

Dear friends in the Valley,

The City administration seems intent to increase pressure on Masi residents to leave the valley. The article in yesterday's Peoples Post has caused immediate and furious outrage, especially in Masi itself. Instead of consultation, instead of first telling people that their homes stand to be 'on the wrong side of the fence', instead of first offering residents an alternate place to live, the City informs us of a 'fence' in an area Sanparks consider to be not worthy of the title 'wetland'.

The City is playing with fire and keeps dealing with poor people as second-class citizens. This situation will explode in all our faces. Yesterday's announcement via the press will be debated in meetings in Masi. Although no-one has been told where exactly the fence will run, several thousand people will wonder when they will once again have their houses broken down by the long arm of this City's administration.



A case of careful choreography? Why place this article the week before the 'fence' article? Which wetland? What's the relationship of the article to the pictures? A vague and poor piece of journalism that angered several readers.

False Bay

Echo

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Worry over wetlands

KAREN KOTZE

The Sun Valley wetlands clean-up group are calling for comprehensive action to be taken to protect the environmentally sensitive wetlands in their midst.

The wetlands, at the foot of the mountain, runs alongside the suburb and local schools and is home to an assortment of wild birds, caracul, otters, leopard toads and fish.

And in recent months, it has also been home to a group of people whose shacks are being built among a copse of blue gum trees.

At last count, there were eight shacks, said Steven Wortrich and Wendy Robb, who are representatives of the Sun Valley wetlands clean-up group.

Mr Wortrich, a qualified horticulturist and forester, said any form of habitation is strictly forbidden in the National Water Act.

The area is also rife with alien plants, which the group feels is a priority to remove, to restore the indigenous fauna and flora in the area: especially after such a long dry spell, saying that the indigenous vegetation needs all the help it can get.

area – which is demarcated as public open space – could be enjoyed by a wide variety of people. They have an idea which involves bringing people on foot and on bicycles to the area.

Mr Wortrich was behind the formation of the Facebook group called Sun Valley Wetlands cleanup. In creating it, he drew other equally concerned residents' attention. They met, and decided to be proactive about what they were seeing.

The group is independent of all other Sun Valley community, security and environmental groups.

They say they have one simple mandate: to clean up the wetlands, and this includes ensuring security and litter removal.

The group is also monitoring and reporting on any illegal, squatting, dumping, or fires within this public open space reserve and surroundings.

Mr Wortrich said the group is keen to work with the authorities, their representatives and any allied private organisations, who are mandated to manage the wetland and surroundings.



PICTURE: KAREN KOTZE

■ Residents have raised concern about the establishment of a small informal settlement in the Sun Valley wetlands.

A very welcome vision by Dr Lutz van Dijk, that appeared in the Weekend Argus on 21 February, 2016.

From Township to Town: Masiphumelele - 10 years from now

Or: Why development will benefit all – residents and neighbours alike

Lutz van Dijk:

The past six months were the most difficult for the community of Masiphumelele in all its history since 1996 when about 8000 residents were granted permission to stay by President Mandela on about one square kilometre of land between Fish Hoek, Capri and Noordhoek.

Today, more than 40.000 residents are surviving on the same small piece of land, while new people keep coming, squeezing themselves in the poorest parts like the informal settlement wetlands where are hardly any basic services (at present ca. 70 families share one toilet and one water tap !). In 2011 a census estimated 10.550 residents here, latest estimates from 2015 based on aerial photos suggest more than 13.800 children, women and men.

It is here where the most devastating fires happened: On 29 November more than 1000 shacks in section D+E made more than 4500 families homeless (some are still staying in the Masi community hall as efforts to re-bloc and competition during re-building pushed several out). Again on Friday 12 February, in section A ("Zululand") 136 shacks burnt down, affecting ca. 600 people.

Before these fires, Masi received even international news when on 15 September 2015 protests began after a 14 year old boy was raped and murdered and like so many times before no police responded timely to the desperate calls of family members. The same evening a group of parents and neighbours killed a man suspected of the murder.

