

'Give us houses, not loos' – backyard residents

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NONTANDO MPOSO
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BACKYARD residents have told the City of Cape Town that they want houses, not extra toilets and pre-paid electricity metres.

Members of backyarders' forums from Langa, Hanover Park, Maitland, Facreton and Kensington made this point clear during a meeting with officials from the Department of Human Settlements in the city yesterday.

"The city should use these funds to buy land and build us the houses we are so desperate for," said Jimmy Khaliphi, a member of the Kensington backyarders' committee.

Nokwanda Mathanda, a Langa backyarders' representative, said the city had not consulted them.

"We are waiting for houses, not electricity or toilets," she said.

They expressed concern, too, that the backyards in which they lived were already so cramped that there was no space for toilets.

And some had toilets that had not worked for more than two years, and they questioned why the city did not simply repair these rather than build new ones.

Raymond Julius from the Facreton backyarders' committee said people were frustrated and tired of waiting.

"We have had numerous meetings with the city. They make promises that never materialise," he said, adding that they could not "live with our families inside toilets".

The mayoral committee member for utility services, Shehaam Sims, responded that the plan was part of a pilot project to be tested in Langa, Kensington and Hanover Park.

It would provide basic services, including sanitation, running water and electricity to backyard residents while they were waiting for houses.

In Hanover Park there are an estimated 3 780 backyard residents. The Cape Argus previously reported on the plight of 34 backyarders living in makeshift shacks on one property in the area.

Langa has a tally of about 960 backyarders and Facreton 250.

Nyanga has the highest number, estimated at 10 000, while Retreat and Gugulethu have 4 000 each.

Sims said they were responding to issues such as landlords who locked their doors at night, leaving backyarders without access to toilets, and others who charged obscene amounts for electricity.

The reality was that the city's provincial budget allowed for only 10 000 housing opportunities a year, while there were more than 334 000 people on the waiting list for houses.

"Not everyone is guaranteed a house.

"That's why we are working towards providing a healthy environment for (the backyarders) while they wait," she said.

nontando.mposo@inl.co.za