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Woodstock family in a housing nightmare

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LAND and housing advocacy group Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) is assisting a Woodstock family currently facing eviction, in challenging the City's issuance of emergency housing kits and the constitutionality of this, calling for emergency accommodation to be offered instead.

The family wishes to remain anonymous, having been occupying the home for 25 years. They have been living at the building since 1998, when their now deceased father was the caretaker of the building. The previous owners allowed the father to live on the property with his family in lieu of a salary.

The building was sold for R35 million to the Woodstock Hub in 2018,

which now intends to develop the building. According to NU, the City is constitutionally mandated to provide emergency accommodation in terms of the Emergency Housing Programme (EHP) to the family of low-income earners who do not have any other alternative housing.

The family is asking the court to declare the policy of issuing emergency housing materials without access to land unconstitutional, and for the City with provincial and national governments to investigate using publicly owned buildings and land for emergency housing, particularly public land within 10km of Woodstock.

NU said it was a myth that there was a shortage of land to address the housing crisis. NU political organiser Buhle Booi said: "Shifting the burden of alternative accommodation back

on to evictees perpetuates the notion that the state does not have land to accommodate the poor. Through our research we have ascertained that the state has a vast property portfolio of vacant and underutilised land. Land ultimately should be for the people – it should be utilised for its social value."

The City said the matter was currently pending before the Western Cape High Court and that it would comment in detail at a later stage.

In addition to the City, other respondents named in the application include the Public Works and Infrastructure minister; MEC for Transport and Public Works; Human Settlements minister; Infrastructure MEC; and Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development minister.

"To note, the City's offer of an emergency housing kit was followed

by an offer from the owner of the unlawfully occupied building of either R100 000 or six months alternative accommodation in a different building in Woodstock. These offers have been rejected by the occupants," the City said.

The applicant's attorney, Dr Jonty Cogger, said the offer of R100 000 would be a temporary fix considering the high cost of housing, transport, and living expenses.

"While our clients are under no illusion that a private entity is responsible for their housing needs, they need to be wary of accepting a short-term solution that will inevitably see them homeless after six months. The City has the responsibility to intervene, not a private landowner, to provide a longer-term solution, which it has failed to do."

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