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# Residents sign petition to reclaim their wards

Signatories want municipality to clean up hijacked buildings

TAMMY FRAY

In an endeavour to reclaim their neighbourhoods, residents of Buffalo City are joining forces to submit a petition to the municipality to address the growing concerns regarding abandoned and hijacked buildings.

The petition, backed by more than 350 concerned residents, seeks to push local authorities to take action against the deteriorating properties that have become magnets for vagrants and criminal activities.

The petition will be handed over by ward councillor Jason McDowell at the end of the month.

The petitioners, including residents living in areas including Vincent, Nahoon, Stirling, and Bonnie Doon, have expressed several concerns about the proliferation of vagrants and crime, sewage issues, illegal dumping, overgrown properties, infestations of rats and mosquitoes and a decline in property values.

McDowell said: "The petition expects the municipality to compel property owners to make their properties safe and clean. If owners fail to act, the municipality should take action and charge the property owner via their account."

The petition prompts the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCM) to respond to the petition within a month and convene a meeting with the petitioners; to ensure the enforcement of the dilapidated buildings bylaw and empower BCM to fine property owners who neglect their properties and ensure swift and decisive action.

If the petition goes unanswered, the residents plan to escalate the matter by submitting a notice of question to the spatial planning directorate and public safety directorate. This notice will then be deliberated in portfolio meetings and eventually brought before council.

One of the buildings highlighted on the petition is the hijacked Northdene Complex building on St James Road, which has been the subject of legal woes for the department of public works since 2018. The residents said the occupants

perpetuate substance abuse and noise pollution in the area.

Department spokesperson Sipokazi Ncanywa said they were using private attorneys to evict illegal occupants and working with BCM and Amathole to fast track cases.

One of the illegal occupants said they had been left with no other option due to rising unemployment in the city. She said they were not making use of any illegal connections and were contributing to the area by cleaning up the street and recycling waste while they are looking for formal employment.

Southernwood councillor Lorna Hali, said there were 15 dilapidated or abandoned buildings/plots in her ward, including a few from the Selborne and Berea. All had been reported and litigation was underway to compel the municipality to enforce bylaws.

Hali said: "My stance is to make my ward a less conducive place for vagrants and criminals.

"The municipality has a legal responsibility to enforce bylaws."

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said: "The metro has a database of dilapidated buildings and we regularly update council.

"We recently undertook a full-blown law enforcement operation where we engaged ward councillors with the most affected properties to ensure that we work towards solutions.

"There is a general trend of owners leaving the Eastern Cape who end up abandoning their buildings. Some may be late (owners who passed away) with no families to claim the estate.

"Through our bylaw on dilapidated, unsightly and abandoned buildings and structures, we have been able to take action on these properties and against the owners and where notices are ignored, we will act, trace and invoice those responsible," Ngwenya said.

"Currently, the list of dilapidated buildings in our database stands at 45 with most of these in the Quigney and Southernwood areas of east London while others are in Vincent, Bonnie Doon, Egoli, Nahoon, Berea and so forth.

"We have 13 matters that are before courts where the Centre For Local Community Rights and BCM are key interested parties," Ngwenya said.



Springbok supporters in their green and gold rugby shirts across the city on Bok Friday. Pictures: SUPPLIED and THEO JEPHTHA

## EL majorettes prepare for world champs

FAITH MTWANA

Four East London girls have made it into the official SA national majorettes team that will be traveling to Croatia for the MWF World Championships later this month.

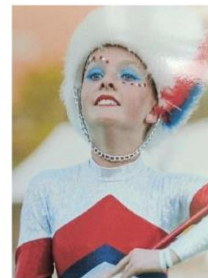
Onwabe Banjwa, Ilke de Lange, Khanya Simelane and Tariro Chinamasa will be joining the team of 39 girls who have been chosen to represent the country on the world stage.

Lilyfontein deputy principal Michael Cousins said that this opportunity was a great marketing tool for the majorettes.

"It sends the message that says if you are from the Eastern Cape and are prepared to work hard, drummers can take you to all the corners of the earth.



**MARCHING MAGIC:** National team majorettes Onwabe Banjwa and Ilke de Lange. Pictures: SUPPLIED



"Banjwa has proved this. She is a skillful, hardworking ambassador. My expectations are that this team will grow culturally in Croatia and represent our country with

distinction on the world stage," Cousins said.

Banjwa's love for majorettes and cheerleading started in 2014 when she used to watch the older Lilyfontein majorettes

practice. By the time she was in grade 1, she had already decided to try out for the squad.

"Being a majorette has taught me about dedication, commitment and hard work but mostly I have learned about sisterhood in the squad.

"I am excited and honoured to represent SA," Banjwa said. Banjwa's mother, Belinda Hill, said she was very proud of her, especially after watching her daughter's passion for the sport grow over the years.

De Lange joined majorettes after watching her two older sisters perform.

"I started when I was in grade 2, and this is a great opportunity because I am excited to meet majorettes from other countries.

"I hope I bring back a gold medal," De Lange said.