

East London: R3.6m paid for new land for Orange Grove development

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ORANGE Grove informal settlement residents were over the moon this weekend when they received news that Human Settlements department had concluded a R3.6-million land transaction for developmental purposes in the area.

Human Settlements MEC Helen Sauls-August informed the residents on Friday that her department would build them a new residential area on the newly acquired land. The 300 hectare piece is near the East London airport.

The Orange Grove community has been at odds with the ANC-led Bhishe government after the Buffalo City Metro failed to hand over the land purchased in 2008 by Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale for housing for more than 5000 beneficiaries in the area.

Community leader Themba Wele said the land was acquired in 2008 and they were promised it would be officially handed over in October last year but that never happened.

Earlier this year the residents took to the streets and demanded the removal of their councillor, Nontsikelelo Peter, accusing her of not championing the land issue. But it was evident on Friday that the councillor and residents have since set aside their differences.

Wele commended Peter on her work to get the community land. "We have been fighting for this thing for so long now. I'm glad we finally got the land," he said.

Announcing the latest developments, Sauls-August said the land would still belong to her department and people would get title deeds once their houses had been built. "We have come a long way with the Orange Grove land issue. We have purchased that land for the community of Orange Grove and Buffalo City," she said.

Sauls-August said the residents would have their houses by the end of the 2013-14 financial year. By the end of this month all the names of the beneficiaries would be handed in to the municipality, she added.

"We are going to work with the municipality in every step of this process. We will engage with the various departments because this an integrated human settlement project."

Wele said he hoped the new housing project would open up job opportunities for people in Orange Grove.

He promised that residents would not invade the newly bought land but would wait upon the government to complete its process.

Resident Fundiswa Sizani said she was glad there was finally some movement on their situation.

“Some of us here have title deeds, yet we do not have houses. But we hope this time around we will receive our houses as promised,” she said. — poliswap@dispatch.co.za