

# Knysna fire disaster: 'DA, councillor and mayor don't care'

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File photo

The Knysna fire disaster continues, now with the DA versus the victims.

On Monday night, the meeting at the Angling Club was proof that the DA doesn't care about Knysna.

It was clear that Peter Myers, ward 10 councillor and deputy mayor, was the "them" in the "us versus them", instead of being our elected representative.

Mayor Eleonore Spies wasn't there, maybe because there were no TV cameras. Only one director, Marlene Boyce, bothered to turn up.

It was poorly organised, small speakers and no roving microphone despite the guarantee that it would be a full house. In fact, the public couldn't fit inside, some were forced to stand in the foyer and in the road. At times, most battled to hear what was happening.

I came with questions and suggestions but realised that they weren't going to be answered as person after person got fed indefinite responses and nonsense.

Myers showed utter disregard for the homeless, even when a woman appealed for her and two children (ages 5 and 11) who'd been put on the street that day. Knysna has had lows in the past eight years I've been here but he owns the lowest so far.

I held in my anger for over an hour but let it out after Myers failed to answer my question and gave the microphone to his fellow councillor, Dr Martin Young.

Not everyone is an internet regular so some wouldn't have understood why I said Young doesn't deserve to speak.

Last week, when I made a call on Facebook for fire victims to stand together, Young tried to discredit me, saying that I was defrauding disaster victims for profit, pretending to be a fire victim. Of course I'm a victim, having lost almost everything. Additionally, I refuse to be a useless citizen – I've done my daily part in helping people and keeping our town informed.

It was also clear that Young had no sympathies for tenants who'd been made to suffer in the fire's aftermath.

Stop being biased and know your DA. If this crisis isn't motivation enough for you, then you don't deserve help.

Sometimes we need to change our thought patterns to become the better people we hope to be.

Now let me get into what should have happened at the meeting rather than what did.

Myers was wrong when he stated that the municipality's role was only in dealing with electricity, rates, sport etc.

He's an elected representative who is supposed to show leadership and moral duty. If ever that was needed, it's during this crisis.

He dismissed accommodation, the greatest need by victims, saying that it wasn't the government's responsibility.

All over the world, when there's a disaster, people step in to help with emergency shelters. That includes the government helping.

In the past, in Knysna, when there've been shack fires, temporary shelters are provided. Why not here? Were the people in the hall tonight too white?

Why hasn't the municipality taken over a sports field and erected Wendy houses accompanied by electricity and port-a-loos?

Why hasn't the municipality opened up a place they own like Cearn Hall, or unused government buildings?

Even though there's only R800 000 in the disaster kitty, why hasn't that been used to rent accommodation?

The only answer is that the DA doesn't want to help those in need.

Maybe they want the poorer white folk of Knysna forced out of town.

It's not an odd thought, considering the name of the game has been property in the past.

Our town is ruled by cliques and money that isn't helping the majority.

I understand the catch-22s of holding this year's Oyster Festival, even supporting the decision to go-ahead, but cannot understand how business gets supported but human rights don't.

Maybe part of the problem is that deputy mayor Myers is a wealthy man who has no consideration for the poor and middle class.

On the day of the fire, it was clear that his concern was for his home at Brenton-on-Sea, 23km away from the mostly white ward where the DA strangely made him their cannot-lose candidate councillor.

My home area of Kanonkop, by percentage, was one of the hardest hit areas, if not the hardest hit, yet two weeks after the fire I had to request that he visit it.

The disaster meeting at the Angling Club tonight was a disaster because he and the Knysna municipality do not care.

Hopefully that will reflect at election time, when all the self-serving councillors will be kicked out, like homeless people.

But we, as either caring citizens or citizens in need, cannot wait until then.

I again make a call for the better side of Knysna (we've witnessed that this past three weeks), and those in desperate need, to stand together.

We must unite and decide what we need to do to gain results.

Let's have a real meeting, a meeting about us.

**Mike Hampton**

**Knysna**