

KENILWORTH

'What a waste of resources'



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Most Hollywood movies would have you believe that there is usually a sinister reason why a once beautiful home is left abandoned for decades, but in the case of the empty-standing property at 15 Tennant Road in Kenilworth, PR councillor Mikhail Manuel claims something far more alarming is at play – the alleged mismanagement of government resources.

Situated in a suburb where the surrounding houses sell for approximately R8 million on the private property market, 15 Tennant Road has allegedly been left to go to ruin for more than 25 years. A bit of history lesson is required to understand how it all began. Prior to 1994, the property in question was owned by the former TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei) – territories, or homelands, set aside by the National Party administration for black inhabitants as part of the apartheid policy. The dwelling was used by government officials from the TBVC states.

According to Wikipedia, under the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970, the then government stripped black South Africans of their citizenship, depriving them of their few remaining political and civil rights, and declared them to be citizens of these homelands (also referred to as Bantustans).

With the end of apartheid in 1994, the Bantustans were abolished and the nine provinces as we know them today were established. About a year later, the house was transferred to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to be used for “government purposes”.

Last month Manuel, together with Ward 59 councillor Ian Iversen and representatives of law enforcement did an inspection of the property in response to residents’ ongoing complaints about its derelict state. He explains that since 1995, vagrants have slowly but surely been demolishing the house, removing windows, doors, and even bricks.

“The property also has a pool in the back which intermittently turns into a swamp. Neighbours complain it is a health hazard and a breeding spot for mosquitoes. Every now and then the City of Cape Town steps



The property located at 15 Tennant Road in Kenilworth has reportedly stood empty for more than 25 years.

in and pumps the water out, but it just fills back up with the winter rains. It is not a sustainable solution,” Manuel says.

During the inspection, the councillors still found the house to be dilapidated and unoccupied, but at least it was no longer unguarded. Four South African National Defence Force soldiers are now stationed at the property on a 12-hour rotational watch.

Following an investigation by the City, the Department of Public Works was issued with recommended remedial measures to secure the property and to prevent illegal occupation.

Wayne Dyason, spokesperson for law enforcement, says the owner complied with these measures “which made them compliant in terms of the Problem Building By-law 2010”.

Iversen adds the municipal rates (about R2 000 per month) are paid each and every month by the national government “which is also adding to the financial loss being experienced by tax payers”.

Manuel says, with the property’s rates and levies up to date, and with the City’s condi-

tions met, there is little else that can be done from the City’s side.

“But what a huge waste of resources; to have four soldiers stationed there and to consistently pay rates and levies on a property that has not been used for 27 years,” he says.

With the house located in a very high-value area, Manuel believes it would be a far better use of resources if the department just sold the property.

Wondering why the property has not been occupied, or sold, in the past, *People’s Post* reached out to the department.

According to Thami Mchunu, the department’s national spokesperson, the house was handed over to the department in a dilapidated state.

“It was found to be unsuitable for the intended purpose, for example, ‘prestige’ accommodation. The property was to be renovated, however, budget constraints did not permit for the intended renovations.”

Mchunu adds that the department did try a couple of times to dispose of the property via an open tender, but no suitable offers

were received.

“The property was then let out voetstoots to a private individual from 1999 to 2002, and another tenant from 2008 to 2011. At the end of the lease, a decision was made to reserve the property for government purposes. In 2019, it was handed over to the Department of Defence,” he says.

As to the allegation that allowing the property to stand empty for so many years is a mismanagement of government resources, Mchunu says the department is the custodian of state-owned property and its mandate is to provide accommodation to other departments.

“Therefore, it is inevitable that some properties will remain vacant for prolonged periods, as such they must be kept for future needs of the government. In this instance, the property in question has since been allocated to the Department of Defence.”

Chances of the property being put up for sale in the near future also seem slim. According to Mchunu, the Department of Defence is in the process of securing funding to renovate the house.