

Heritage approval granted for social housing development at old Woodstock hospital

By [Matthew Hirsch](#)

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Heritage approval for development of the old Woodstock Hospital, which is currently occupied by people in need of housing, has been welcomed by Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis. The city intends to build about 700 social housing units on the site.



Heritage approval has been granted to the City of Cape Town to proceed with its social housing development plans for Woodstock hospital, but it is currently already occupied by people in need of housing. Source: Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp

In a press release on Monday, the city stated the Woodstock Hospital, renamed Cissie Gool House by housing advocacy group Reclaim the City, will be the city's biggest inner city housing development.

The city said it would engage the current residents to “unlock social housing development in the shortest possible time”.

The city has previously moved to evict the approximately 900 residents of Cissie Gool House, and police have raided the property a number of times.

Hill-Lewis said heritage approval for social housing at Woodstock Hospital was “welcome progress towards our goal of faster affordable housing land release in well-located parts of the city”.

However, the city states the Woodstock Hospital was “subject to orchestrated building hijackings” by the Reclaim the City campaign in early 2017.

“With heritage approval secured, the main obstacle is now the ongoing unlawful occupation of the property,” states the city, adding that five other inner city land parcels for social housing have “reached critical land release milestones”.

These land parcels would accommodate over 1,300 social housing units. These are:

- Newmarket Street (Cape Town) – 200 social housing units
- Salt River Market (Salt River) – 215 social housing units
- Pickwick (Salt River) – 600 social housing units
- Fruit and Veg (CBD) – 180 social housing units
- Earl Street (Woodstock) – 160 social housing units

This comes after recent criticism from housing activists, who say that although land has been released for social housing, construction on these sites has been slow.

Acting Mayco Member for Human Settlements James Vos stated that the city was “determined to proceed with the planning and development of social housing, as well as taking engagements forward with unlawful occupants to unlock social housing development in the shortest possible time”.



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Eviction proceedings pending

Vos said eviction proceedings against people living in the Woodstock Hospital was pending, with the High Court having granted the city an order to survey residents and their individual circumstances.

Releasing a statement in response to the city’s announcement, housing advocacy organisation Ndifuna Ukwazi said it recognised and welcomed the city’s efforts to accelerate the release of land for social housing in the inner city and adjacent suburbs, but the recent progress was long overdue. The organisation stated the city had been promising to develop the land since 2017.

“It is dishonest that the city claims that the occupation is the biggest obstacle when it has failed to produce any inner-city affordable housing since the dawn of democracy. If anything, the recent progress should be partially attributed to activist pressure,” stated Ndifuna Ukwazi.

“It is only since activists increased the pressure that we have seen any progress. Several city projects with absolutely nothing to do with Cissie Gool House are on the verge of cancellation because of government failure, and they would do well to focus on this.”



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'City withdrew from engaging with residents'

Cissie Gool House resident and Reclaim the City leader Bevil Lucas said they have been committed to engaging with the city since 2017. However, Lucas said, the city withdrew from engaging with the residents. She said the city surveyed the number of residents and their personal circumstances in 2019, but there had been no follow up since then.

Lucas said a number of invitations to city officials, including Hill-Lewis, to engage with residents had not been taken up. "Recently we held a co-design exhibition at the Institute for Architecture in the city as a means to show what the ideas and thinking is taking place within the occupation. These initiatives are all part of our commitment to engage with the city. New commitments to engage with us are very welcome. We only hope it can be realised sooner rather than later."

Fellow Reclaim the City leader Karen Hendricks said the city had a tendency to shift blame. "We want to live in an inclusive city, and we believe that the commodification of housing undermines our constitutional vision of an equal and just city. Who is this development for? We have turned this abandoned building into a home for poor and working-class families who would otherwise have been rendered homeless."

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