



UCAZ
Urban Councils
Association of Zimbabwe

30 Samora Machel Ave
1st Floor, Insurance House
Harare
ZIMBABWE

P. O. Box 23, Harare
Telephone: +263 24 2794977
+263 24 2252784
Fax: +263 24 2706758
E-mail: ucaz@ucaz.org

POSITION PAPER
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE URBAN STATE LAND MANAGEMENT
POLICY (APRIL 2025)

Submitted to the Parliament of Zimbabwe

Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Public Works and National Housing

Presented by the Secretary General
Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe
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Executive summary

Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) welcomes and supports the objectives of the Urban State Land Management Policy (April 2025), which seeks to promote efficient, transparent and sustainable land management, orderly urban development, equitable access to land, improved land-use planning and development control, modernisation of land administration systems, and improved enforcement and accountability.

This position paper does not seek to critique the Policy. Rather, it consolidates the practical experiences, implementation challenges, and recommendations of urban local authorities, gathered through UCAZ's Housing Directors Forum, to strengthen implementation and enable local authorities to discharge their statutory responsibilities more effectively.

UCAZ's position is that urban local authorities must be recognised and resourced as the principal custodians of urban development and land management within their jurisdictions. Successful implementation of the Policy will require full operationalisation of devolution, adequate and diversified infrastructure financing, strengthened institutional and technical capacity, standardised and secure documentation, accelerated digitisation of land records, robust enforcement mechanisms, and legislative alignment supported by regular parliamentary oversight.

This position paper consolidates local authorities' housing experiences, challenges, and recommendations for submission to the Parliament of Zimbabwe Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Public Works and National Housing.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On 14 August 2026, UCAZ convened a virtual meeting of the Housing Directors Forum, bringing together Directors of Housing and representatives of participating local authorities to consult on implementing the Urban State Land Management Policy. Members who could not attend could submit written contributions.

The meeting was convened to consolidate local authorities' housing-related experiences, challenges, and recommendations for submission to the Parliament of Zimbabwe Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. It was agreed that the resulting position paper should focus on practical measures to strengthen implementation, rather than on critiquing the Policy itself.

This paper draws on the outcomes of that consultation, together with UCAZ's broader institutional position on urban land governance, to present a consolidated set of issues and recommendations for Parliament's consideration.

2. Policy intent and guiding principles

The Urban State Land Management Policy aims to promote **efficient, transparent, and sustainable land management; orderly urban development; equitable access to land;**

improved land-use planning; and modernised land administration systems. The Forum supports these objectives and stresses that implementation must prioritise:

- **Transparency and accountability** in land allocation and administration.
- **Protection of home seekers** from fraudulent and exploitative transactions.
- **Institutional capacity building** and resourcing for local authorities.
- **Use of technology** (GIS, digitisation, remote sensing) to modernise land records and enforcement.

3. UCAZ POSITION

Urban local authorities should be the principal custodians of urban development and land management within their jurisdictions. This requires the Policy's implementation architecture to give practical effect to devolution, equip local authorities with the financial resources, technical capacity, and legal instruments needed to plan, service, allocate, monitor, and enforce land use effectively, and hold both local authorities and other stakeholders accountable through transparent, standardised, and digitised systems.

4. KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Devolution and Institutional Capacity

Full operationalisation of constitutional devolution remains central to effective implementation. Local authorities continue to face capacity gaps in planning, GIS and engineering that constrain their ability to discharge land management responsibilities. UCAZ recommends deliberate investment in institutional strengthening and technical capacity-building across local authorities, alongside strengthened constitutional devolution.

4.2 Land Audits, Land Banks and Governance

The Policy requires local authorities to maintain accurate, up-to-date records of land within their jurisdictions. While some local authorities have established land banks capturing land use, housing units, and open spaces, others are still developing their land databases. Reliable land information is fundamental to transparent allocation, effective planning, development control and sound decision-making.

- Local authorities should be supported to establish and regularly update comprehensive land databases;
- Land-use planning and land administration systems should be strengthened; and
- Institutional capacity for modern land governance should be built on a sustained basis.

4.3 GIS, Digitisation and Integrated Land Information Systems

The transition from manual land records to Geographical Information Systems (GIS), digitised databases, and electronic transactions is critical to accurate property and land records, monitoring development, improving transparency, enabling early detection of unauthorised developments, and meeting minimum service delivery standards. Local authorities, including the City of Gweru, Gwanda Municipality, and Redcliff Municipality, have made notable progress in GIS-based land and property management, demonstrating the feasibility of accelerated digitisation across the sector.

UCAZ recommends accelerating digitisation across all local authorities and adequately resourcing it, and that Government support the development of integrated, interoperable land information systems nationally.

4.4 Standardisation and Security of Housing Documentation

The absence of standardised, secure housing documentation — including offer letters, certificates of occupation, and other allocation records — across local authorities creates inconsistency and opportunities for fraudulent transactions. The Housing Directors Forum has resolved to establish a working group to develop a standardised, secure housing documentation toolkit, comparable to the development control toolkit used by planners, for Government consideration.

4.5 Standardised and Transparent Allocation Procedures

Clear, transparent, and standardised procedures for allocating council land—capturing applicant details, waiting-list status, household size, and duration of stay—are necessary but not sufficient. Local authorities must also improve public communication and awareness of allocation procedures to reduce misinformation, fraud and the exploitation of home seekers.

4.6 Servicing of Land Before Allocation

The allocation and occupation of unserviced land, lacking roads, water, sewerage and other essential engineering services, remains a significant concern. Consistent with the Policy's prohibition on allocating unserviced plots, UCAZ recommends that allocation procedures require confirmation that land has been surveyed, that required engineering services have been provided, and that an Engineering Certificate of Compliance is issued before allocation proceeds.

