

Parkwood housing project gets underway

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A team of engineers, planners and designers is to visit seven sites next week where social and affordable housing will be built for backyarders in Parkwood and surrounding areas.



Housing MEC Bonginkosi Madikizela addressed Parkwood residents on progress with the plan to build affordable housing. Photo: Barbara Maregele

This was announced by Western Cape MEC for human settlements Bonginkosi Madikizela at a joint meeting with residents and the City of Cape Town on Wednesday afternoon, 1 August. This follows a meeting on 19 June, when government officials revealed that at least [seven sites](#) in Cape Town's southern suburbs, including Parkwood, Lotus River and Retreat, had been identified for possible social and affordable housing.

Madikizela said, "The last time I was here, emotions were high and people were very angry. But leadership has managed to calm people down ... When people are demonstrating, and they have genuine reasons, I have a responsibility to respond."

Parkwood protest

In May, hundreds of [Parkwood backyarders](#) protested over the lack of housing in the area that has resulted in overcrowding. Backyarders have also complained that rents, electricity and water costs are high in the city's rental flats.

The protest [erupted in violence](#) when the group erecting shacks on vacant land in the area clashed with police. During a visit to Parkwood the same week, Madikizela assured residents that he would return with a "lasting solution" to the housing problems in the area.

While many of the backyarders in the hall on Wednesday applauded as several of the professional team's representatives were introduced, some residents of Fairways - which borders Parkwood - were not as pleased.

Impact on property values

A Fairways resident, who asked not to be named, told GroundUp that “people who live on our side are worried that the construction of low-cost or affordable housing will have a negative impact on the property values of our houses”.

Kim Abrahams said he owned three properties in the area and was representing the ratepayers’ association. Abrahams questioned Madikizela on what government would do to prevent people moving into backyards in the new houses.

“I bet this will happen a few months after those houses go up. You will then have the same problem of backyarders. The people on this side (Fairways) work just as hard as anyone else. We pay a lot of rates this side, we cannot be milked all the time to benefit other people,” he said.

He suggested a community hall be built on an open field between Fairways and Parkwood instead of housing. “They are only building these houses to get the coloured vote again,” Abrahams said.

In response, Madikizela said, “We do have an obligation to assist those people who have fallen through the cracks because of our history. When you see those things happening, why do you fold your arms and do nothing?”

He added that government was mindful of the concerns raised around property values. Households earning up to R15,000 a month would be housed closest to the private houses and lower-income houses further away, Madikizela said.

Local labour

Parkwood resident Rashaad Allen of the Foundation for Positive Change asked if unemployed people from Parkwood would be employed by contractors when construction started. Another person in the hall questioned whether the housing project was an election ploy.

Madikizela said, “It’s compulsory for people from the area to be employed. When it comes to the labour intensive process, subcontractors from the area will be chosen, but we must also make sure those people know what they are doing. The fact that we have already employed the team of professionals means we have already started with the project.”

He said the decision to assist the Parkwood community “was not taken lightly”.

After visiting some of the backyarders’ homes, he had seen “compelling” reasons to assist the group immediately. “We don’t respond like this to every person who resorts to the street. I saw for myself the shocking conditions. These people... have been on the housing waiting list for 20 or 30 years.”

After the meeting, Yumna Adams, a member of the Parkwood steering committee, said they were happy with progress. “We know these things take time. We are just praying this works out because our people really need these houses,” she said.

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