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**I USED to spend my Saturdays walking around the Cape Town city centre for fun.**

I would take the train into town and either meet a friend outside the cinema in the Golden Acre, or just explore on my own.

I knew every nook and cranny of the Gardens, and every backstreet shop from Greenmarket Square to the Good Hope Centre and across the station bridge to Culemborg and into the docks.

I would walk late into the day, sometimes all the way to Sea Point. Often I would go catch a movie at the dingy Roxy Cinema behind City Hall, grab a chip roll at Shop No 7 on the Parade, before catching the last train back home.

I loved every minute of it; loved moving around my city so freely; loved the people, the different sights, sounds and smells around every corner.

Why am I reminiscing about this? Well, because years later I was living in Joburg and witnessed the beginnings of the urban decay that is now evident here in my city.

#### Late

It started out in almost exactly the same way – authorities ignoring the slow increase in the number of homeless people and then, suddenly waking up, far too late.

Joburg now has more than 15 000 homeless living on the city streets and I fear we are heading in the same direction.

The City of Cape Town is now getting ready to do something about the unsightly informal settlement that has been growing outside the Castle, without any meaningful intervention from the Department of Public Works, which administers the site.

But why the sudden urgency, and why only now? And what about all the other smaller informal settlements that have sprung up all over the CBD over the past three years?

It's not like this is a recent development. I first wrote about this more than two years ago when I personally counted

more than a dozen of these communities in a 10km radius between Three Anchor Bay and Observatory.

There's the community that has been fenced in next to the Sea Point tennis courts, followed by another in the centre island a little further along.

There's one as you go onto the elevated freeways and two perched on and beside the unfinished bridge.

There's one spilling into the Hertzog Boulevard intersection as you enter town, along Buitengracht, the N1 outbound, below Signal Hill on upper Strand Street, to mention just a few.

The point is, there are far too many to ignore, or for it to go unnoticed.

Obviously something needs to be done about the homeless people outside the Castle, but it should apply to the entire homeless issue across the city,

the province and the country.

But confining the conversation to the metro, whatever the solution is, it must be applied uniformly. However there is a precedent of failure.

Moving the homeless elsewhere at the moment, only for them to return a few days later, is clearly not the answer, as it doesn't address the root cause of the problem.

It's clear that the terrible state of the economy is affecting some worse than others, which means the solution calls for a multi-pronged approach with several interventions, of which housing is only one.

A long-term solution requires commitment to a long game. So let's start with the obvious challenges that are most often thrown out by critics – the instances of substance abuse and mental illness.

The authorities must allocate

psychological help to those afflicted on an ongoing basis, followed by dedicated hygiene facilities.

We cannot stand by while our fellow citizens are forced to live in and among their own waste, a stone's throw away from the municipal seat of power.

Addressing these basic issues will help create purpose and restore dignity. And the truth is, no dignified person wants to live in squalor on the streets.

It will take time to reach the tipping point when moving them to decent housing will actually make a difference. Maybe then we can start freely walking through our city again.

Because it can't be that on the one hand, we celebrate being voted the most beautiful city in the world, while on the other, some of our fellow Capetonians are surviving on occasional handouts.

# SHACK ATTACK

**Solution to moving the homeless masses is restoring their dignity**

