



## OPEN ACCESS

## EDITED BY

Sijekula Mbanga,  
Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

## REVIEWED BY

Eghosa Noel Ekhaese,  
Covenant University, Nigeria

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

George O. Onatu  
✉ gonatu@uj.ac.za

RECEIVED 22 July 2024

ACCEPTED 01 April 2025

PUBLISHED 29 April 2025

## CITATION

Buthelezi NBC, Onatu GO and  
Aigbavboa CO (2025) Planning approval of  
housing developments: case study of the city  
of Johannesburg and Tshwane metropolitan  
municipalities of South Africa.  
*Front. Sustain. Cities* 7:1468965.  
doi: 10.3389/frsc.2025.1468965

## COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Buthelezi, Onatu and Aigbavboa. This  
is an open-access article distributed under  
the terms of the [Creative Commons  
Attribution License \(CC BY\)](#). The use,  
distribution or reproduction in other forums is  
permitted, provided the original author(s) and  
the copyright owner(s) are credited and that  
the original publication in this journal is cited,  
in accordance with accepted academic  
practice. No use, distribution or reproduction  
is permitted which does not comply with  
these terms.

# Planning approval of housing developments: case study of the city of Johannesburg and Tshwane metropolitan municipalities of South Africa

Nonhlanhla B. C. Buthelezi<sup>1</sup>, George O. Onatu<sup>1\*</sup> and  
Clinton O. Aigbavboa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, <sup>2</sup>Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Planning approval of housing developments is one of the highly regulated sectors in the world. The Republic of South Africa (RSA), just like other countries, has set broad spatial planning frameworks that have become a useful guideline for planning approvals. Various scholars have noted that some of these spatial planning policies are very weak in terms of addressing the real structure of the economy and housing challenges but instead have rather focused on check listing and implementing policy visions based only on the social, political, and institutional regulatory environments. The post Covid Reconstruction era has brought life back into the spatial planning policy debates to go beyond issues of weak institutions, internal processes but to focus more on job creation to reduce unemployment, poverty, increase production and related agglomeration economic benefits that come with people and firms located near to one another. The problem emanating from this is that several of the planning approvals processes for housing developments have been fraught with delays and hindrances such that their contributions to rapid economic growth are negligible and invisible. Hence, this research is to find out to what extent have the planning approval processes of housing development in both the City of Johannesburg and Tshwane experienced delays that impact on the regional economic growth? Since South Africa is a home to 62 million people and has more than 4,075 unplanned settlements that require planning approvals. This research is based on document content analysis and case study design. A sample of 25 practitioner's, professionals in the two metropolitan municipalities and government departments were involved. The conclusion drawn and findings of the research point to the need for collaborative planning approval reform and approaches that are nationally acceptable and digitized systems to monitor the trends in planning approvals.

## KEYWORDS

housing development, planning approvals, delays, economic growth, Gauteng Province

## Introduction

Planning approvals of housing developments are highly regulated and often fraught with delays and hindrances, yet they are a key lever to growing the economy. In South Africa, housing developments are constructed in cities and towns after adhering to the prescribed planning approval processes involving the built environment professionals such as town planners, architects, urban designers, surveyors, and other many role players.

According to Webster (2023) the challenge of planning approvals includes interconnected complexities which is attributed to the convoluted legislation that is rigidly interpreted, not administered efficiently, and hinders the full involvement of the private sector. This affects low-income families and impedes government's objectives of growing the economy. The problem of delays in planning approvals has not been tackled sufficiently overtime, even post COVID-19 pandemic period which brought with it agglomeration of so many changes, such as process automation and remote working arrangements. In some industries and sectors such agglomeration brought with it improvement and efficiencies in operations. Several studies have been conducted on planning approvals in countries like Nigeria, Canada, City of Cape town. Unfortunately, the Gauteng Province does not have a developmental framework for planning approval of housing developments and has not been able to digitalize the planning approvals systems in the two metropolitan municipalities. The study addresses a practical knowledge gap regarding planning approvals of housing developments in South Africa.

According to Harwood (2016) planning approval refers to the permission needed for the construction or development projects. The researcher has noted that there are planning approval processes in different fields and has therefore limited the planning approval in this research to housing development projects. The focus is mainly on processes followed by developers when submitting applications to a municipality. This includes housing development applications containing reports that are compiled and submitted which amongst others include zoning information, rezoning applications, building plans, township establishment, engineering designs, environmental implementation plans, layout plans and surveyor general plans. The other details of the processes include town planning evaluations, consulting relevant stakeholders, granting permission to build on an identified piece of land, specifying some conditions, monitoring, and controlling the projects to ensure that the aims and objectives of the development are achieved in line with desirable economic growth of the area concerned. Housing development is defined in the Housing Act (Department of Human Settlements, 1997) as referring to the establishment and maintenance of a habitable, stable, sustainable public and private environment to ensure viable households and communities in areas allowing convenient access to economic opportunities, health, educational and social amenities.

## Background to the study

Various scholars have noted that spatial planning policies and legislation are in place but are very weak in terms of addressing the real structure of the economy and growth. The development planning and building control teams tend to focus more on using check lists and implementing the policy visions based only on the social,

political, and institutional environments as prescribed by applicable legislation such as Spatial Land Use Management Act of 2013, National Building Standards Regulations Act of 1977, National Environmental Management Act, etc. The post Covid Reconstruction era has brought with it life back into the spatial planning policy debates to go beyond issues of weak institutions, internal processes but to focus more on job creation, unemployment issues, increase in production and related agglomeration economies benefits that come with people and firms located near one another. Several of the planning approvals processes for housing developments have been fraught with delays, unnecessary bureaucracy and hindrances such that their contributions to rapid economic growth are negligible and invisible.

