

## HOUSING CRISIS

# Call for the release of land

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PRESSURE is mounting on the government to release three military-owned sites to address the rising housing crisis in the city.

Several civic organisations working on land and housing as well as community activists held a public meeting this week to discuss various ways in which the parcels of land could be released and their development potential. The organisations included the Community Organisation Resource Centre, the Development Action Group, the Legal Resources Centre and Ndifuna Ukwazi.

The meeting came a few months after a submission was made to the Presidency to urge the national government to release the Youngsfield, Wingfield and Ysterplaat land parcels.

Development Action Group's director Adi Kumari described the meeting as historic as it brought together various participants to map out the future of the significant land.

"Some intensive planning work has gone into mapping out the development future of this land. We have shared the plans with various government structures including the City of Cape Town and the public works minister who have expressed their support," Kumari said.

He said if the three parcels of land were to be developed it would help solve 30% of the housing backlog in Cape Town as these could yield between 40 000 and 70 000 houses.

Senior researcher at Ndifuna Ukwazi Michael Clark said legal mechanisms and a policy framework existed that would allow for the land to be developed for housing needs.

"All that is required is political will to implement these mechanisms effectively," Clark said.

He cited the Government Immovable Asset Management Act and the State Land Disposal Act as some of the mechanisms which he said could be invoked to release the parcels of land.

"In the extreme circumstances, expropriation of the land could be used," Clark said.

At least 67 000 affordable housing units for low-income families could be built on the three parcels of land, according to the organisations.

DAG's project officer Ryan Fester said the three sites were 10km away from the Cape Town CBD and to amenities. They were also close to existing economic and industrial nodes, offering considerable employment opportunities and implying less money spent on travel – often a disproportionately heavy strain on poor households' budgets.

The organisations called for an incremental development approach to target different types of housing

units for different income groups.

Ndifuna Ukwazi director Mandisa Shandu said the socio-economic fallout from Covid-19 had left many people homeless. She said Cape Town's history of dispossession as a result of colonialism and apartheid resulted in inequality and an exclusionary nature of housing.

The average sale price for a home in Cape Town was the highest in South Africa.

In 2019, the city registered the 17th highest year-on-year property inflation in the world at 9.1% (higher than any other city in Africa).

According to 2011 census data, 75% of households in Cape Town earned less than R18 000 a month and most people could not afford to pay more than R3 000 a month in rent or R281 000 to own property.

In 2019, Statistics SA found that the median income of a South African was R13 546 per year, or just R1 129 per month. This meant that rent and home-ownership in well-located areas close to Cape Town's economic nodes was out of reach for most middle-class South Africans, let alone the poor or working class.

In 2019, the Western Cape provincial housing backlog stood at over 600 000 families, of which 365 000 were in the City of Cape Town alone.

"If the state is serious about addressing the persistent urban spatial disparities that plague Cape Town and diminishing the disproportionate economic and health consequences of the pandemic, all levels of government need to pro-actively unlock and release well-located public land for the development of affordable housing as a matter of urgency," the submission to the Presidency said.

If the land was to be developed, it would help create inclusive, integrated, vibrant and resilient neighbourhoods, the organisations said.

This, they said, would help create racially, economically, socially, culturally, and gender-inclusive communities.

Public Works Minister Patricia de Lille called for the release of the land for human settlements when she was mayor of Cape Town.

The minister's spokesperson Zara Nicholson said in January De Lille undertook a joint site visit with the ministers of defence and rural development and land reform to see how much of the land was being utilised by the Department of Defence.

"Following the visit, the three ministers made recommendations to the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Land Reform regarding the potential use of the land.

"The IMC has agreed that the minister of defence must prepare a Cabinet memorandum to make recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration," Nicholson said.