

# Clash over Tafelberg sale

**Siyavuya Mzantsi**

THE Western Cape government and the National Treasury are at loggerheads over the decision to sell the vacant Tafelberg site in Sea Point for private use instead of using it for affordable housing.

The gloves came off between the two, with the Treasury lashing out at the province for its decision to sell the Tafelberg site in Sea Point, for R135 million, to the Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School, saying it seems inappropriate – particularly during a period of public sector spending restraint.

The Treasury's director-general wrote to the provincial government expressing concern over the decision.

In response to the letter, the Western Cape government denied that any regulatory, legislative, or policy framework was breached in taking the decision to sell the property.

It was the provincial executive's view that it would be irrational and unreasonable to have regard only for the property when assessing whether its current housing and development programmes were meeting

its constitutional and legislative obligation specifically in relation to affordable housing.

Civil Rights organisation Ndifuna Ukwazi supported Reclaim the City in calls for the land to be used for affordable housing for the poor, accusing Premier Helen Zille lying in her resolution when she said the provincial government was under a direct instruction from the National Treasury to sell assets to raise revenue.

While the Treasury believed the decision was in contrast to repeated government policy statements on the importance of reintegrating urban areas in the country, Zille's spokesperson, Michael Mpofu, hit back yesterday, saying it seemed the Treasury relied on media coverage for its current view that the decision made by the provincial executive was "specifically based on the National Treasury directives for 'fiscal austerity' and revenue enhancement".

His response was to a statement the Treasury issued, indicating that there were no "significant obstacles" to using available national housing subsidies, including for social housing, on the Tafelberg site.

Mpofu said the decision was taken following the outcome of the national salary negotiations, that left the provincial government in a "fiscal crisis". This could not be bridged by the national government, he said.

He said the Treasury instructed the provincial government to investigate how and where their budgets could be reprioritised to accommodate the (new) baseline reductions.

Mpofu said the Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works was requested to find ways to leverage some of its existing property assets to help balance the budget, in accordance with Treasury instructions.

"We took great care, despite the fiscal crisis, to adopt a holistic approach to the utilisation of provincial assets so that we did not only pursue the single objective of balancing our budget. We consider prospects for achieving different government priorities on a site-by-site basis," said Mpofu.

He said the province hoped the cause of affordable housing would not be distorted for the "benefit of political or other agendas".