In assessing planning approval of housing developments, the researcher looks at these issues in the Province of Gauteng that has a population of about 15 million people in a country that has over 62 million people. The province experiences a high influx of people and has the highest population compared to other provinces. According to Statistics South Africa (2022), 16.10 million people (26.6%) of South Africa's population live in Gauteng and the Province serves as the economic engine room of the country and the subcontinent, responsible for the highest percentage of the country's GDP.

Gauteng Province is used as the case study because it has the highest number of building plans received and has the highest demand for housing at 1.3 million. It has major business, industries, finance, real estate, manufacturing, and general government services. The picture below depicts the Gauteng Province and its six local municipalities and two district municipalities (Figure 1).

The study focusses on two Metropolitan municipalities namely the City of Johannesburg and the City of Tshwane and includes officials from provincial and national department of Human Settlements as well as the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs department. The two metros are noted to control the biggest share of budget and investments with vast gross floor area compared to the remaining municipal areas. The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan area is one of the largest metropolitan areas in South Africa, and its boundaries extend from Orange Farm in the South to Midrand in the North and from Witpoortjie / Roodepoort in the west to Modderfontein / Bruma in the east covering 1,644 squares kilometres (Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs, 1998b). The City of Johannesburg is classified as a Category A municipality also by the Municipal Demarcation Board in terms of Section 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998; Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs, 1998a). The city of Johannesburg is divided into seven regions. Each region has a detailed regional plan, called a Regional Spatial Development Framework which guides patterns of development and investment. Building inspectors are attached to all seven regional offices for enforcements and inspections, so that they are conveniently close to all new developments and constructions. Some of the administrative functions of the city are performed centrally in the Metro Centre, Braamfontein, and in other offices in and around the central parts of the city. The work in city is clearly segregated into various business units such as Development Planning and Land Use Management, Transportation, Environment, Community Development, Housing, Finance and Johannesburg Metropolitan Police and Corporate Services.

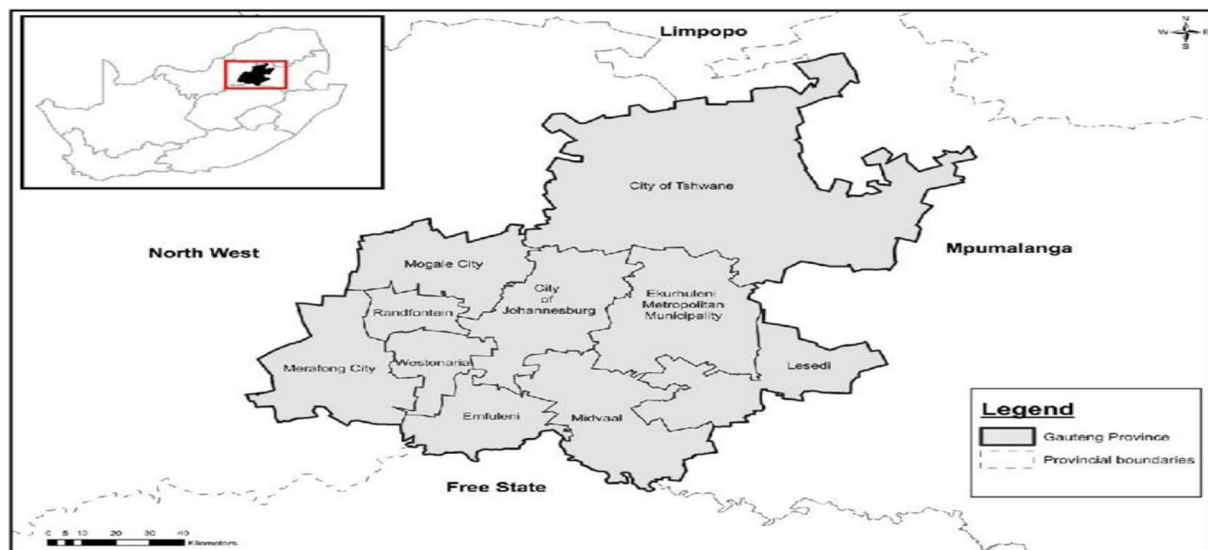


FIGURE 1  
Gauteng province and surrounding areas. Source of Map: Google maps.

The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality is the third-largest city in the world after New York and Tokyo/Yokohama. It is classified by the Municipal Demarcation Board in terms of Section 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998; [Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs, 1998a](#)) as a Category A municipality. The Municipality was established on 5 December 2000 through the integration of various municipalities and councils that had previously served the greater Pretoria area and surrounding areas. The City of Tshwane's boundary was further amended on 28 May 2008 through a proclamation in the Government Gazette that incorporated the former Metsweding District Municipality, including Dinokeng tsa Taemane (Cullinan) and Kungwini (Bronkhorstspuit), into the City of Tshwane. The incorporation took place in May 2011 after the local government elections and enlarged Tshwane to 6,345 km<sup>2</sup>. Currently, Tshwane stretches almost 121 km from east to west and 108 km from north to south. It has seven regions and with building inspector's region. The head office is in Pretoria and with departments such as Land Use and Development Planning, Transport, Human Settlements, Agricultural Services, Accounts Management, Metropolitan Police services, Environmental Health and Cemeteries. Figures below provides the details on population dynamics of each of the selected cities ([Figures 2–4](#)).

