

Govt rejects Mehta plan to develop Lugazi mayor's park

Task. Mr Katsigaire says the municipal authorities should identify alternative space where Mehta and other developers can put their investments.

BY DENNIS SSEBWAMI
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

BUIKWE. The Ministry of Lands and Urban Development has rejected a request by Mehta Group to take over Lugazi Mayor's Garden and erect a shopping mall.

In a letter dated September 11, 2017, a copy of which *Daily Monitor* has seen, the director physical planning and urban development, Mr Savina Katsigaire, said converting the Mayor's garden into a commercial place, the town will lose the good trees that provide shed to residents and cause traffic jam in the area.

He was communicating the decision of the National Physical Planning Board which sat on August 18, in Kampala.

The letter was addressed to the Lugazi Municipal Town Clerk, Mr Vincent Okurut.

Lugazi Mayor's Garden is located next to the roundabout on the Kampala-Jinja Road, which is an international transit highway.

"...In view of the above, the board resolved to maintain its longtime held policy of preserving and protecting public open spaces in urban areas," Mr Katsigaire said in the letter.

He added: "Therefore, plot 1-375-9 Block 575 Kyagwe, Lugazi Municipal Council remains a public open space."

The Mehta Group, which owns Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited (Scoul), says Lugazi Mayor's garden, which measures an acre belongs to them



Contested. A section of Lugazi Mayor's Gardens which is being claimed by both Mehta Group and a local businessman. PHOTO BY DENNIS SSEBWAMI

and they have plans to erect a shopping mall. On 26 June, Scoul through its chief executive officer, Mr TS Sundaram, wrote to Mr Okurut notifying him about the company's urgent need to redevelop the land and they have since fenced off the place in preparation for construction works.

But in the letter, Mr Katsigaire asked Mr Okurut to identify alternative acceptable space within the Municipality where Mehta and other developers can put their investments.

"In today's world it was nec-

essary that developments remain sensitive to the needs of the public," the letter adds

THE LAND

Lugazi Mayor's Garden is located next to the roundabout on the Kampala-Jinja Road, which is an international transit highway.

Mr Katsigaire's letter writ-

ten on behalf of the permanent secretary Ministry of Lands, Mr Dorcas Okalany was also copied to Minister of Lands Betty Amongi and the permanent secretary Ministry of Local Government, Mr Benjamin Kuumanya and all local leaders in Lugazi Municipality.

The ministry's objection comes weeks after another businessman Mr Sunday Francis Giga also claimed ownership of the mayor's garden land claiming that his father Arshi Giga Babubnai obtained it from the then Lugazi Ginnery in 1971, which was owned by Purshotamdas and Sons Limited.

Mehta Group's proposal to redevelop the Mayor's Garden had already caused friction between Lugazi Central Division Mayor, Mr Stephen Mpiima and Lugazi Municipal Council Mayor, Mr Deo Tumwesigye with the latter insisting that the land on Plot No.1-3 and 5-9 doesn't belong to Mehta Group and was gazetted as an open place. But Mr Mpiima had earlier indicated that he did see any problem if Mehta Group develops the place since the land belongs to the company.

Efforts to speak to Mr Patrick Dhikusoka, the senior general manager in charge of administration and public relations officer at Scoul, were futile as he couldn't answer repeated telephone calls to his known phone from this reporter.

But Mr Tumwesigye said he was happy with government's decision to preserve the area as an open space.

"It was very clear from day one that Mehta was fighting a losing battle. We cannot allow him take every space available in the name of development. It is true we need more tall buildings, but also need an organised town with enough open place where people can go and relax," he said by telephone yesterday.