



a world class African city

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CITY OF JOHANNESBURG ADVANCES DIGNITY AND JUSTICE THROUGH INNER-CITY HERITAGE AND PUBLIC SPACE UPGRADES



As South Africa marks Human Rights Month in March, the City of Johannesburg reflects on the sacrifices that shaped the country’s democratic journey and recommits itself to building a city rooted in dignity, equality, access, and justice for all.

Human Rights Month serves as a powerful reminder that the freedoms enjoyed today were hard-won through struggle, resistance, and collective courage. It also calls on all spheres of government to actively protect, promote, and realise these rights in ways that are visible, meaningful, and felt in everyday life.

Building a better city

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In giving practical expression to this commitment, the [Johannesburg Development Agency \(JDA\)](#), on behalf of the City of Johannesburg, continues to implement targeted urban development initiatives that both honour the country's liberation history and improve the quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors to the city.

Two key projects currently underway in the inner city — the Chancellor House Refurbishment Project and the High Court Precinct Public Environment Upgrade (PEU) — stand as important interventions linking Johannesburg's built environment directly to the ideals of justice, human dignity, and human rights.

Preserving the Legacy of Justice at Chancellor House

Located in the heart of Johannesburg's inner city, [Chancellor House](#) is a declared provincial heritage site and one of the most significant buildings in South Africa's legal history. It once housed Mandela & Tambo Attorneys, the country's first Black-owned law firm.

Between 1952 and 1956, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo operated from these offices, defending Black South Africans subjected to unjust apartheid laws and discriminatory policies. Situated opposite the Johannesburg Magistrates' Court, the unassuming three-storey building became a formidable centre of resistance, legal advocacy, and hope.

From these chambers, Mandela and Tambo — later joined by notable figures such as Duma Nokwe and Godfrey Pitje — represented countless individuals denied justice by an oppressive system, reinforcing the law as a tool of struggle rather than exclusion.

Today, Chancellor House functions as a freedom struggle museum and forms part of the Mandela Footsteps Trail, offering locals and visitors alike a deeply immersive connection to South Africa's constitutional and democratic foundations.

The JDA is currently implementing refurbishment works at the site, aimed at safeguarding its heritage value while ensuring it remains safe, accessible, and fit for purpose for future generations.

The scope of work includes the removal of deteriorated elements, structural crack stitching, drywall installation, roof waterproofing, and upgrades to plumbing and electrical systems. Ironmongery works and testing of existing mechanical and electrical services also form part of the intervention.

Reimagining the High Court Precinct

In parallel with preserving historic sites of struggle, the JDA is implementing the [High Court Precinct Public Environment Upgrade \(PEU\)](#) — a project focused on reshaping the space surrounding the Gauteng Local Division of the High Court into a safer, more accessible, and dignified civic environment.

Bounded by Lillian Ngoyi, Delfers, Helen Joseph, and Eloff Streets, the precinct plays a vital role in Johannesburg's judicial landscape and supports a dynamic mix of commercial activity, residential life, retail trade, and informal economic participation.

The upgrade seeks to strengthen the relationship between the justice system and the public realm by improving walkability, safety, accessibility, and urban management, while reinforcing the economic vitality of the area.

Key interventions include the construction of new pedestrian walkways, upgraded street furniture, landscaping and tree planting, the installation of benches and recycling bins, reconfigured parking and drop-off zones, and the introduction of universal access features to ensure inclusivity for persons with disabilities, the elderly, and children.

Together, these improvements aim to ensure that the physical environment surrounding one of the country's most important legal institutions reflects the dignity, openness, and fairness expected of a democratic justice system.

Building a City That Reflects Constitutional Values

Speaking on the significance of these initiatives during Human Rights Month, JDA Spokesperson Mr Kenneth Nxumalo said the projects demonstrate how urban development can actively reinforce the values enshrined in South Africa's Constitution.

"Human Rights Month reminds us that our freedoms were earned through sacrifice and sustained through action. Projects such as the restoration of Chancellor House and the upgrading of the High Court Precinct show how the City of Johannesburg is preserving the legacy of those struggles while shaping urban spaces that speak to dignity, access, and justice in the present day," said Nxumalo.

As Johannesburg continues to evolve, these interventions reflect a broader commitment to building a city where history is honoured, public spaces are welcoming, and human rights are lived — not only remembered.

ENDS

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[Reimagining Johannesburg's High Court precinct](#)

[Walking in Mandela's footsteps: Restoring Chancellor House for Tourism Month](#)

[Joburg commemorates Human Rights Day at Alex 10km race](#)