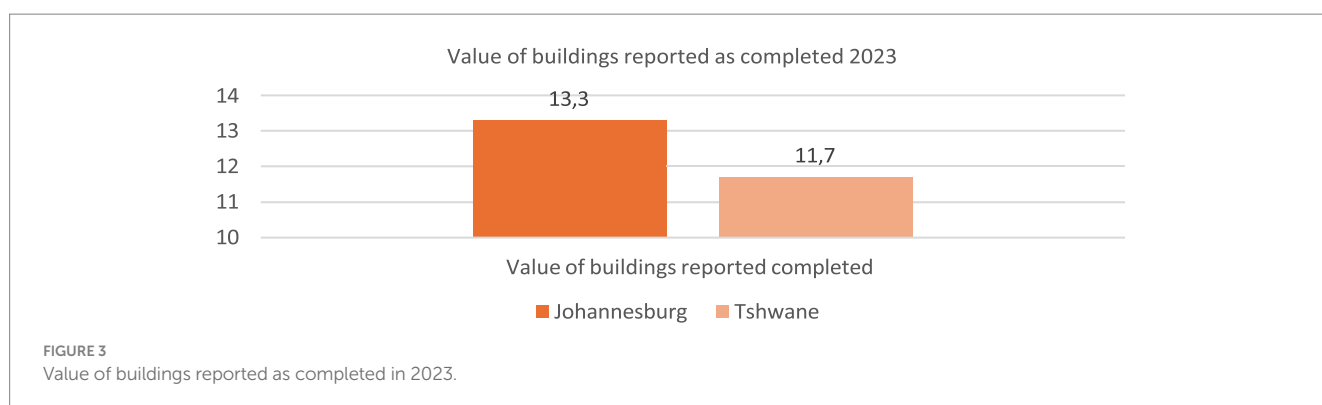
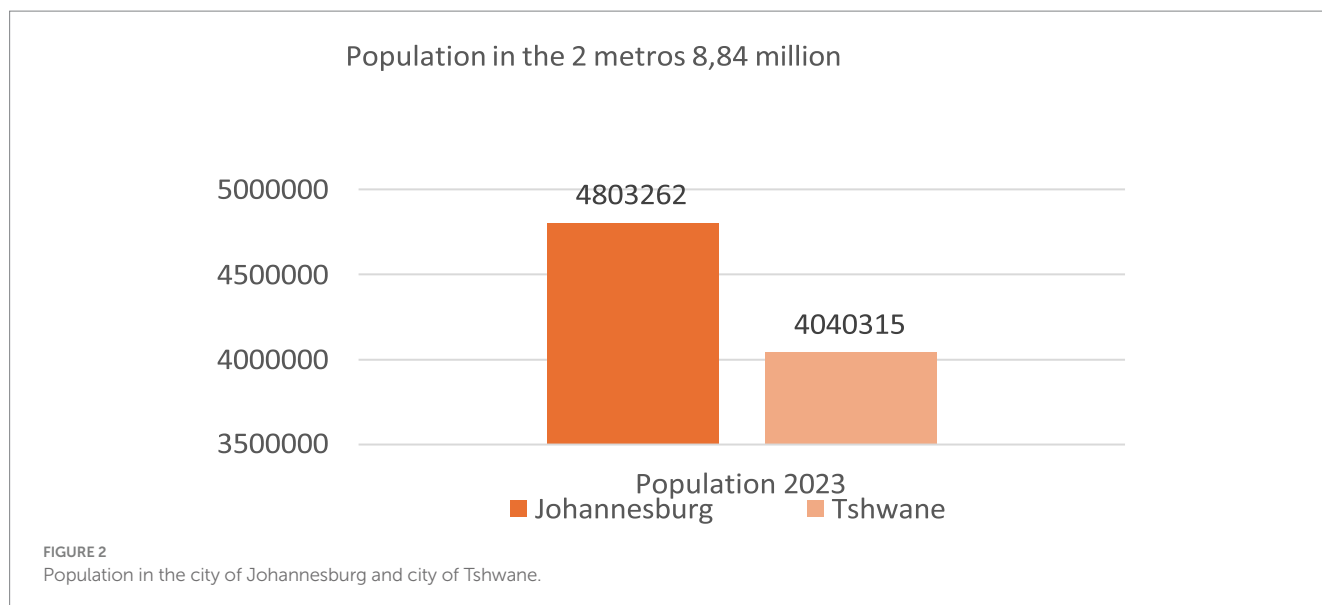
## Problem statement

The planning approval of housing developments has been fraught with hindrances whilst following various legislative and policy instruments that include the Municipal Systems Act, and Spatial Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA), of 2013 ([Presidency, 2018](#)). Several regulatory instruments and interventions were introduced over the years. These includes the shift in powers of land use planning and control from provinces to local governments by way of court injunction, the development of the neighbourhood

planning and design guide whose objective is to guide provinces, municipalities and the private sector, the enactment of the Infrastructure Development Act of 2014, and the approval of the National Spatial Development Framework of 2020. However, all these have not fully addressed the problem ([Visser, 2016](#)). Fragmentation of spatial planning functions continues uncontrolled as some of the functions such as housing, water use licenses and mining which are key to growing the economy remain with the different spheres of government. Consequently, cities, provinces and national government appoint technical and administrative capacity, set up systems, and use various tools to consider planning approval application for housing development and still experience delays.

