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Officials demolish nine-room house near affluent Mthatha suburb

ILLEGAL STRUCTURE: Armed police keep watch as the Southridge Park house is demolished on Wednesday by King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality.
PICTURES: LULAMILE FENI

SIKHO NTSHOBANE

Any dwelling built illegally on municipal land will be demolished, as one Mthatha resident has learnt to his bitter cost.

This was the clear warning given to land-grabbers by King Sabata Dalindyebo (KSD) municipal bosses on Wednesday after they sent a backhoe to tear down a posh, nine-room house built near the affluent suburb of Southridge in Mthatha.

The almost-completed house is one of many that have sprung up on vacant land alongside Nelson Mandela Drive on the busy N2.

The house was demolished after the sheriff of the Mthatha high court, Ntuso Majokweni, backed by armed police and KSD municipal law enforcement officers, gave the go-ahead on Wednesday morning.

KSD acting mayor Nkosi Mkhanyiseli Dudumayo, who oversaw the demolition, said the local municipality had recently been granted a court order to forge ahead with the demolition.

The owner had been given 10 days after the court order to comply and demolish the house, but had failed to do so.

"We had to follow proper processes," Dudumayo said.

"The land in question is part of our assets as the municipality."

"Any land in KSD must be protected for the benefit of the people of this area."

According to a statement sent to the Dispatch by the municipality, the owner of the house, whose name is known to the Dispatch, was served with a contravention notice on July 15 2021.

He then visited the municipal building control inspectorate, where the process was outlined and proof of ownership was requested.

However, he failed to provide this, as well as municipality approved building plans.

The matter was then referred to the municipality's legal services for action, and a court order for the demolition of the house was sought.

The Dispatch has been unable to reach the homeowner.

Dudumayo said the land in question formed part of 430 vacant sites donated by the public works department to KSD in 2017 for the construction of the Southridge Park extension 10

township.

The land was officially registered under the municipality's ownership in 2019.

As per the conditions of the donation, the municipality was required to transfer the sites to people who had bought sites from the SBK Trust.

About 220 sites will be transferred to individuals.

Over the years, the municipality has battled land grabs in and around Mthatha.

In 2014, it was reported that at least 100ha of vacant municipal land in different parts of the city — some earmarked for housing development — had been invaded by the so-called land-grabbers.

Dudumayo said most of the illegally occupied land was along the R61.

The municipality was now in the process of reclaiming all illegally invaded land through the courts.

"We can't allow lawlessness," Mthatha Ratepayers & Residents Association spokesperson Madyibi Ngxekana gave the municipality the thumbs-up for its action, saying most land-grabbers did not pay for municipal services after building houses, even if they were next to a rate-paying area.

He said it was not the first time land-grabbers had tried to build houses on prime land next to Southridge Park.

Eastern Cape Chamber of Business president Vuyisile Ntlabati said many people in Mthatha had been scammed out of their savings by what was believed to be a well-orchestrated syndicate selling vacant land it did not own to desperate people wanting their own houses.

There were rumours that some well-educated people, including lawyers, were part of the syndicate.

However, Ntlabati also lashed out at the municipality for opening a window of opportunity to criminals to prey on the desperation of the people.

"Some of these victims genuinely want to acquire land and they often think the sale of the plots is legal."

"The municipality has building inspectors."

"These illegal houses should be detected while they are still at the foundation stage and demolished right away."

The land ... was donated by public works for Southridge Park ext 10



DOWN IT GOES: This house near one of Mthatha's affluent suburbs was illegally built on prime land.

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