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Bulletin

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CAPE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Freedom Day swim



PICTURE: ANDREA POWELL

Although the Llandudno to Camps Bay 9km Freedom Day swim was called off due to high swells, fun was had by all on the lawns above Camps Bay beach at the Freedom Day celebration on Saturday April 27. The annual swim raised awareness and funds for the Vista Nova School in Rondebosch, which provides remedial education to special needs children. Pictured is Lisa Cowling from Constantia who had some foamy fun on the water slide at the festivities.

New twist in housing row

VERNA VAN DIEMEN

The number of backyard dwellers in Westlake is in dispute – and has been for many years.

On Friday last week, Penny East, councillor for Ward 71, received about 700 names.

This was the latest attempt to get clarity after years of contested versions of how many people were left out when the residents of an informal settlement moved into one of the first Reconstruction and Development (RDP) projects.

The 700 names handed to Ms

East on Friday April 26 is in contrast to the 150 backyard dwellers listed in 1999, when Westlake was built.

However, having your name among the 700 is no guarantee of getting a house; it is only the first step in a long process of confirming who is entitled to housing.

But a community organisation is tired of waiting – and on Monday, May 6, they intend taking the matter to the Public Protector. Ms East received the 700 names after two meetings were held during April.

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Housing a 'contentious' issue

From page 1

The first was a public meeting at the Westlake Community Church hall on Thursday April 11, called by Westlake Community Forum, and chaired by Patrick Heynes.

About 250 people attended. The main item on the agenda was the need for houses for the backyard population. The next meeting, held on Monday April 15, was between representatives from the Westlake Homeowners' Association, the Westlake Hobbies Association, Ms East and Trevor Mitchell, from the City's human settlements department. It was agreed Ms East would draw up and deliver forms to Mondhi Phiri, of Westlake Hobbies Association, who would collect the necessary data, then Mr Mitchell would check the names and ID numbers against the City's housing database. But even this step has resulted in controversy. Mr Heynes, who chaired the first meeting, had lived in the informal settlement and he was one of the RDP house recipients. He serves as chair of the Westlake Community Church Trust, chairperson of The Westlake Homeowners' Association and Street Committee co-ordinator.

Back in 1999, according to a report ("March for more houses", Bulletin, November 20 2003) only 644 of the 700 houses that were promised in Phase 1 of a social development plan had been completed. About 100 protesters from Westlake marched from Westlake to Ou Kaapse Weg where they handed over a memorandum to City mayor representative Peter Loubser, acting director of housing administration for the South Peninsula Administration.

The land that residents claimed had been set aside for Phase 2, and another 55 houses, was mired in controversy. Unlike the "free" houses, provided to residents at the same price as the government subsidy of R22 000, the 55 houses would have cost an extra R40 000 - way out of the reach of the people who had been living in the informal settlements, the report said.

Mr Heynes said there were 750 families when the homes were built in 1999, but government had only allocated 600 subsidies. The remaining 150 families moved into backyards and shacks, and were promised their homes would later be built on a pocket of land in Westlake. However, he said, the developer sold the land so farmers from the area could build homes for their workers.

When the homes were built, Westlake backyard dwellers illegally occupied those houses in 2002.

Mr Heynes said the new houses were far superior to others in the area and were the envy of the community.

The former backyarders were evicted from the new houses in 2003, he added.

Mr Heynes said he and the Westlake Homeown-

ers' Association have had meetings with Human Settlements MEC Bonginkosi Madikizela about the promise of housing, and an investigation into why the land had been sold. But, Mr Heynes said, the frustration over lack of progress has led the association to the decision to take the matter to the Public Protector. He is due to lay a complaint of maladministration against the City, provincial government and the developers (Rabie) on behalf of the Westlake Homeowners' Association on Monday May 6.

"We will make it a class action. We have spoken to a lawyer but we need funding. We were promised the land and we have the proof. Why did the developers sell the land to farms around us?" he said.

Mondhi Phiri, from the Westlake Hobbies Association, who was one of the initial 150 backyard dwellers who had been promised housing in 1999, said he refuses to move to another area.

He was one of the residents who moved into the houses which were built on the pocket of land that Westlake residents said was promised to them.

"We want land in Westlake. If they gave me a house in another area, like Delft, I would decline it. It's not that I am ungrateful but most of our children go to school here, most of us have employment

nearby, how will we manage?"

Denis Joseph, former ward councillor for Westlake who served between 2009 and 2011 and is now a Member of Parliament, said the issue of housing has been a contentious one.

"I inherited the housing issue when I became ward councillor, but I did intervene. I set up meeting between the community and Mr Madikizela.

"As far as I know, no final report has been provided on the status of housing in the area.

"There has also always been a dispute between the community and government about who the actual beneficiaries of houses were.

"As far as I know, the 600 people who received houses, were the beneficiaries. But there has never been any finality on the issue," he said.

● John Rabie of Rabie Property Group declined to be quoted.

● Bruce Oom, spokesperson for Mr Madikizela, said: "This project goes back many years. It's going to take a bit more time to find out what happened, and where the responsibility lies, whether it's with the City of Cape Town, or the provincial government.

"The MEC has also been in back to back meetings so I have not had a chance to discuss the issue with him. I will revert back to you as soon as I have information."

Questions about R10 'donation'

The Bulletin was alerted to the issue after receiving a call from a resident who was concerned about Mondhi Phiri, from the Westlake Hobbies Association, collecting R10 to have their names on a database.

It was decided in a meeting held on Monday April 15 with ward councillor, Penny East, and representatives from other community organisations that Mr Phiri would collect the data, which would be compared to the City's official housing database.

Ms East said immediately after the meeting, people started calling her to complain.

But Mr Phiri said the R10 was "a donation", and not compulsory.

"It is people who don't have the proper information spreading the stories. If people do not have the money they don't have to pay but they can give if they want to," he said. Mr Phiri said he had collected money from more than 100 people and it would be used to hire the Westlake Community Church hall for meetings, for batteries for loud speakers, and transport.

"The Westlake Community Church Trust committee only gave us the hall once - and now they refuse to give us the hall for free. The councillor should arrange for us to use the hall. We

have to pay for everything. So we need money to function," he said.

Mr Phiri said police threatened to arrest him for trespassing after he entered the hall without permission.

He also said he had travelled to Ms East's office at the Alphen Centre, in Constantia, a few times to hand over the data but she was never available.

Patrick Heynes, Westlake Community Church Trust chairperson, said the hall, which costs R20 an hour to hire, does not belong to the City but to the Westlake Community Church Trust.


"The foundation has to pay for running costs such as electricity, water and maintenance."

While the Bulletin was interviewing Mr Phiri, several people enquired about the database.

Ms East also passed the car. The Bulletin asked her about a letter she had sent telling residents they did not have to pay R10 to have their details recorded.

Mr Phiri confronted her and asked why she had written the letter. Ms East said: "I have all the right to do that. I have been mandated to represent the community and I have had complaints," she said. Mr Phiri then handed Ms East the names, which she said she would hand to the responsible City official.

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