

Neighbourhood watch calls for a more ‘collaborative’ approach

From page 1

“These people are becoming increasingly comfortable in this space. They are removed, but moments later, you spot the same people moving new materials to that space. It’s as if their spots are booked on this pavement and in this space. They have become so used to being booted out of here, that some of them know exactly where to go to find new materials to build a new structure, and then we are back at square one.” The woman said she had reported the camp several times to the police and the City of Cape Town.

There appear to be about 10 shelters under the bridge, but they are joined together and it’s not clear precisely how many people are staying there.

Ward councillor Dave Bryant said he “regularly received” complaints about the dwellings that contravened the City’s Streets, Public Places and Prevention of Noise Nuisances By-law.

“The City does not remove structures in their entirety during smaller operations due to capacity constraints, instead the structures are broken down. During larger operations, when trucks are available, the material can also be removed,” he said. Mr Bryant said he and fellow councillor Brandon Golding had pooled ward funding to buy a flat-bed trailer to use for these operations and they hoped to start using it next month.

“This will allow for excess building materials to be removed more regularly during operations. A CCTV camera has also been installed at the bridge and will go live later this month. This camera will be monitored 24/7 going forward and will also allow enforcement staff to make use of footage of criminal activity in the area for SAPS investigations,” Mr Bryant said.

Cape Town Central police station spokesman, Captain Ezra October, said the Upper District Six Neighbourhood Watch (DSNW), among others, complained regularly about the camp and its surroundings, and officers had made arrests for drugs and outstanding warrants there. “But, police do not remove structures because we do not want to violate the persons’ rights to dignity.”

Residents should call City law enforcement, he said, to report illegal structures.

DSNW secretary, Anthea Bredenkamp, said law enforcement, SAPS, social services and the City’s land invasion unit needed to work together to solve the problem.

“We believe that a combined effort over a period of time will clear this area,” she said.

Immigration officials should be involved because there were many foreign nationals sleeping in surrounding fields.

“We fear that without the proper interventions, the surrounding fields will cultivate squatter

camp. This should therefore be an area of deep concern for the City of Cape Town as well as the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, as the fields in question are earmarked for restitution.”

JP Smith, Mayco member for safety and security; and social services, said the City had received complaints about illegal structures, fires, noise nuisance and substance abuse at the site.

“The area is included in the City’s weekly operations with law enforcement, where social services are offered to the street people in this area including access to shelters, assistance with securing identity documents, Expanded Public Works Programme opportunities and relocation and reunification with their families. These services are accepted on a voluntary basis,” he said.

However, the City’s social services department “cannot force street people to accept these services”, and, indeed, 90% of the time, he said, the help offered was refused.

“The City has no control over the movement and behaviour of homeless, less fortunate individuals who persist in visiting the area. It is important to bear in mind that these individuals have constitutionally enshrined rights to freedom of movement. Despite the City’s efforts, individuals repeatedly return. The limitations in the powers of the peace officers employed by the City in Metro police and law enforcement, combined with the legislative shortcomings and weaknesses in the criminal justice system, make it difficult to achieve the outcomes expected by the public through policing and prosecution.”

There would be a meeting soon to “agree on a way forward” but he couldn’t say when.

Those giving to the homeless directly – instead of to charities and shelters – only helped to keep them on the streets, he warned.

● All street people matters or queries can be logged though the City’s call centre at 021 480 7700 from a cellphone or 107 from a landline, or call the City’s toll-free number at 0800 872 201.



■ The mini camp developing under the Nelson Mandela Boulevard has become a major headache for the Woodstock community.