



The cost implication of erroneous rezoning by the city

On 9 May 2024, our office received a complaint from *Mrs Hendricks who cited that a year ago, her municipal account statement had suddenly increased significantly from her usual monthly billing. After inspecting her bill for discrepancies, she quickly realised that her property had been rezoned from a residential home to a commercial space. As a result, she was subsequently billed on business tariff rates.

During this period, she made multiple queries with the Revenue Shared Services Centre (RSSC) Department but unfortunately received no response. However, she continued to pay the inflated billing amount to avoid any penalties until she could no longer afford to do so and opted to lodge a formal complaint with the Ombudsman.



Image Source: Property24

In terms of Section 21 of the City of Johannesburg Municipal Planning By-Law, 2016, the alleged reclassification of Mrs Hendricks' property indicated two probable instances of maladministration, namely, the erroneous rezoning of her property without a written application from the resident requesting such a change and the respective department's failure to formally consult with her on the City's decision to implement the alleged change.

As a property owner, you have the legal right to object to your municipal rates. The grounds for objecting to property valuation are outlined in the Municipal Property Rates Act 6 of 2004 (with subsequent amendments). This means that you can apply in writing to the RSSC or at your nearest customer service centre to be charged at residential rates, provided that the property in question is exclusively used for residential purposes. Click [here](#) to lodge your complaint with the city, should you find yourself in a similar situation.

While this matter is still under investigation, we implore all officials to conduct due diligence when serving the residents of the City as billing oversights of this nature very often carry serious financial implications, particularly for pensioners and others living on a fixed income, who may not always have the means.

* Not her real name

Complainant seeks reinstatement of pavement

*Mr. Kgopa, a resident from Randburg, lodged a complaint with our office in July 2024, requesting for the reinstatement of his residential pavement and damage to his property.

In his complaint, he cited that on 18 April 2024 Johannesburg Water officials attended to a leaking pipe on his property and left without reconstructing the pavement after an alleged botched excavation on his property led to the rupturing of an asbestos pipe that caused a significant amount of water flooding and ultimately damaging various valuable items in his garage and backyard.

After numerous attempts to receive some form of compensation from the city-owned entity, he decided to escalate his matter with the Ombudsman as there seemed to be no effort from Johannesburg Water to redress his complaint.

Though the matter is currently under investigation in our office, it is worth noting that the entity usually actions small scale restorations work on pavements, roads, concrete surfaces and backfilling etc. Thus, we are confident that we will find an amicable solution for both parties based on the findings which will derive from our evidence-based investigation.

**All you need to know about the City's
FAULT LOGGING**

Queries from the customers can be logged in one of the following ways:

CALL CENTRES

- **Revenue (Billing) Call Centre** - deals with all billing related matters i.e payments and statement enquiries, incorrect/inaccurate billing (rates, electricity, water and sewage, refuse), address updates (only postal), estimated bills (water and electricity) etc.
- **Electricity Technical Call Centre** - deals with all fault reporting for electricity meter related issues (fault logging), meter changes, meter reading schedules, meter reading contractors, prepaid and smart meters inquiries, prepaid vending, power outages (both planned and unplanned), tariffs, cable theft, etc.
- **Water Technical Call Centre** - deals with all water technical related issues such as faulty meters, leaking meters, burst pipes and blocked drains, sewage, meter reading schedules, prepaid vending, change meters, meter reading contractors, water maintenance and planned and unplanned water disruptions.
- **Refuse Call Centre** - deals with all queries related to refuse removal and waste management. For example, ordering of new bins, broken or replacement bins, reporting of stolen bins, bin collection schedules, illegal dumping, recycling, compost sites, depot addresses, landfill sites and addresses and e-waste.
- **Johannesburg Roads Agency Call Centre** - this is for road related issues such as faulty traffic lights, emergency defects relating to roads and stormwater, potholes, flooding, blocked kerb inlets and missing manhole covers.
- **Metrobus and Rea Vaya Call Centre** - deals with all transport related matters, for example bus schedules, bus routes and maps, bus fares, fare increases and smart card information.
- **General Call Centre** - deals with general queries related to the City's services not covered by options 1-6, for example, what time the Johannesburg Zoo opens, etc.