[Burkhardt \(2022\)](#) warns that almost a quarter of R340 billions of South Africa's infrastructure projects were delayed and this resulted in significant losses in investments and affected job creation. Developers and contractors envision developments that can put large amounts of investments in cities with a view to growing the economy and creating employment. They pay compliance fees as required by the local authorities and wait for final planning approvals. Oftentimes the expected planning approvals are hindered and delayed. In certain developments they end up not even granted at all which ends up shutting out the developers' visions and destroying the country's economic growth objectives. These challenges and bottlenecks cannot be left unattended, hence this academic enquiry that seeks to craft a developmental framework for planning approval of housing developments.

The problem has affected the quality of debates and dialogues and continues to rob South Africa of economic growth and stability. This challenge also affects policy formulation and decision-making about key interventions that must be advanced to contribute meaningfully to South Africa's economy. In turn, this problem affects the South African citizens because they do not get a full benefit from the appropriate interventions which should increase their income, create employment, and un trap them from poverty.



## Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to deepen understanding and sustainable approaches regarding planning approvals of housing developments.

## Research questions

The researcher is interested in finding answers to the following questions: How are the planning approval for housing developments conducted in the City of Tshwane and City of Johannesburg? What factors inform city planning approval processes when undertaking housing developments?

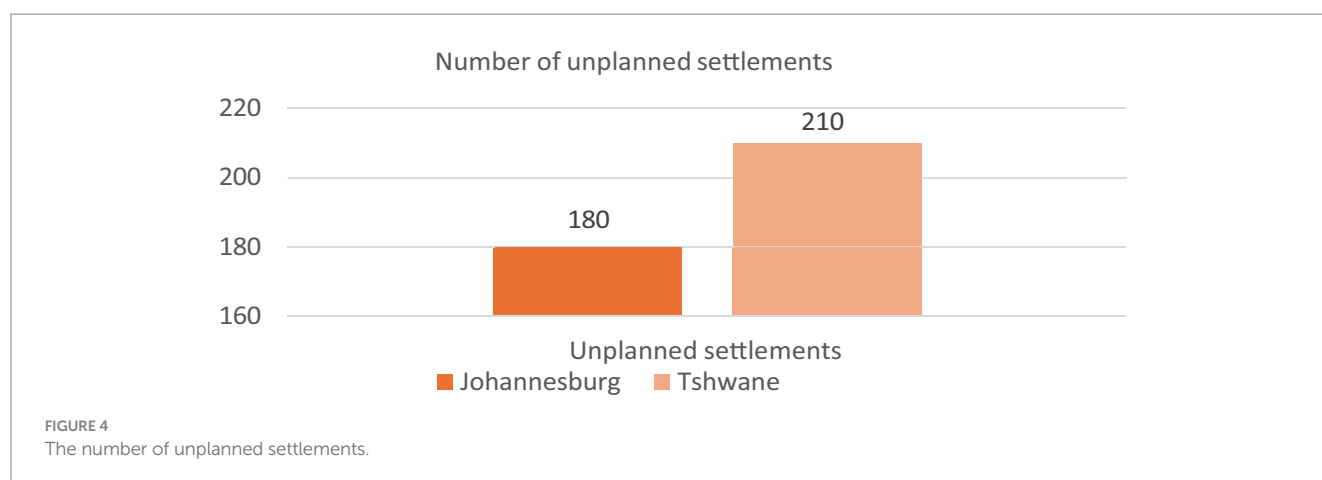
## Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study include to understand the nexus between planning approvals and the housing developments in both the City of Johannesburg and City of Tshwane and to also find out what causes the delay in the approval of plans for housing development and its impact on the economy.

## Literature review and analysis

In looking at the impact of planning and regulatory delays when dealing with energy infrastructure [Marshall and Cowell \(2016\)](#), noted that decisions are not regularly made within specific timeframes, and this affects negatively the cost of the given project and the general welfare of the entire community and consumers. The study also highlights that existing literatures points to the fact that planning and regulatory delays are very common features in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. With respect to delays, it is noted that there are two types of delays ([Marshall and Cowell, 2016](#)). One is a situation whereby decisions are not taken on time, and the other is when decisions are based on a prescribed cycle that is within a particular time, e.g., weekly, monthly or yearly. This study is guided by both type of delays.

The study uses the concept of [Foucault \(1991\)](#) governmentality as a theoretical framework. Governmentality is defined by [Kerr \(1999, p. 197\)](#) as a way of thinking about government and the practices of government. [Dean \(1999, p. 12\)](#) further explains governmentality is not just a tool for thinking about government and processes of governing, but it includes what and how the people who are governed think about the way they are governed. He further explains that governmentality is a collective activity comprised of knowledge, and opinions of those who are governed and governing.



The researcher sees the concept of governmentality integrating with the objectives of assessing how the planning approval processes of housing developments are conducted, and the extent they contribute to South Africa's economy. The researchers grasp that government analyses investments, approves grants and put in place mechanisms that would mobilise financial and human resources, and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups that are interested in housing developments.

The researchers also comprehends that there are numerous role players in the planning approval process of housing developments and some of the role players do not have a full grasp of the practices of government. Jean and Grunder (2003, p. 232) cite Copjec (1994), who states that the role players have intentions, failures, and successes of those who act as doorkeepers of the law. Raco et al. (2018) noted this interplay and how the global financial crash of 2007–2008 compelled many governments to streamline and reform their planning systems and thereby encouraging faster project delivery in view of unexpected uncertainty. The researcher realises that all role players have relationships within the entire process. This include development applicants, residents, and other stakeholders that are outside the processes of planning approvals. Such stakeholders include relevant partners, professionals and consultants of various disciplines related to structural, mechanical, and electrical systems, and in most cases includes environmental impact professionals, traffic specialist and developers. The researcher concurs with Jean and Gunder (2003) perspective who argue that all role players have the desire to be part of a planning approval system. This assertion is also supported by Raco et al. (2018) who observed that in London, the powerful and time-resource developers and investors use planning timeframes very carefully to boost returns. In this study on planning approvals, the role players would include city planning officials, provincial and national department of human settlements, officials in the sector departments, officials in the city's economic development departments, officials in the building controls departments, developers, objectors, elected representatives, officials in the municipal planning tribunals and municipal appeals tribunals.

