Stadium must be turned into housing, says Cosatu

Congress of the South African Trade Unions says Cape Town's Greenpoint stadium should be dismantled and turned into low-cost housing

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The Congress of the South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in the Western Cape called on city managers yesterday to dismantle Cape Town's Greenpoint stadium and turn it into low-cost housing, saying that engineers and architects believed it was possible.

The stadium, built for the Soccer World Cup, has been struggling to sustain itself and to host events, largely due to high hiring costs. It has cost the city R44,6m in maintenance each year. The total operating budget was R56,7m in the past financial year, with only R12m expected to be generated by hiring it out.

Concerns have also been growing that a number of other World Cup stadiums around the country such as Mbombela Stadium in Nelspruit and Durban's Moses Mabhida Stadium could become white elephants, especially given that they are all funded by ratepayers.

Cosatu's provincial secretary, Tony Ehrenreich, said yesterday the union had spoken to engineers and architects who all felt that it was possible to turn the stadium into a low-cost housing project.

"If public funds are being spent on the stadium, then it should be spent in a way that the most vulnerable people of Cape Town (can) benefit. We believe that the building of low-cost housing in Cape Town (stadium) will go a long way to integrate communities across colour lines," Mr Ehrenreich said.

Cosatu has been a constant thorn in the side of the Democratic Alliance-run province. Last month, it threatened protests should Western Cape education MEC Donald Grant go ahead with a proposed move to close 27 schools in the province.

This followed an announcement by the provincial government to close down 27 underperforming schools, saying pupil numbers at the schools were low and had a minimal chance of increasing.

Last month, Mayor Patricia de Lille approved the review about the operations of the stadium. The city is seeking to amend regulations which ban commercial activity at the stadium, and to use the stadium precinct to make it sustainable.

However, the Green Point Ratepayers and Residents Association expressed reservations last month over the redevelopment plans of the stadium, saying commercial activity would have a minimal effect on maintenance costs.

Grant Pascoe, Cape Town's mayoral committee member for tourism, events and marketing, said yesterday that an independent business analyst had suggested options to make the stadium viable, but turning it into a low-cost housing project was not one. "Cosatu is entitled to its opinions … (but) now we are hoping to have the record of decision amended and then we will consult with all stakeholders on how to make the stadium more commercially viable.… It is premature for Cosatu to be making comments now," he said.

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