The following weeks also drug dealers were targeted who had been known to residents and police, but were never arrested. Another six mob killings happened. Protests escalated when more and more activists were arrested for public violence, but still none of the drug dealers. At present, more than 40 Masi activists awaiting their trial. So do two community leaders charged with murder and attempted murder who are out on bail for now. Whether those many activists who had never been charged before will be struck off the role or sentenced, is still open and might lead to new protests.

Government officials keep talking about new development plans ("Masi Development Framework") which had been done by expensive consultants. So far they are kept as a secret and several NGO's, community leaders and neighbors have repeatedly requested to allow public debate on it. However, as there had been many plans since 1996, also this one will be measured against one basic question: Is there real change to come or just prolonging of the status quo? Can we ever imagine Masiphumelele as an ordinary town among others in our valley?

After working almost daily in Masi the past 14 years I think we are at crossroads as never before. If we continue as in the past, we will have three escalating negative consequences: More disasters, more protests and riots - and exploding costs (humanly and financially) to deal with both.

We need the courage to vision how Masiphumelele can change from a township to an ordinary town in the next ten years. It is possible. Here are three basic suggestions:

1. Masi needs to change its disaster areas into human settlements with basic services and access roads in a safe hygienic environment. About 370 households would need to relocate for such an exercise to ensure that ca. 3000 families (equals ca. 14.000 residents) will be safe from disasters forever.

Besides the human responsibility to end the suffering of thousands every year, it is possible with much less costs than the repeated exercises of disaster relief (R 20 m for making these areas safe for once and all, compared to R 200 m for the latest November fire alone for disaster relief !). In 2014 we had all five leaders of sections A-E at this informal settlement agreeing to such plans for substantial re-blocking.

And: There is land available next to Masi. Despite previous objections around freshwater and geotechnical conditions, the remainder of City's erf 5131 (which comprises 5,3 ha) is the solution we were long searching for

No serious challenge with environment or neighbors. The few existing objections are contradicted by even SANPar being in favor of development as the present growth of alien vegetation on this piece of land poses a serious challenge to them (as senior management told us on 7 January 2016).

But what many of us did not realize in the past when we appealed to the Masi leadership or the Ward Councilor and other officials to ensure a certain control of developments on all levels from the Amakhaya ngoku public private housing project over occupation of TRA's up to any kind of "influx control" is this:

2. Masi needs its own modest but functioning professional council authority – elected, paid for and accountable.

It is impossible to burden our Ward Councilor and her administration in Fish Hoek with more tasks relating to Masi. Equally, no one can expect Masi residents who are willing to take community responsibility and act as leaders or NGO volunteers to "govern" a community of 40.000 residents. The salary costs for such a position of two or three professionals would be much less than what is paid now for consequences of miscommunication and lack of administration.

Until such an authority is established we need to be aware that appealing to goodwill is just not realistic. If after a fire, families are left to compete for these little spaces of 3x3 m per household, always the strongest and most competitive will win. Nothing else would happen in any other community in the world where resources are so scarce and limited.

But as far as the call for "influx control" for Masi is concerned there is one good news – as there is only one way to control this globally and in South Africa – and yes, also in Masiphumelele:

3. Masi must allow space for an emerging middle class not only to stabilize the community, but also to promote development initiatives around small businesses and new housing models created from inside – a present most of the "achievers" (actually all those with permanent jobs) move away from Masi once they can afford it.

In all areas where Masi is best developed the smallest numbers of new residents are settling. Most newcomers squeeze in at informal settlements. Where ever ownership is possible, residents learn to take responsibility. With a new middle class also a new responsibility for the wellbeing of the community will emerge. The City owned Solole farm (5,4 ha bought in 2014), just opposite Masi, would allow such a new diverse role model village for middle class and poor families alike.

