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A MSUNDUZI councillor and a host of City officials are facing a criminal probe for their role in a housing project in Copesville, and the municipality may be investigated for allowing the corruption to take place. The Human Settlement Department has laid corruption charges against them after an internal probe, initiated following a complaint by whistleblower Thabiso Zulu.

Zulu had accused councillor Spha Madlala of being part of a corrupt network in the allocation of houses that form part of a government housing project in the area.

More than 40 houses were built in Copesville for homeless families residing within Msunduzi as part of govern-

ment's Operation Sukuma Sakhe Housing Project.

However, Zulu claimed that Madlala and certain Msunduzi officials who have been overseeing the project handed out the houses to family members and friends, with some of the houses sold to people who were not meant to benefit from the project.

The department referred Zulu's complaint to its Risk Management Directorate's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Investigative Unit, which concluded that there was satisfactory evidence showing that theft and corruption had taken place.

In a letter dated May 16, 2019, the department's director of risk management and advisory services, Raymond Mohan, told Zulu that Human Settle-

ment MEC Ravi Pillay had instructed the department's officials to lay criminal charges.

"In light of the findings, the MEC has also instructed the department to register a criminal case with immediate effect with the Hawks, as mandated by Section 34 of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004," he said in a letter seen by *The Witness*.

Further, Pillay had forwarded the unit's report to Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) MEC Nomusa Dube-Ncube, and also attached a letter requesting Dube-Ncube to institute a probe against the Msunduzi Municipality for allowing the corruption in the project to take place.

"This act [the municipal systems act] requires that an MEC for Cogta must investigate a municipality where the MEC has reason to believe that a municipality in the province cannot, or does not, fulfil a statutory obligation binding on that municipality ..." Mohan said in his letter to Zulu.

The housing project in Copesville came into the spotlight early last year after *The Witness* published a story on a grandmother, Regina Hadebe (80), who was supposed to have benefited from the project.

At the time Hadebe, who had been renting a shack in Haniville for 25 years, claimed that her name was removed from the list of people who were supposed to get houses and replaced with someone else's.

The department's spokesperson, Mbulelo Baloyi, said Hadebe has since been allocated a house.

Madlala said he was not aware of the department's findings or any criminal investigation against him.

"What I do know, however, is that Zulu's claims are not new; they were also investigated by the public protector, who found them to be baseless.

"The department had also asked me to give my side of the story, a request I fully complied with," he said.

Madlala said he had never been involved in the selection of beneficiaries.

"I inherited the project from the former ward councillor. Zulu is simply pushing a political agenda against me," he said.

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