

Swanky Cape pads for ministers at R1,200 rent

And directors-general will pay just R75 to live it up in luxury at taxpayers’ expense

By **PHILANI NOMBEMBE**

● Cabinet ministers will pay just R1,200 a month to live in lavishly renovated multimillion-rand apartments in Cape Town, which experts have criticised as wasteful and a slap in the face for taxpayers buckling under fuel price hikes and a spiralling cost of living.

Residents will enjoy top-quality imported finishes, a lap pool and breathtaking mountain views for a fraction of the cost of even the humblest student room in the suburb of Rosebank, the long-term home of Western Cape premier Helen Zille.

The block of 29 flats was handed over by builders this month after a R100m-plus two-year renovation. The flats will house ministers, their deputies and senior officials, with directors-general set to pay just R75 a month in rent.

On average, the 29 flats were renovated for R3.6m each, and photographs posted on the website of architects Ngonyama Okpanum & Associates show sleek finishes including bamboo floors, frameless showers and exposed-brick walls.

According to the department of public works, the renovations cost R103m, but spokesperson Thami Mchunu said: “We are still busy with the final account.”

Mchunu told the Sunday Times the 29 flats, most of which have two bedrooms, were “primary residences for the directors-general. If ministers or deputy ministers are accommodated here, they are also entitled to another residence in Pretoria.”

Ministers, who earn R200,000 a month, would pay R1,200.82 to rent one of the flats, deputies earning R165,000 would be charged R988.90 and directors-general R75.

Property analyst Erwin Rode said the department had overcapitalised on the renovations. “That’s a lot of money, unless you want to install gold-plated toilet seats and gold taps,” he said.

“You don’t use that kind of money unless you are the Queen of England. Prima facie, it looks wasteful. The question is whether there is something behind the wasteful expenditure.”

Two building industry experts echoed Rode’s sentiments. They said the government could easily have used more affordable, locally manufactured materials.

The experts, who requested anonymity because they do business with the government, said HulaBond exterior cladding,

which cost R4m, and windows with a quoted price of R9m (R310,000 a flat), were unnecessary.

The Marmoran paint on the exterior of the building, Rygersdal, cost more than R2m and was “only visible within 20m of the building”. It cost 30% more than “normal paint”, they said.

Cape Town mayor Patricia de Lille described the level of the renovation and the bargain-basement rentals as “ridiculous”, pointing out that City of Cape Town employees who live in council property pay market-related rentals.

“When people don’t pay for themselves, they go for the most expensive,” said De Lille. “This is not their money, it is the taxpayers’ money. There is absolutely no modesty here, considering how many houses could have been built with that money.”

During her term as mayor, which ends on October 31, De Lille has prioritised the reversal of apartheid spatial planning by encour-

Minister wants his ‘liar’ DG removed

Public works minister Thulas Nxesi has asked President Cyril Ramaphosa to intervene in the feud between him and director-general Sam Vukela, amid warnings that keeping Vukela in the post could “return the department to the days of the Nkandla scandal”. Nxesi wrote to Ramaphosa last month, asking him to “redeploy” Vukela because he was “insubordinate and a liar”. But Vukela has hit back, saying Nxesi was the one lying to the president as he wanted him out because he had refused to hire Nxesi’s friend.

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aging the provision of affordable housing in central areas, but, she said, government departments had refused to help.

“These state-owned buildings should be used to bring about affordability and integration,” she told the Sunday Times.

“I have written open letters to former president Jacob Zuma, urging him to engage with public works to release land for affordable housing in the city. They don’t want to release the land. Integration will not happen through the market, it can only happen if we use publicly owned land.”

Michael Holenstein, spokesperson for the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse, said the public-spending watchdog was considering investigating what he termed an abuse of taxpayers’ money.

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