

# City announces u-turn on social housing

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“We are in need of housing, that is why we're here,” said Woodstock resident Faghmeeda Desiree Ling. She was part of a group of supporters of Reclaim the City carrying placards and standing outside the fourth annual Affordable Housing Africa Conference held at a hotel in Cape Town's CBD on Tuesday, 18 July.



Mayoral committee member for urban development Brett Herron speaks to supporters of Reclaim the City during the fourth annual Affordable Housing Africa Conference in Cape Town. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks

Mayoral committee member for urban development Brett Herron was announcing that ten City-owned sites in inner city areas, including Woodstock and Salt River, will be used for social and affordable housing.

Herron characterised his announcement as the city's “180-degree change in its approach towards the urgent demand for housing”.

He announced plans to develop two erven (plots of land) along Pine Road to be followed by six erven along Dillon Lane.

“The proposed development will be between two and four storeys, with a mixture of studio, one, and two-bedroom units. The two sites will provide about 240 social housing units for those with a monthly income less than R15,000. Beneficiaries must be registered on the city's housing database and able to pay rent,” he said.

Herron said the tender for the projects would only be ready in two to three months. He added that once the development of the Salt River Market in Albert Road was completed, it would also provide a combination of 476 affordable housing units.

“It will have subsidised rental units for households with a monthly income of less than R15,000 to GAP rental housing for households earning between R3,500 and R20,000. Retail and office space will form part of the development to cross-subsidise the housing opportunities and to ensure its long-term financial sustainability,” he said.

## Scuffle outside

The announcement was slightly marred by an earlier scuffle between protesting residents and hotel staff who were seen pushing the residents and members of the media in the doorway as protesters tried to force their way inside the room where Herron was scheduled to speak.

After about 15 minutes, the group was allowed in and was asked not to disrupt proceedings. Herron began his speech saying: “Reclaim the City and their members are welcome here. I welcome their request to be heard.”

He told delegates attending the conference that the city has estimated that about 650,000 families earning less than R13,000 a month would be reliant on the city for housing between now and 2032.

“This is partly as a result of unemployment, slow economic growth, and rapid urbanisation,” he said. Herron said there are about 320,000 people on their housing database.

“The dire need for housing for Cape Town’s most vulnerable households is the single biggest challenge we are facing as a local government today. Our task is exacerbated by the unprecedented growth in the property market in areas close to key nodes of employment, and along public transport routes,” he said.

Outside the venue, Herron spoke to the group of residents about their concerns. Ling also apologised on behalf of the protesters who were involved in the earlier disruption outside the conference room.

Referring to the Albert Road court case, Ling said: “We have approached the council for a report on possible places to live. Today you mentioned social housing being implemented. We are in the process of being evicted and we don’t know where we stand. What happens to us if we are evicted? When will we see infrastructure?”

Herron responded: “The affordable housing will be rentals driven by the private sector. For those of you who face almost immediate eviction, we need to assess whether you qualify for social housing.”

“We can assist the family and make offers available in the current social housing developments in Steenberg and Milnerton. If you’re moved to the social housing for immediate assistance, you can then apply to come back to Woodstock once those buildings have been completed. Those who don’t qualify will be accommodated in our transitional housing space in Wolwerivier, but we are looking to develop transitional housing in a number of areas across the city.”

Herron assured residents that the city would be providing a report to the court with options for alternative accommodation for the Albert Road group.

“This is not going to happen over night. We are catching up with work that hasn’t happened in the past ... I understand your frustration. I’ve been doing this for five months now and I’m trying to catch up,” he said.

Reclaim the City’s Ntombi Sambu asked Herron: “Have you been to Wolwerivier? What will happen to those in the transitional housing who don’t qualify? How will they travel into the city for their livelihoods?”

To which he responded: “The Constitutional Court last week found [Wolwerivier] to be acceptable as transitional housing. We are still looking for other sites so people will have more of a choice.”



Reclaim the City supporters picket during the fourth annual Affordable Housing Africa Conference in Cape Town. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks

## Welcome change

In a press release following the event, Reclaim the City said it welcomed the plans: “They are a step in the right direction and Councillor Brett Herron should be commended for showing the leadership this city requires.”

The statement continued: “But we are also cautious. We have heard many promises before only to be disappointed. What we need now is firm deadlines and implementation. Until that happens, many of us still face evictions and removal to relocation camps. We are clear in saying ‘We won’t go!’ Nobody is moving from their homes to camps like Wolwerivier. We will resist to stay in our homes until we see bricks, front doors and keys!”

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