WALK-IN SERVICE
Customers can visit in person, any of the walk-in centres situated across the City in all the seven regions (A-G)

Documentation required to for a query to be logged

- Account number
- Postal address
- Identify number
- Details of query

Customer feedback mechanism

Customers may use the reference number that was provided to them to obtain progress feedback on outstanding queries. They can do this by calling the call centre on 0860 562 874. In addition to this, the City runs customer query feedback processes via sms, telephonic communications and electronic mail in order to provide customer feedback. It is therefore important that the City has the correct customer contact details.

Queries take 30 days to be resolved, during which period credit control will not be effected, pending resolution of the query. After resolution of a query, the customer will be contacted to be informed of the resolution. Should customers not be happy with the service or nature of the resolution, an escalation process is in place to ensure satisfactory resolution. Escalation of queries can be channelled this way:

- Operational Manager
- Assistant Director
- Deputy Director
- Director
- Group Head
- Group CFO

* Not his real name





A day in the life of a...Joburg Ombudsman Ambassador

Since the inception of our *Joburg Ombudsman Ambassadors Programme* in June 2021, we have mentored a total of forty ambassadors through the City's EPWP Project. From call centre training and lodging of complaints to procurement and media buying, beneficiaries such as Aluwani Lehlakota have quickly adapted to the workplace while learning soft skills such as time management, problem solving and teamwork in the various units within our office.

Umbiko sat down with Aluwani, to get a glimpse of his day as an ambassador within the Intake and Registry Unit.



Image source: Aluwani Lehlakota

What training or experience is required to work at an Intake and Registry level, particularly as an ambassador?

To work at intake and registry, one typically requires customer service training, proficiency in administrative tasks, and a strong understanding of the handling of confidential information in respect of the POPI Act. Additionally, effective communication, public speaking, and decision-making skills are essential, alongside cultural competencies to interact respectfully with a diverse group of clients.

Walk us through a typical day at work as an ambassador?

As an ambassador, my day is structured around several key activities. I begin with a morning briefing to review the schedule, meetings and any urgent issues. A significant portion of my day is devoted to communicating with various stakeholders, such as clinic managers, and community representatives, ward councillors through calls, and emails.

Engaging with the public through events and outreach programmes is crucial, as it helps in promoting our services and building relationships. I also document my activities and prepare reports to ensure transparency and accountability. Finally, I end the day with a review of my accomplishments and subsequently plan for the next day to ensure tasks are on track and any pending issues are addressed, timeously.

What information do you need to successfully close a client's case at the preliminary investigation stage?

To close a client's case at the preliminary investigation stage, you need to gather comprehensive case details, all relevant evidence, understand the client's pain point and the desired outcome. This means that you need to be familiar with applicable laws, obtain stakeholder feedback, review preliminary findings, and ensure all procedural requirements are met. Proper documentation of the investigation and communications is equally important.

How would you rate yourself when it comes to providing the client with feedback of their case?

I would rate myself highly on providing detailed feedback regarding a client's case because I ensure that the information is accurate, relevant, clear, and delivered in a timely manner. I always strive to address the client's needs effectively and provide them with the best possible support.

What is stressful about solving clients' queries or cases?

Solving clients' queries can be stressful due to the complexity of issues, time pressure for quick resolutions, high client expectations, emotional demands, and the responsibility of ensuring correct outcomes, especially when resources are limited. Balancing these factors requires strong problem-solving skills, time management, and emotional resilience.

Tell us your overall experience as an ambassador and how working for the Office of the Ombudsman has affected your life?

As an ambassador, I have gained valuable skills in communication and diplomacy while engaging with diverse communities. Working for the Office of the Ombudsman has deepened my understanding of social justice and accountability, emphasising the importance of empathy and transparency. This has significantly shaped my approach to leadership, highlighting the importance of integrity and fair processes.

Copyright Notice and Disclaimer

The information provided in this document is protected by applicable intellectual property laws and may not be copied, distributed, or modified for any purpose without the explicit consent of the Office of the Ombudsman. This newsletter is for information purposes only and cannot be considered a legal reference to the needs/circumstances

