



19 May 2016

Call for support: #StopTheSale of Tafelberg and desegregate Cape Town

Introduction

Following months of pressure from the *Reclaim The City* movement (more info [here](#)), The Western Cape Provincial Government has agreed to temporarily halt the sale of the Tafelberg site in Sea Point. This block-sized parcel of public land is the last of its kind in the affluent neighborhood, and was found to be ideal for affordable housing by a government supported feasibility study. In spite of this, the site was recently sold (but has not yet been transferred) to a private buyer for R135m. This sale forms part of a wider government plan to sell off well-located public land on the open market with no conditions attached. These sales tend to occur because of erroneous priority given to short-term cash injections over long term social value, pressure from local property developers that make enormous returns in well-located areas like Sea Point, NIMBYism, and subscription to "urban regeneration" through private development.

The Province has recently re-published a notice of its intention to dispose of the site, opening up a 21-day comment period for objections ending 9 June 2016. This presents a unique opportunity to both provide affordable housing for up to 350 families, and set Cape Town on a new urban development and housing policy trajectory. But it can only be grasped if a broad front of organizations and individuals make submissions explaining why the sale should be stopped. This is where we need your support.

Why Is Cape Town Failing on Housing and Spatial Development Policy?

Cape Town is facing the worst crisis of housing affordability and spatial inequality in South Africa. Urgent steps must be taken to ensure affordable housing in well-located areas is protected and expanded.

Reclaim the City has argued that this can best be done by adopting a two pronged approach used in most major cities around the world – regulating the private property market to protect tenants from exploitation and eviction, and providing subsidized government housing where shortages exist.

The Tafelberg site in Sea Point provides a prime opportunity to advance the latter. The decision to dispose of the site speaks to broader failures in housing delivery, with two root causes.

Firstly, the city is not delivering at the scale needed to address the backlog. The City of Cape Town says that approximately 373 000 households need improved housing, but only 6 100 houses are provided each year. At this rate the backlog will almost

double to 650 000 households in 15 years. These backlog estimates are conservative.

Secondly, houses that are being built are poorly located. Almost all subsidized housing in Cape Town has been built on the city limits, where land is cheap, far from places of work, social services, recreation and transport nodes. This strategy leads to severe long-term fiscal, social and household costs, and fails to meet legal and moral obligations to provide redress to those expelled from urban centres under Apartheid, or more recently as a result of gentrification.

Why Does Sea Point Need Affordable Housing?

There is a dire need for government subsidized housing in well-located economic and social centres across the city, but there are practical and historic reasons why Sea Point is in particular need of intervention.

- **Sea Point was one of the most notoriously racially exclusive whites-only suburbs during Apartheid.** Successive governments since 1994 have failed to build any subsidized affordable housing in the neighborhood, or in the immediately surrounding areas. In fact, residents living in very limited affordable housing (built before 1994) in the area have been evicted so that the land can be sold. One of these public housing developments – Wynyard Mansions – is on the Tafelberg site. There has therefore in fact been a regression since 1994.
- **Sea Point has an extremely active local service industry.** Thousands commute there - often 90 minutes each way- to work long hours as domestic workers, shopkeepers, waiters, nurses and other professions that keep the suburb's economy and services churning.
- **The cost of housing in Sea Point is increasing faster than almost anywhere else in the country.** PayProp's 2014 Rental Index ranks Sea Point third on its list of the 20 most expensive rental suburbs in South Africa. Rents rose 25% in 2014 alone. A one bedroom apartment can cost about R12 000 - well out of reach of the vast majority of Capetonians, where the median income is about R3000. This is creating a suburb accessible only to the super-rich. Much of the affordability crisis is being driven by property being bought for investment or holiday apartments, rather than primary homes. Pam Golding Properties research shows 40% of properties sold on the Atlantic Seaboard in 2015's high-selling season were bought by people from Gauteng Province. Increasingly many more are bought by international buyers.
- **Sea Point probably has the highest concentration of public amenities in Cape Town.** These include beaches, parks, promenades, swimming pools and stadia. This has come at significant expense and should not benefit only the wealthy. Working class families should also be able to enjoy these facilities as residents, and not just as visitors.

- **Sea Point has excellent public services.** These include public schools, hospitals and other social services, and is one of the safest mixed-use neighborhoods in Cape Town.
- **Sea Point has excellent and affordable access to several public transport systems.** This is particularly important for low-income families that tend not to have private transport, in a city where most middle class and affluent families have several vehicles.
- **Since 1994 Sea Point has become one of Cape Town's more integrated inner-city neighborhoods – but this is under threat.** It is still relatively integrated today, but this is rapidly changing. Intervention is needed to ensure it does not return to being a community where only rich (largely white) households can afford to live.
- **There have been several flaws in government's disposal process.** These included a number of discrepancies that cast serious doubt on the legitimacy of the disposal process. Firstly, a letter from the Provincial Department of Human Settlements requested that the site be used for affordable housing, but was ignored. Secondly, a feasibility study conducted by the Social Housing Regulatory Authority with support of the Provincial Government found that the site was ideal for social housing, and that it was practically and financially viable. Finally, the Provincial Government opted to sell the land outright despite previous commitments to lease it.
- **Tafelberg could provide homes to more than 300 families, and set housing strategy on a new trajectory.** In response to criticism about Tafelberg and other scatter-site housing proposals, Province often sites planned mega-housing projects like the Conradie Hospital mixed-income development. These are important, but they are not enough. To address the challenges of scaling up delivery and factoring in location, we need to ensure the state has a plan and timetable to use its significant but finite public land stock to encourage mixed income development across the city. In the absence of such a plan, it is reckless and irrational to sell off precious land parcels to the highest bidder. Tafelberg is an opportunity to change how Capetonians and South Africans think about and act on urban land and housing strategies,

How Can You Help?

We are approaching a wide variety of stakeholders to make submissions by the end of the comment period on 9 June 2016. We would like to ask for your assistance in drafting a basic submission in the form of a sign-on letter. This should ideally be no more than 1000 words, and suited for public distribution.