



■ **Left:** Former domestic worker and spokeswoman for Reclaim the City in Sea Point, Elizabeth Ngqoboke gave a thought-provoking testimonial.

■ **Right:** Julian Sendin of Ndifuna Ukwazi; property developer Martin Kearns; spatial planner and urban designer Barbara Southworth and CEO of Communicare Anthea Houston fleshed out the various aspects of social housing.



Experts explain benefits of social housing

MIKA WILLIAMS

Issues around social housing and the future of the Tafelberg site in Sea Point were thrashed out by residents and affected parties at an information session hosted by Ndifuna Ukwazi and Reclaim the City on Thursday January 19.

Reclaim the City has organised a #Tafelberg270 rally on Sunday January 29, from noon until 5pm, on the Sea Point Promenade to demand affordable housing for working class, black and coloured people in the inner city (“I want to go back to Sea Point,” Atlantic Sun, January 19).

The rally is planned a day before the Department of Public Works closes its comment period on the proposed financial model for 270 social housing units on the Tafelberg site.

Social media was abuzz during the run-up to the meeting last Thursday over an email sent out by Samuel Seeff, head of Seeff Properties and chairman of the Western Province Priorities and Planning Board, along with Lance Katz, vice-chairman of the Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School (PJJDs) urging the Jewish community not to attend the meeting.

Panellists, Julian Sendin of Ndifuna Ukwazi; property developer Martin Kearns; spatial planner and urban designer for 20 years in both local government and the private sector Barbara Southworth and CEO of Communicare Anthea Houston, addressed a capacity crowd at the Methodist Church in Sea Point about the feasibility study currently open for public comment; the impact of social housing and the cost of developing the Tafelberg site.

The meeting was chaired by former City of Cape Town manager Andrew Boraine, who said the country had undergone

a painfully slow land restitution process and that there had been “no new” affordable housing in Cape Town since 1994.

He described Cape Town as an “inside out” city as most of the city’s working class had to travel far distances, at a substantial cost, to reach economic opportunities.

Julian Sendin of Ndifuna Ukwazi echoed Mr Boraine’s sentiments.

“Cape Town has a housing crisis with close to 47 000 families still waiting for houses, and if the City wants to address it in an acceptable timeframe, it’s going to require them to operate at a 400 percent service-delivery rate – which is highly unlikely,” he said.

Mr Sendin said the construction of 270 flats was possible on the Tafelberg site which is about the size of two rugby fields.

“Once this site is sold off to the private sector, it would be lost forever. This is the last piece of publicly-owned land in Sea Point,” he added.

Former domestic worker and spokeswoman for Reclaim the City in Sea Point, Elizabeth Ngqoboke, gave a testimonial of her 22-year experience of living and working in the area.

“It’s not that we want to live in luxury apartment blocks; we just want affordable housing where our families can stay with us.

“We want our voices to be heard in this area. We as domestic workers have taken care of households in Sea Point for years, yet it is so difficult for us to speak to our bosses about the issues we have.

“Our employers say we are part and parcel of their families but we are not treated that way,” she said.

Ms Ngqoboke, who is now working as a carer in the area, said another impact of living in cramped servant quarters was that their relationships with their families were affected.

“Many families of domestic workers become homeless and many of the homeless children around the Atlantic Seaboard and the Cape Town CBD are sometimes a result of them not being able to stay with their parent or parents who work as either carers or domestic workers in Sea Point,” she said.

She also spoke about the sexual harassment that many domestic workers have to endure at the hands of their male employers.

“I want to tell the housewives of Sea Point that they don’t always know what is happening in their households when they are not at home. People really don’t know what is happening behind the rosy doors of homes in this area.”

Ms Ngqoboke urged people to unite and fight for low-cost social housing in the area.

Property developer Michael Kearns said affordable social housing can work, which had been shown in the UK in cities like London and Dublin. “I see parallels between Dublin and Cape Town. I grew up in Dublin and it took us close to 100 years to get it right. Social housing is seen as a type of ‘swearword’ but it can work and it has been proven to work.

“The way to make any city work is to have people living in it. All we need to do is conceptualise a sustainable model for his type of housing.”

CEO for Communicare Anthea Houston said the City was struggling with complex social housing issues and that a solution should be found.

Communicare is a social enterprise that aims to provide affordable housing comprising of gap and social housing for people who have a combined household income of between R3 500 and R7500 a month.

“Domestic workers have long been the

invisible community in Sea Point. The Tafelberg site is prime property for regulated and affordable social housing and just like the development we did in the affluent suburb of Bothasig which worked; this project can work.

“Following that development there was a slight drop in property prices in the area but it soon went back to normal. I don’t think existing homeowners in Sea Point have anything to worry about,” she said.

Spatial planner and urban designer Barbara Southworth of Sea Point said the Tafelberg site can work as a mixed-use development.

“What is the alternative? The City cannot continue to place people 20 to 30 kilometres from the economic hub. It will only add to more congestion on the roads and additional money being ploughed into transport infrastructure.

“Low-density and mono-functional spaces don’t work anymore. We cannot carry-on in the way that we have been.”

Ms Southworth said government needed to start looking at the bigger picture. “Cities like Amsterdam and London have already adopted the social, mixed-use housing model. It is certainly possible with the right design,” she said.

At a press conference held last week to introduce her restructured mayoral committee, Mayor Patricia de Lille pledged to address the legacy of apartheid spatial planning in the city.