4.7 Private Developers, Partnership Models and Unserved Land

Local authorities can be held responsible for developments over which they had limited or no control where private or state land is subsequently incorporated into local authority boundaries. UCAZ recommends clear procedures for vetting, selecting, and monitoring developers, and development agreements that clearly define responsibilities and protect home seekers from inappropriate advance payments or the sale of unserviced stands.

On the question of pre-sale development models, UCAZ's position is that the focus should not be a blanket prohibition of pre-sales — which some local authorities, including the City of Mutare, have used as legitimate beneficiary-servicing approaches where municipal resources were constrained — but rather the prevention and criminalisation of the sale of unserviced land and of fraudulent or exploitative land transactions.

More broadly, UCAZ supports a shift away from the historical practice of selling land outright to private developers, which has often resulted in land being acquired cheaply and resold at significantly higher prices without adequate servicing, to the detriment of home seekers. UCAZ advocates partnership models in which local authorities retain greater oversight of development, can undertake or directly contract infrastructure works where feasible, manage pre-sales within clearly defined frameworks, and ensure development agreements protect public and home-seeker interests.

4.8 Urban Renewal and Social Housing

Urban renewal requires significant infrastructure investment and risks displacing existing residents, particularly where projects are private-sector led and make housing unaffordable. Given local authorities' limited financial capacity, UCAZ recommends Government grants and other external financing mechanisms to support sustainable urban renewal, including social housing financing, funding for on-site and off-site infrastructure, and a guaranteed right of return for existing residents to prevent displacement.

4.9 Master Plans and Administrative Boundaries

Master plan boundaries are at times confused with administrative boundaries, resulting in poor development practices, including in peri-urban areas where land designated for urban development falls under the control of rural local authorities. UCAZ recommends translating master plans into binding administrative powers and appropriate boundary incorporations, rather than leaving them as planning documents without corresponding enforcement authority.

4.10 Enforcement and Municipal Capacity

Strengthened enforcement mechanisms are essential to implementing the Policy effectively. GIS, remote sensing, and digital monitoring systems have significant potential to detect unauthorised developments early, complementing strengthened municipal enforcement powers. The recent granting of peace officer status and powers of arrest to municipal officers is a welcome development that should be built upon. UCAZ will advocate for accelerating and strengthening appropriate municipal enforcement mechanisms.

4.11 Infrastructure Financing and Legacy Informal Settlements

Infrastructure financing remains one of the most significant constraints on housing delivery and urban development. Bulk infrastructure has historically depended heavily on Government grants, while local authorities continue to face substantial financing gaps. UCAZ further notes the ongoing challenge of managing legacy informal settlements, which requires dedicated regularisation and infrastructure recovery mechanisms alongside broader financing reform.

UCAZ proposes greater engagement with the Insurance and Pensions Commission (IPEC) and pension funds to explore opportunities to unlock housing and infrastructure finance, including by developing bankable housing projects that can attract pension fund investment and potentially qualify under prescribed asset investment frameworks.

5. FUNDING MECHANISMS REQUIRED

UCAZ recommends the establishment and strengthening of the following funding mechanisms to support sustainable implementation of the Policy:

- A National Urban Infrastructure Development Fund;
- Land Value Capture mechanisms, including betterment levies and development charges;
- Municipal Infrastructure Bonds;
- Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), structured to protect public and home-seeker interests;
- An Urban Stateland Development Fund;
- International Development and Climate Finance;
- Property-based revenue reforms, underpinned by updated valuation rolls; and
- A Settlement Regularisation and Infrastructure Recovery Fund.

6. LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

To provide a coherent legal foundation for implementation, UCAZ recommends that Parliament consider the following:

- Harmonisation of the Urban Councils Act, the State Lands Act and related planning legislation;
- Strengthening of constitutional devolution provisions as they apply to urban land management;
- Establishment of a National Urban Land Tribunal to resolve land disputes efficiently;
- A statutory requirement for annual reporting to Parliament on implementation progress; and
- Creation of an Urban Development Financing Framework to coordinate the funding mechanisms set out above.

7. SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Require that land be allocated only after it has been surveyed, appropriately serviced, and issued with an Engineering Certificate of Compliance.
2. Promote partnership-based land development models in which local authorities retain control and oversight.
3. Criminalise the sale of unserviced land and fraudulent or exploitative land transactions, without imposing a blanket prohibition on legitimate pre-sale or beneficiary-servicing models.
4. Provide Government grants and other financing mechanisms to support infrastructure and social housing in urban renewal projects.
5. Guarantee a right of return for existing residents affected by urban renewal programmes.
6. Translate master plans into effective administrative powers and appropriate boundary arrangements.

7. Promote the use of GIS, remote sensing and other digital technologies to strengthen land-use monitoring and development control.
8. Accelerate and strengthen municipal enforcement mechanisms, building on the recent granting of peace officer status to municipal officers.
9. Engage the IPEC and pension funds on opportunities to unlock housing and infrastructure financing through bankable projects.
10. Establish the funding mechanisms and legislative reforms set out in sections 5 and 6 of this paper.

8. CONCLUSION

UCAZ reaffirms its support for the objectives of the Urban State Land Management Policy and its commitment to working constructively with Parliament and Government in strengthening its implementation. The success of this Policy will ultimately depend on sustainable financing, institutional strengthening, digital transformation, legislative alignment and consistent parliamentary oversight.

UCAZ urges the Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Public Works and National Housing to consider the issues and recommendations set out in this paper, and looks forward to continued engagement in ensuring that local authorities remain at the centre of a modernised, transparent and accountable urban land management system that serves all Zimbabweans.

Presented on behalf of the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe by:

Secretary General

Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ)
