

PRESS RELEASE
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Land and Housing Activist Collective objects to the private auction of City-owned Land in Cape Town

This morning the City of Cape Town intends to proceed with the sale by auction of at least 14 City-owned properties. The sale of public land in a housing crisis clearly demonstrates a lack of determination to address the housing backlog and reverse the apartheid legacy of spatial injustice. As the landless communities who populate the housing list together with our parents and children, we see this injustice as a bold statement that this city does not care about the poor. The conditions of overcrowdedness, squalor, and lack of basic services under which we have lived for generations compel us to object to the planned auction, despite welcoming the Mayor's decision to withdraw 3 sites from the proceedings. Housing the poor and integrating the city needs to be the priority in all the city's land use and disposal plans.

Municipal land disposals are regulated by the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) and the Municipal Asset Transfer Regulations MATR). All state land use decisions are also subject to the principles of the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) as well as the Constitution, specifically s26 and s25(5) which affirm the rights to access adequate housing and to equitably access land.

The laws of the country are very clear about the duty to manage land in a manner that responds to social problems, both current and historical. According to the MFMA, in order to dispose of a piece of land the City needs to be sure 1) that the land is not needed for basic municipal service provision and 2) that the amount of money they can get by selling the land outweighs the social and community value that could be derived by using it. Basic municipal services must be understood in the context of a particular City and it always includes uplifting and empowering the poor who reside in a municipality.

When challenged, the City said all properties up for auction have been "thoroughly assessed" and are not required for municipal purposes. Yet in Cape Town, we have nearly 400 thousand people waiting on the housing database and we have seen no reversal of spatial apartheid in the 28 years of democracy. In this context, facilitating access to well-located land is among the most important interventions the municipality can make to improve the life of its poorest residents.

This auction suggests that the City continues to view land through a racist, apartheid lens, where only the outskirts are deemed suitable for low-income housing. Black and coloured neighbourhoods grow increasingly overcrowded as those facing eviction due to the ridiculous cost of rental in Cape Town are moved there. We are forced to clash with Law Enforcement over scraps of land on which we've built ourselves shelter and tried to find community. The City would see us removed to "temporary" relocation areas where we will wait and wait forever. Why is a plot in Newlands beyond the reach of those who need it most? Why does the City continue to sell or lease truly well-located land every day? It seems "infill" only means trouble for us, rather than densifying the neighbourhoods that have the best services. It seems open space in the suburbs is

sacred while in the township it is an opportunity to squeeze even more human beings into a poverty trap.

One clear comparison is between Bonteheuwel and Claremont. Last year, Bonteheuwel residents submitted hundreds of objections to the City's plan to develop housing on one of the only sports fields our schools and community clubs could use. It was a beloved space, activated every single weekend by families in the area. Our objections fell on deaf ears. Last week, the Primrose Sports Club wrote one open letter regarding the auction of land adjacent to the space they lease. They got a direct, personal phone call and a meeting from the Mayor himself. That land has been withdrawn from auction, but is it for the right reasons?

We must emphasise that we welcome the withdrawal of the three sites from this auction. As positive a gesture as this is, we challenge the City of Cape Town to be more imaginative. The opportunities available on these pieces of land may seem small in comparison to the scale of the need, but with clever design and access they could have a big impact. Among the key reasons this does not happen is lack of proper meaningful consultation and engagement with the communities in need. The law obliges municipal leadership to consult and co-determine the future of the city with its communities. We demand full transparency from the City on how the decision to dispose of these sites by auction was made, by whom, and according to what criteria. This practice of governing the city for us and not with us is what we demand should come to an end.

Cape Town needs a truly unified strategy for how we share space. We need to know what land is available and to be part of planning how it is put to good use. The City is a custodian of public land. This land has social, community, spiritual and other value beyond its financial price tag – and this land is ours. It carries the history of our dispossession, our struggle, and our dreams. It cannot be treated like any ordinary asset, to be traded for petty cash. We reject public participation processes that ask us to rubber stamp disposal decisions that have already been made. We are the people, not stakeholders and clients. It is not our job to convince you against a decision. It is your job to listen to what we decide.

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