In terms of section 153 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) municipalities have developmental duties that include structuring and managing administrative, budgeting and planning processes to give effect to the needs of the communities, promote social and economic development and participate in the national and provincial development programmes. Furthermore,

schedules 4 and 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa list regional planning and development, urban and rural development as concurrent competence of national and provincial governments. It also lists municipal planning as an exclusive local government competence and further list provincial planning as an exclusive provincial competency. Denoon-Stevens et al. (2022) found that many powerful stakeholders in the built environment do not see value in the planning approval process. They argue that some of the planning processes were inherited from colonial regimes and must change as they are outdated. Unfortunately, they pour scorn on cities that have enforced and used outdated standards which regrettably yielded fewer housing developments than alternative regulations. The researcher realises that stakeholders are mindful of their actions and how they contribute towards growing the economy. It is an unfortunate reality that the stakeholders that occupy unplanned settlements do not see the significance of planning approvals. They invest in informal activities unplanned settlements which are not calculated as part of the economic growth calculations due to informality.

Berrisford and McAuslan (2017) argues that when planning is effective it engages effectually with the land development market, includes citizens in decision-making, guides the investment of public funds towards desired outcomes and contributes directly to the vision set out in the National Development Plan. He further advises regarding the contrary perspective that when planning is driven primarily by statutory compliance requirements, it focuses on controlling and restricting private-sector and citizen behaviour. The researchers see this as an aspect that tend to undermines the economic growth process and imposes high costs on both the public and private sector. In line with views of Berrisford on engaging effectively, the researcher is of the view that the citizens of unplanned settlements should assist government in dealing with planning approval processes. Unfortunately, they are unable to assist because they lack knowledge and understanding about the interventions for growing the economy. They also find themselves having to deal with planning processes that are too rigid, complex and statutory compliance driven such that it diminishes the power and dominion to assist government in growing the economy.

There is a relationship between planning approvals of housing developments and the economy, and the relationship clearly shows who has power and dominion over planning approval. Philp (1983) argues that power and domination have a considerable presence everywhere in society. In the case of planning approvals, planners have



the power and dominion over the processes. However, they need to understand the economy as planning approvals are reported to be a drag on the economy (Tai-Hsieh and Moretti, 2017; Todes and Turok, 2018; Todes, 2008). This has been upheld by scholars such as Glossop (2014) who claim that housing development is not just a numbers game but a barometer of the state of the economy.

In respect of South Africa, it has been pointed out by the Presidency (2023) that the economy is failing to grow because it was not structured to serve the interests of all South Africans. South Africa's economy is affected by the fragmented plethora of planning and regulatory instruments for land and housing developments that must be complied with in municipalities. The researchers align with the views of Colenbrander (2016) who saw cities as globally accepted engines of economic growth and concurs that cities should be given flexibility to plan, regulate and implement policy reforms for increasing economic growth. (Berrisford, 2011) also noted that the question that remains unanswered is around the support that must be provided by the national and provincial human settlements departments to the cities for them to make a better contribution to the economy when undertaking planning approval processes of housing developments.

According to the Property Sector Charter Council (2018) they argue that the economy will not be functional without buildings in which people live and work. It further posits that the property sector makes an important contribution to GDP in the form of value-added tax (VAT), multiplied taxes and direct taxes such as property rates. In the year 2015, the Council advises that the property sector contributed a total of 62.4 billion in taxes of which 22.5 billion was from residential which include housing developments.

It is interesting to note that the property sector analysis covers the planning approvals of housing developments as central feature in calculating growth in the economy. The researcher sees a need for a developmental framework for planning approval with town and regional planners, economists and other relevant role players assessing, dissecting, discussing, debating robustly and making recommendations for growing the economy. Botha et al. (2014) assert that property development constitutes one of the largest business enterprises and gross domestic product contributors of the world. They also advise that the business of property development has incurred substantial losses over the centuries because of non-compliance with good governance without considering all factors influencing it.

## Theoretical framework for planning approvals of housing developments

Steggel et al. (2006: 16) recommend that researchers should use theory explicitly to enhance, clarify understanding and contribute to the further development of theories. In this research existing theories are used to contextualise the delays in planning approvals of housing developments and further attempt to analyze planning approval namely classical theory, systems theory and the Process Efficiency Theory perspective. The next paragraph provides the details.

### Planning approval from classical theory

Albanese et al. (2023) a classical theory is a long-established theory, which focusses on the organization rather than the employees working in it. According to the classical theory, an

organization is comprised of machines and human beings as different components that makes the organization work. Assessing the planning approvals of housing developments from classical theory means that every complex aspect of the machine and organization called planning approval of housing developments has a classical analysis. The researcher is looking at human beings and machines that play various roles in the planning approval process of housing developments. From the classical theory point of view, this includes city planning officials, planners, objectors as community members, developers who play different roles as applicants, commentators, approvers, objectors and rejectors of applications in the two metropolitan municipalities and look at the role of officials at a Provincial and National Departments.