As long as Masi is treated as a refugee camp, it will have exactly the problems all such camps have all over the world. Huge influx of more desperate people, regular riots and violence, gangsterism and domestic violence - and a growing number of humanitarian NGO's which work like Don Quichotte against the windmills: Alone, never be able to change the cause of all problems - perpetuated extreme poverty.

With a strong shared vision for the coming ten years, we can change Masi to become a thriving prosperous town.

* Dr van Dijk is since 2002 founding co-director of the HOKISA Children's Home in Masiphumelele. This text is an edited version of a presentation at the quarterly meeting of the FSPCF (Far South Peninsula Community Forum) in Fish Hoek on 16 February 2016.

Since 2013 a plan for the Southern Peninsula has been in the making. Masi, in particular Lucia Mayo has asked the Sub-Council what the plan entails and how it might affect Masi residents.

Now a small and somewhat inane sentence in an article lifts the lid: "In terms of housing, the CSIR recommend that more attention is given to upgrades in informal settlements and the provision of social services". Masi residents, hold your breath! People who feel under threat should not be communicated with like this.

SOUTH PENINSULA

'Need for detailed plan'

P. Post 28.2.16

NICOLE MCCAIN
@nickymccain

The findings of the Far South strategic environmental assessment were presented to the local subcouncil last week. The Far South Peninsula Community Forum (FSPCF) requested that such a strategic environmental assessment of the Far South be carried out in 2013, following a variety of concerns about development in the area.

The goal was to identify and evaluate the strategic environmental impacts of the City of Cape Town's approved Southern District plan.

The CSIR was appointed to carry out the assessment, and its recommendations highlight the need for more detailed planning in areas of informal settlements, interfaces with open space, buffer zones and ecological corridors.

There is concern at the official comment that in its current form the finished assessment is not legally binding in any way, says FSPCF spokesperson Patrick Dowling. Therefore, the way in which the findings and recommendations are taken up into a revised Southern District plan is very important, he explains.

"The City has quite a lot of flexibility about the way in which it chooses to interpret the assessment and which, if any, of the 'policy options' covered actually end up in the Southern District plan," he says.

In terms of transport, the CSIR has found the proposed densities in the district plan were not likely to attract more public transport and that there is a need to promote non-motorised transport and public transport.

The assessment is "somewhat ambivalent" about traffic, Dowling says.

"While we support any effort to encourage non-motorised transport the question of public transport needs to be carefully analysed because the City sees this as going hand in hand with much higher population densities, which then undermine the environment, heritage, tourism and recreation elements," he says.

"We also do not see ongoing road widening and extensions as a sustainable approach in the long term. Therefore the idea of inter-nodal transport needs to be explored with full public participation to arrive at a solution which eases congestion without compromising the Far South's most valuable assets and natural systems."

In terms of housing, the CSIR recommends that more attention is given to upgrades in informal settlements and the provision of social services.

It also recommends that green technology be used more, which the FSPCF agrees with, Dowling says.

"The FSPCF knows that we will have to be very vigilant if such good intentions are to be realised," Dowling says.

Continued on page 2.

Below article speculates what Cllr Purchase thinks caused the fires. The cause of the fires might be far closer to home: People have access to electricity, but distribution of power-points is dealt with by the shack occupants themselves. They 'wire' every need they have, without training or experience. Speculations about 'retribution' serves other interests than those of the people whose houses burnt down. And it causes fear Counsellors should not be the source of.

Masi fires could be 'retribution for attacks'

KAREN KOTZE

While police and a forensics investigator probe whether a fire that destroyed 132 shacks and left hundreds homeless in Masipumulele on Friday, February 12, was lit on purpose, the community's ward councillor believes it's the work of the township's drug kingpins seeking payback for community outrage levelled against them last year.

The latest fire is the second big one in less than three months, and ward councillor Felicity Purchase believes innocent people are paying the price as the area's drug dealers take revenge on a community that rioted against their presence last year.

"The story, from reliable sources is that a fire will be lit for every person necklaced or killed in the violence last year.

"That is not justice," she told the Echo. "This is apparently retribution for the vigilante action taken late last year against certain alleged drug dealers."

