layer. The security compact provides the institutional protection. Entrepreneurial investment provides the productive energy.

42 The Developmental Logic

The logic of the model can be represented as a chain: public investment leads to productive infrastructure, which leads to a safer and more accessible public realm, which leads to activated commercial premises, which draws entrepreneur investment, which builds new and stronger businesses, which creates employment, which raises household incomes, which grows local demand, which attracts further business investment, which raises property utilisation, which attracts greater private investment, which strengthens the local economic ecosystem.

The objective is to create a positive feedback loop.

The opposite cycle currently exists in many neglected areas: poor infrastructure leads to low investment, which leads to vacancy, which invites crime, which lowers footfall, which causes business failure, which lowers investment further, deepening deterioration.

The purpose of REBUILD THE SPINE is to reverse that cycle.

43 The South African Adaptation

The model cannot simply copy Chile or Colombia. Chile offers a lesson about structured incremental development. Medellin offers a lesson about integrated urbanism.

South Africa requires a third component: institutional realism in an environment where organised criminal networks can interfere directly with economic activity.

This means the South African model must integrate: municipal government, national law enforcement, community institutions, private enterprise, public transport, spatial planning, development finance and property management.

The South African innovation is therefore not the invention of a completely new theory. It is the synthesis of proven principles under local conditions.

44 A New Philosophy of Municipal Development

The deeper proposition behind the MURZ is that municipalities should stop thinking exclusively in terms of projects. They should think in terms of productive systems.

A road project has a beginning and an end. An economic corridor is a system. A building project has a completion certificate. A commercial ecosystem has businesses, workers, customers, suppliers and investors. A security deployment has patrol statistics. A safe commercial district has legitimate activity that continues after the police presence normalises.

The municipal objective should therefore be to create systems that become progressively less dependent on exceptional government intervention. That is the definition of sustainable regeneration.

45 The Final Proposition

REBUILD THE SPINE is ultimately an experiment in whether government can change the trajectory of a place by changing the conditions under which its people invest.

The municipality cannot create every entrepreneur. It cannot guarantee every business succeeds. It cannot eliminate every crime risk. It cannot substitute indefinitely for private capital. It cannot create prosperity through infrastructure alone.

Government can, however, create a better platform. It can take derelict property and make it usable. It can take an unsafe street and make it accessible. It can take fragmented infrastructure and make it coherent. It can take isolated businesses and create clusters. It can connect transport with commerce. It can connect training with enterprise. It can connect public investment with private investment.

It can create the conditions in which people who already possess ambition, skills and determination have a greater chance of succeeding. That is the essence of developmental government.

The central proposition of Micro Urban Regeneration Zones is therefore not that government should build everything. It is that government should build the platform upon which citizens can build more.

Conclusion

Cape Town does not need another isolated township revitalisation programme. It needs a replicable mechanism through which concentrated public investment can generate sustained private economic activity in places that have historically received insufficient investment.

The Micro Urban Regeneration Zone provides such a mechanism. REBUILD THE SPINE would place that proposition under real-world conditions.

Its intellectual foundations are deliberately complementary. From Elemental comes the principle of providing a high-quality platform capable of incremental completion, alongside an important warning that incremental development requires a framework capable of preventing uncontrolled expansion. From Medellin comes the principle that infrastructure, public space, mobility, community institutions, economic opportunity and social development should be conceived as one integrated urban intervention. From Cape Town comes the necessity of adapting both ideas to a metropolitan environment where spatial inequality, infrastructure deficits, unemployment and organised criminal extortion intersect.

Spine Road provides an unusually powerful location for such an experiment because it already possesses metropolitan significance, connects Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain, sits within an active spatial-planning process and now contains major MyCiTi infrastructure supporting the expansion of public transport connections to the wider city.

The proposition should therefore be tested rather than merely promised.

Thirty-six months. Defined geography. Defined properties. Defined investment. Defined security arrangements. Defined economic targets. Independent measurement. A hard decision at the end. Continue. Adjust. Kill.

If the model works, Cape Town will have more than a regenerated section of Spine Road. It will have a new instrument for rebuilding township economies. If it fails, the City will know precisely why it failed. Either outcome is preferable to another decade of fragmented projects, scattered investment and good intentions without measurable transformation.

The ultimate ambition is simple: REBUILD THE SPINE. Not merely the road. Not merely the buildings. Not merely the public spaces. Rebuild the economic spine of the township.

Create places where people do not merely live and commute through. Create places where people work, trade, invest, employ, learn, manufacture, save, build businesses and accumulate assets.

That is what urban regeneration should mean in a developmental South Africa.