### Planning approvals from the systems theory perspective

Planning approvals of housing developments from the systems theory perspective based on composite parts. Turner and Baker (2019) define a system as comprised of correlated parts and or elements but criticize that systems theory has been questioned in the recent literature due to its observed detachment from today's research and practice demands. In this research, the researcher looks at the different parts or elements of planning approval of housing developments. This covers applicants, commentators, approvers, objectors and rejectors of applications in the two municipalities and looks at the role of officials in the Provincial and National Departments.

### Planning approvals from the process efficiency theory perspective

The Process Efficiency Theory is defined by Eysenck and Calvo (1992), as cited Duncan et al. (2011), as a theory that makes an important distinction between performance effectiveness and processing efficiency. According to Elliman et al. (1997) it is important to measure not only performance effectiveness (as indicated by task score), but performance efficiency. Performance efficiency represents the extra effort, and processing resources allocated to a task, for example, lengthened reaction times may be an indication of performance. According to these scholars' performance effectiveness refers to the quality of performance in terms of speed and accuracy. They further define processing efficiency as performance effectiveness divided by the processing resources invested in the task.

## Methodology

A case study research method was used in this research with a detailed examination of planning approval processes. The researcher undertook a comprehensive systematic content policy analysis, literature review and conducted interviews with 25 key practitioners in the provincial, national departments, and professionals in the City of Johannesburg and City of Tshwane, respectively, were interviewed to identify challenges in the planning approval processes. The study excludes objectors and developers. The interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams platform.

One of the greatest advantages of a case study is that it allows researchers to investigate things that are often difficult or impossible to understand and allows researchers to probe intensely into complex issues and situations (Drew, 2023). It also allows researchers to capture information on the 'how,' 'what,' and 'why,' of something that's implemented. Notwithstanding that case study might not be generalised to a larger population, the use in this research is necessitated because the research questions are on, how, what and why (Yin, 2014).

## Research gap and discussions

Substantial research exists about planning approvals in South Africa and other countries. However, the study on planning approval of housing developments has not received much scholarly attention in the city of Tshwane and city of Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province of South Africa as it relates to processes. The Gauteng Province is the economic hub of South Africa and very key in economic growth interventions. Hence, this study is relevant and necessary.

The study makes a significant contribution to theoretical underpinnings regarding planning approval and economic growth. It scrutinizes the planning approval processes for housing developments in the City of Tshwane and City of Johannesburg. It provides information that contributes to housing development debates and economic growth. The study offers policy recommendations to national government, provincial and local government regarding framework for assessing spatial transformation, economic growth and motivate for additional resources, i.e., human, funding and systems of the developmental framework to be used by municipalities, province and national government.

Webster (2023: 31) insists that town planners must have the skills and knowledge to understand development economics which means that it is important for the housing development practitioners to understand how the economy works. The South African council for Town Planners (2014) defines competencies and standards for the planning curricula in a guideline framework. The framework highlights that planners alone cannot solve all challenges but need to resolve all contextual issues in a concerted effort with all sectors of society over an extended period working together with all role players and allowing planners to play a leading role. Shoonga et al. (2021) recommends that there needs to be a clear understanding of the interlinkages within the housing, land industry, and the greater economy. This recommendation builds on the argument by Moss (2010) who claimed that the housing problem cannot be solved without fixing the economic problem.

The research by Sihlongonyane (2018, p. 73) highlights that planning has become a more multidisciplinary profession and has lost its voice and autonomy. The study also advises that planning in South Africa is old and requires statutory bodies governing the profession to craft a framework that guides the curriculum, the accreditation of schools, the registration of planners and their professional practice.

Sihlongonyane (2018, p. 77) recommends more engagements should be facilitated to transform the planning profession. He also recommended that the 2014 gazetted Planning framework be aligned to the Higher Education Qualification Framework. The researcher has

noted that the framework has levels 1–10 which includes awarding an Honorary Doctorate to non-planners.

## Results, findings and recommendations

The planning approvals are processed by officials that are very experienced and employed by the cities. Some serve in the Municipal Planning Tribunals and Municipal Appeals Tribunals. Most of the practitioners have more than 10 years' experience. The process of granting planning approvals includes pre-planning, preparation, submission of applications, referral for comments, compliance approval, objections and appeals. The key revelation is that some of the applications are made by service providers who sometimes submit incomplete information.

On average, the national department has estimated that the turnaround time that provinces and metros should take to deal with planning approval should be between thirty to thirty (30–36) months per housing development project in line with Spatial Planning and Land Use Regulations (SPLUMA). However, it does not have a developmental framework and an integrated digital system of monitoring planning approvals of housing developments. The delays are known to affect the overall cost of housing development as the price of building material and labor escalate every year with the changes and adjustments in inflation.

The findings from this researcher show that city officials use certain matrices such as checklists, Spatial Development Frameworks, strategies such as Vision 2050, provincial growth and development strategies to grant or not grant approvals.

The researchers also noted that those who are working in the city are expected to formulate responses after undertaking simulation and following sequential activities. It is assumed that town planners will work with development planners, economists and other professionals and the outcome of all approvals granted will contribute to growth in the economy. However, this is not always the case.

It is also noted that there is a tendency to focus on spatial planning, infrastructure needs, and land use management and get bogged down to dealing with the not-so-easy development processes that are often fraught with delays and objections to the extent of neglecting and leaving the economic growth objective to economists and statisticians.