Ms Purchase claimed a forensic investigator had found more than one ignition point for Friday's fire, although the Echo could not independently verify this.

Ms Purchase said information about the fires being set deliberately by drug dealers, as retribution for the vigilante killings, comes

directly from several Masipumulele residents. They are not willing to be identified as they fear for their lives and have approached her for protection.

“We understand that the housing need is acute”

Police have confirmed that they are investigating the cause of the fire, according to Brigadier A Mlenga of the Wynberg SAPS Cluster.

Fire and rescue services spokesman Theo Layne said an official forensic investigation into the start of the various fires in Masipumulele was ongoing.

Ignatius Smart, who is leading the investigation, could not be reached for comment, despite several SMSes and phone calls.

Ms Purchase said Friday's fire had left some 600 people homeless.

On Sunday November 29 last year, a fire razed hundreds of structures, killed two people and displaced 4 500 people.

Benedicta van Minnen, mayor



PICTURE: HENK KRUGER

■ In November last year, residents from Masipumulele near Noordhoek worked hard to try and get a shack fire under control.

committee member for human settlements, said strong, if anecdotal, evidence now suggested that the November fire was possibly not accidental.

She said the Masipumulele informal settlement was completely electrified, yet, every year, a large fire broke out there.

Ms Van Minnen has urged residents to come forward with any information that might help pinpoint the cause of Friday's fire.

Ms Purchase said the commu-

nity had started rebuilding late on Saturday morning after clearing debris and continued under spotlights until well past midnight.

"The hall was available for the residents to sleep in, but very few chose to do so," she said.

It had been difficult to get the residents to maintain the 2m spacing needed to put up electricity poles, but in the end this had been achieved.

"The people were fed from Friday night on site through the week-

end. Volunteers from the CERT (City Emergency Response Teams) in Ocean View assisted in the serving of the food, to allow residents to continue working," Ms Purchase said.

Ms Van Minnen said the City had been stopping people from building illegal structures in Masipumulele's wetland area, because the spread of a dense informal settlement there not only posed a fire risk but would also hamper the delivery of basic and emergency services.

"Attempted invasions will also have an effect on the City's Masipumulele Phase 4 housing development, to the severe detriment of the legitimate beneficiaries of this development," she said.

"We understand that the housing need is acute and we will do everything in our power to assist our vulnerable residents."

Ms Purchase said the wetland was an ecologically-sensitive "sponge for the valley" and the Department of Environmental Affairs wanted it fenced off to prevent further invasions.

"Eventually the plan is to draw back to the formal line on the Masi boundary and relocate the residents through a series of projects. As people are relocated to new homes, others will be relocated higher up and the bottom structures removed," she said.

A reply to Cllr Purchase' has been sent for inclusion in the next People's Post but was not printed.

Horst.

10 COMMENTS

LETTERS

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'Inhumane' to destroy

The video on SABC of the "official" destruction of the new shacks built on the edge of Masiphumelele was sickening. How inhumane to destroy new homes built by people desperate for a place to live.

Every society, every religious group, and each of us will be judged on the basis of our actions toward the most vulnerable.

Of course, the City of Cape Town has told the people not to build there. The City put responsibility for that "rule" on the Sanparks officials.

Now we learn that the "wetlands" may not, indeed, be true wetlands. And Sanparks officials say that a parcel of the land bought by the city in 2004 (12 years ago!) was expressly intended to provide

to Fish Hoek in 2001.

Finally, how can we pretend there is no land available when we drive past the obscene new development at the bottom of Ou Ka-Way, and when we read of the approval of a new development at Kommetjie?

SOLVEIG KJELLER
Fish

Subcouncil chairperson Felicity Purchase responds:

The City's anti-land invasion unit demolished 24 shacks when they were re-erected in the wetlands after warnings in December and again last week that they were illegal. The residents of Masi k that they are not allowed to erect shacks on council land and tha

Yours,

Horst

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