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COLLOQUIUM BETWEEN CITY AND LOCAL UNIVERSITIES WILL ENHANCE CAPE TOWN'S COMPETITIVENESS

Cape Town has been described as one of the world's "rising urban stars" by Newsweek Magazine. It was ranked alongside the like of Las Vegas and Dubai, because it has academic institutions that turn out the kind of skills the global contemporary knowledge economy demands.

With this in mind, the City of Cape Town hosted a colloquium on Friday, 23 November 2007 with the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC). It was represented by the vice-chancellors and senior staff from the four universities in the city:

University of Cape Town (UCT)
University of Stellenbosch (US)
Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)
University of the Western Cape (UWC)

This academic seminar sought to create a framework for further collaboration and identify areas of collaboration.

The colloquium was chaired by Mike Marsden, the City's Executive Director: Service Delivery and Integration and facilitated by Andrew Boraine, Chief Executive of the Cape Town Partnership.

Executive Mayor Helen Zille delivered the keynote address. She emphasised that Cape Town's future depends on its ability to compete in the global arena and the aim would therefore be to make Cape Town more competitive both as a City and as an Administration. The core strategic focus, as set out in the City's Integrated Development Plan, is to increase economic growth and job opportunities by creating a more attractive urban environment for investors. This will be done by rapid infrastructure investment and by making public spaces cleaner and safer.

Higher learning institutions also have a key role to play in order to give Cape Town the edge it needs. The key to economic growth has become the way in which "clusters" or groups of interconnected firms, suppliers, related industries and institutions arise in particular locations. So local economic structures, values, cultures, institutions, and histories have taken on an increased significance - they are the source of the skills and technology that underpin the "competitive advantage". Even small, economically depressed towns have been able to become industrial hubs because of strategic collaborations between institutions of education, government and industry.

Executive Mayor Zille emphasised the useful lessons learned in Worcester in Massachusetts USA. Worcester went from being a smokestack town in danger of recession to a leading centre for biotechnology thanks to joint projects between higher education institutions and industry. One of the most significant of these was the clustering of the Massachusetts Biotechnology Research Park (which accommodates research facilities for numerous companies) with the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the Bioengineering Centre of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. This has created synergy of supply and demand for skills, and it has allowed mutual research benefits for industry and academia.

Professor Martin Hall, chairperson of the CHEC board, also stressed that the partnership with the City is the starting point for determining the nature of collaboration and the identification of joint projects.

Nasima Badsha, CEO of CHEC, gave a presentation on the framework for the engagement between the City and CHEC. She said the partnership should bring about trust and understanding between the City and CHEC as well as the identification and implementation of key projects.

There are collaborations underway at present that will be strengthened and promoted. The City has, for example, a longstanding arrangement with the UCT engineering department.

Three keynote papers were delivered by City personnel:

* Enabling growth and development by using information and broad banding as a key mechanism as part of national strategy of information technology, networking and broad banding - a collaboration between the City and universities in terms of information technology and broad banding by Nirvesh Sooful, Chief Information Officer.

* The education and skills development needs of the City of Cape Town in order to fill the skills gaps in the City Administration, which will build on existing bursary arrangements - a partnership with the universities in Human Capital Development, that also provides opportunities for internships and bursaries by David Berretti, Executive Director: Corporate Support Services.

* Addressing Public and infrastructure investment and maintenance to enable sustainable economic growth and development in the City of Cape Town by benchmarking backlogs and investing for the future - ways in which the City and universities can build an enabling environment to enhance economic and social development by Barry Coetzee, Head: Integrated Waste Management Strategy and Policy, Solid Waste Department.

The different institutions provide institutional 'clusters' that drive productivity and competitiveness. Universities inculcate skills, cultivate a knowledge base and develop research capacity. The City provides infrastructure, it holds the key to land and land permission processes, and it is also a repository of institutional knowledge.

It was emphasised that future initiatives would include business and industry, which is at the heart of funding research and turns skills, infrastructure and other resources into gross domestic product.

It is intended that this Colloquium will be followed up in May 2008 with the signing of a formal agreement containing principles of collaboration and identification of key projects, deliverables and completion dates of these projects.

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