The findings also reveal that applications and payments are made to the city by professionals that are registered with professional bodies. The researcher recommends that a framework and integrated digital system of tracking applications with full details of decisions arrived at, objections which would be linked to professional bodies is required to hold the professionals accountable and inform the national officials and professionals who must track progress and come up with interventions for unblocking challenges.

The researchers also learnt that funding for planning approval of housing developments flows to provincial human settlements departments. The human settlements provincial officials appoint developers and service providers who then package and submit development applications to the city and there is no mechanism of assessing progress and intervening in the event there are delays and hindrances. The above findings on how the planning approvals of

housing developments are undertaken in the City of Tshwane and the City of Johannesburg relate to the first objective.

Secondly, it is also noted that the officials who deal with planning approvals follow council approved policies, guidelines and procedures that are available on their website. In the city of Tshwane, there is a Tshwane Manual for the submission of land development and other related applications, Tshwane Land Use Scheme, 2024 (TLUS 2024), Land Use Management By—Law of 2016 and, City of Johannesburg (COJ) Land Use Scheme, 2018, Nodal Review policy of 2018 / 2019 and SPLUMA principles of 2013. This relates to the factors that inform city planning approval processes for housing development within Gauteng Province.

The researchers also learnt that the objectives of province and municipal land use schemes and national policies are not in harmony. Provincial Department of Human Settlements pursues the objectives of township establishment, released the subsidy quantum, registers the title deeds through conveyancers whilst the city pursues compliance objectives in terms of rules and ensures that everyone to adheres to the rules and prescripts contained in the approved land use and town planning schemes.

It is also noted that cities do not get allocated budgets for planning approvals, but provinces get allocated budgets and appoint service providers who submit all the planning applications. Capacity challenges are another issue that is noted and not to be adequate at national, provincial and municipal level of government as there are very few town planners who are responsible for signing off the work.

The results of the findings also show that applications are often badly packaged and submitted incomplete. The communities often in extreme situations go to human rights lawyers when they feel disadvantaged and prejudiced. However, the human rights lawyers and or organisations just put pressure and demand accountability without drilling into the issues.

From the development applications it can be argued from this research at local government levels require one to understand a plethora of policies and legislation and referral of objections to Municipal Planning Tribunals. The decision-making regarding applications requires assessors who are municipal officials to consider the interests of all affected parties including the objectors who often oppose developments under the phenomena of what is commonly known as Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY).

## Recommendations

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, the Presidency, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development need to partner with the Department that funds the low-cost housing so they can provide administrative support in dealing with planning approvals for housing and real estate developments. This advice links with the view expressed by Sihlongonyane (2018, p. 73) that planners should also work with other disciplines. The researchers recommend that the Department of Human Settlements should play an active role in coordinating, monitoring, reporting and providing administrative support for planning approval of housing developments in collaboration with all social partners.

Planning approvals require institutional arrangements, i.e., monitoring framework, forum for discussing progress,

Interventions to unblock blockages, digital system integrated system of recording projects at a national level and Ministerial Intervention with Municipal Planning Tribunals and Municipal Appeals Tribunals.

The researchers see an area for further research to be to craft a developmental framework for planning approvals and assessment of why municipalities are not given funding for planning approvals when they are central role players in economic growth matters.

## Conclusion

Planning approvals within the two Gauteng metropolitan municipalities of City of Johannesburg and Tshwane were granted at scale not supporting the economic growth objectives. The study reveals that development planning applications at local government levels in South Africa requires one to understand as well as be abreast of a plethora of policies and legislation and understanding of how Municipal Planning Tribunals work. The study also concludes by noting the varying digital systems that are available at the City of Johannesburg and city of Tshwane and need for unfragmented national digital platform that looks at planning approvals for housing developments and collaboration from all spheres of government is required. The study also shows how the process efficiency theory in planning approval processes can be used to identify the cost, turnaround time, capacity, location and the type of planning instruments and systems in the two case areas and how these impact on the economy. Further research is recommended regarding a framework to guide developers and all role players in the planning approvals to improve service delivery delays as it relates to housing development.

## Author contributions

NB: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. GO: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. CA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. This APC work was supported by the University of Johannesburg.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



## Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

## References

- Albanese, A., Wolff, E., and Sica, A. (2023). Forgetting the founders? The uses of classical theory today. *Society* 60, 722–732. doi: 10.1007/s12115-023-00873-6
- Berrisford, S. (2011). Unravelling apartheid spatial planning legislation in South Africa. *Urban Forum* 22. doi: 10.1007/s12132-01142-9119-8
- Berrisford, S., and McAuslan, P. (2017). Reforming the regulatory environment for urban planning: taking stock and moving forward. African Centre for Cities (ACC), Cities Alliance, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and Urban LandMark. Available online at: [https://www.africancentreforcities.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ULR-Report\\_FINAL\\_LR.pdf](https://www.africancentreforcities.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ULR-Report_FINAL_LR.pdf) (Accessed September 24, 2024).
- Botha, B., Adendorff, C., and Smallwood, J. (2014). PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT: a BUSINESS PROCESS MODEL by journal of construction Project Management and innovation. *Centre Const. Manag. Leadersh. Dev.* 4, 1012–1033.
- Burkhardt, P. (2022). Almost a quarter of SA's key infrastructure projects hit by delays. *News24. Bus. Soc. Sci.* 12, 1008–1023.
- Colenbrander, S. (2016). Cities as engines of economic growth: the case for providing basic infrastructure and services in urban areas. Available online at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309647316> [Accessed: September 28, 2023].
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). Available online at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ac6b5de4.html> (Accessed September 28, 2023).
- Dean, M. (1999). Governmentality. Power and rule in modern society. Denmark, University of Newcastle, UK: Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen Business. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Denoon-Stevens, S. P., Andres, L., Nel, V., and Jones, P. (2022). Unpacking planners' views of the success and failure of planning in post-apartheid South Africa. *Cities* 130:103867. doi: 10.1016/j.cities.2022.103867
- Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs. (1998a). Local government: municipal structures act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998) (Notice 19614). *Government Gazette*, 1650, 18 December 1998.
- Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs. (1998b). Local government: district development Model: profile of city of Johannesburg, 2020. Available online at: [www.cogta.gov.za/ddm/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Take2\\_DistrictProfile\\_JHB1606-2-2.pdf](http://www.cogta.gov.za/ddm/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Take2_DistrictProfile_JHB1606-2-2.pdf) (Accessed February 28, 2025).
- Department of Human Settlements. (1997). Housing act, 1997 (act no. 107 of 1997) (Notice 18521). *Government Gazette*, 1661, 19 December 1997.
- Drew, C. (2023). 10 case study advantages and disadvantages. Helpful professor. Available online at: <https://helpfulprofessor.com/case-study-advantages-and-disadvantages/> (Accessed February 2025).
- Duncan, R. D., Mascarenhas, N. C., and Smith (2011). Developing the performance brain: decision making under pressure. Editor(s): Dave Collins, Angela Button, Hugh Richards. *J. Perform. Psychol. Churchill Livingstone*, 245–267. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-443-06734-1.00017
- Elliman, N. A., Green, M. W., Rogers, P. J., and Finch, G. M. (1997). Processing-efficiency theory and the working-memory system: impairments associated with sub-clinical anxiety. *Personal. Individ. Differ.* 23, 31–35. doi: 10.1016/S0191-8869(97)00016-0
- Foucault, M. (1991). "Governmentality" in The Foucault effects: Studies in governmentality. eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), 87–104.
- Glossop, C. (2014). Housing and economic development: moving forward together. Centre for Research and Market Intelligence. Available online at: <https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/08-11-06-Housing-and-economic-development.pdf> (Accessed: September 28, 2023).
- Harwood, Q. C. R. (2016). Planning permission. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1248.
- Jean, H., and Gunder, M. (2003). Planning fantasies? An exploration of a potential Lacanian framework for understanding development assessment planning. *Plan. Theory* 2, 225–248. doi: 10.1177/147309520323005
- Kerr, D. (1999). Beheading the king and enthroning the market: a critique of Foucauldian governmentality. *Sci. Soc.* 63, 173–202.
- Marshall, T., and Cowell, R. (2016). Infrastructure, planning and the command of time. *Environ. Plann. C Gov. Policy* 34, 1843–1866. doi: 10.1177/0263774X16642768
- Moss, V. (2010). Housing finance Markets in Africa: A case of South Africa. Ghana and Tanzania: Nigeria.
- Philp, M. (1983). Foucault on power: a problem in radical translation? *Political Theory* 11, 29–52.
- Presidency (2018). A concept note on institutionalisation of planning in South Africa. Available online at: <https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za> (Accessed September 24, 2023).
- Presidency (2023). A review of the advancing implementation towards a more capable nation. Available online at: <https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za> (Accessed on: September 24, 2023).
- Property Sector Charter Council (2018). South African property sector: economic contribution. Available online at: [www.propertycharter.co.za](http://www.propertycharter.co.za) (Accessed: September 18, 2023).
- Raco, M., Durrant, D., and Livingstone, N. (2018). Slow cities, urban politics and the temporalities of planning: lessons from London. *Environ. Plann. C Polit. Space* 36, 1176–1194.
- Shoonga, R., Gumbo, T., and Makoni, E. (2021). "Land development processes and property rights: top down and bottom-up approaches in Windhoek Namibia." in *Proceedings of the 11th annual international conference on industrial engineering and operations management Singapore*. March 7–11.
- Sihlongonyane, M. (2018). The generation of competencies and standards for planning in South Africa: differing views. *Town Reg. Plann.* 72, 70–83. doi: 10.18820/2415-0495/trp72i1.6
- Statistics South Africa (2022). Mid-year population estimates, 2022. StatsSA: Pretoria.
- Steggell, C. D., Yamamoto, T., Bryant, K., and Fidzani, L. (2006). The use of theory in housing research. *Hous. Soc.* 33, 5–20. doi: 10.1080/08882746.2006.11430525
- Tai-Hsieh, C., and Moretti, E. (2017). How local housing regulations smother the U.S. economy. SEPT. 6, 2017. Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/06/opinion/housing-regulations-us-economy.html> (Accessed: September 28, 2023).
- The South African council for Town Planners (2014). Guidelines for competencies and standards for curricula development.
- Todes, A. (2008). Rethinking spatial planning. Available online at: <https://www.uct.ac.za> (Accessed: September 24, 2023).
- Todes, A., and Turok, I. (2018). Spatial inequalities and policies in South Africa: place-based or people-centred? *Prog. Plan.* 123, 1–31. doi: 10.1016/j.progress.2017.03.001
- Turner, J. R., and Baker, R. M. (2019). Complexity theory: an overview with potential applications for the social sciences. *System* 7.
- Visser, J. (2016). Devolution by court injunction. The case of land use planning and management in South Africa. *Ugandan journal of management and public. Policy Stud.* 10(1), 84–99.
- Webster, S. (2023). A critical analysis on the efficiency of property development approval processes in the City of Cape Town, Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics. Available online at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11427/38203>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). Case study research: Design and methods. 5th Edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.