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31 January 2025

To: City of Cape Town
c/o Affordable Housing & Public Participation Unit
Affordable.Housing@capetown.gov.za
LeanetteAnathi.Dywili@capetown.gov.za.

**RE: SUBMISSION TO PROPOSED SALE OF CISSIE GOOL HOUSE (FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE OLD WOODSTOCK HOSPITAL SITE), ERVEN 13131, 13132, RE: 13130, RE: 13140, RE: 13143, RE: 13146, 13133, 13134, 13135, 13138, 13139, 13144, WOODSTOCK**

1. On 26 September 2024, the City of Cape Town ("the City") published a notice in the *Cape Argus* inviting interested parties to comment on and/or object to its plans to sell Cissie Gool House (previously known as the old Woodstock Hospital site). This site is 1,8405 Ha of City-owned land and is made up of Erven 13131, 13132, RE: 13130, RE: 13140, RE: 13143, RE: 13146, 13133, 13134, 13135, 13138, 13139, 13144.

2. In accordance with the requirements set out in the Municipal Asset Transfer Regulations ("MATR") enacted in terms of the Municipal Finance Management Act ("MFMA")[1], the City provided information about the expected benefits, proceeds, gains or losses and provided reasons for the proposed sale of the property.

[1] See Regulation 37 of the MATR.

3. The authors of this submission have read and considered the City's invitation to comment and make this submission in their personal capacities to the City in accordance with the invitation to submit written comments.

4. As academics and researchers responding to the right to comment, we request that we be alerted to the decision taken, which should include being informed of the right to request reasons for the administrative action and right of review or internal appeal (if applicable), as set out in chapter 3 of the Regulations on Fair Administrative Procedure (GG 23674 of 2002) adopted in terms of the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 3 of 2000.

Yours faithfully,
Dr Suraya Scheba,
Dr Andreas Scheba

**This submission is supported by:**

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Dr Wangui Kimari

[Sent electronically]

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## 1. Introduction

The City of Cape Town has invited comments regarding the Council's decision to dispose of and redevelop the old Woodstock hospital site, also known as Cissie Gool House (CGH), for the development of mixed use market and affordable housing. As academics and researchers we take this opportunity to engage in the statutory public participation process to express our views on the planned redevelopment of the publicly owned property. More specifically, in this submission, we call on the City to pursue a **Development Without Displacement** approach for the site under consideration.

We anchor our recommendations in our academic expertise and knowledge comprising multiple disciplines and professional experiences (architecture, urban studies, geography, urban planning, development studies, political science), our in-depth understanding of housing challenges, policies and practices globally as well as in South Africa and Cape Town, and our engagements with the Cissie Gool House community. Some of us, especially the lead authors of this submission, have spent extensive periods of time with Cissie Gool House residents and leadership over the last 5 years. In the spirit of engaged scholarship and co-production of knowledge, we have conducted qualitative research through various methods - workshops, one-on-one interviews, participant observation, photovoice, and informal conversations - to document people's practices and experiences of living in the occupation. This has resulted in various knowledge outputs, including several student dissertations, a documentary, a short magazine, policy reports and academic journal articles (some of which are available at www.city-occupied.net).

In addition to our primary research with the CGH community, the lead authors and the supporters of this submission have engaged extensively with other occupier communities in Cape Town and elsewhere in South Africa as part of their professional research, teaching and practice lives. Furthermore, as a collective we have accumulated significant knowledge of housing occupations in other geographical contexts and have been involved in comparative urban research projects across the global South and North. The cumulative knowledge and expertise of the people involved in and supporting this submission cuts across years of scholarship related to housing and urbanisation across continents.

Based on this academic expertise, primary research with the CGH community, and insights from comparative urban scholarship, we collectively make a case for a ***Development Without Displacement*** approach that centres co-production and co-design in determining the future of the site. We argue that redeveloping the site with current CGH residents is not only possible, as evidenced by international experience and best-practices, but also more just, equitable and efficient than their displacement and relocation. We believe that recognising and co-designing the future of the site with the CGH community is the best way of realising the City's vision of 'City

of Hope for all' (IDP, 2022-27) and commitment to building a caring, safe & inclusive city for all its residents (City of Cape Town, 2022a).

This argument runs through the entire document, which is structured as follows. The next section argues that CGH and practices of occupation of land and buildings must be understood within enormous historical injustices that are exacerbated by a global structural housing crisis and ongoing processes of market-led exclusion and displacement. Informality is an inevitable outcome and key feature of urbanisation in the 21st century, which is now widely accepted by governments around the world. Instead of criminalising occupations, the City of Cape Town should recognise CGH as a house of care that deserves meaningful engagement and support.

Section three provides evidence about the motivations, practices and governance structures of CGH to demonstrate that there is strong ethos of self-reliance and organisation. Furthermore, care, solidarity, equality and democracy are at the heart of the occupation. This is followed by section four, which highlights efforts by the CGH community to engage the City of Cape Town and other stakeholders to co-develop the site together. Efforts that have continued until today, despite the City's refusal to meaningfully engage with the occupiers. We make an argument for the importance of partnership, and reflect on the themes and options for the advancement of an inclusive development model. Section five serves to further illustrate that another way is possible, by discussing global examples of governments working with occupier communities to build adequate housing and integrated neighbourhoods. In section six, we offer concluding remarks, arguing once more for a development without displacement approach going forward.

## 2. Housing informality and unlawful occupations

Cissie Gool House, as an occupation of a previously vacant building in the inner-city of Cape Town, cannot be understood within a historical, political-economic and social vacuum. The occupation, and people who reside on the site, are inextricably connected to historical and ongoing processes of exclusionary urban development, inadequate provision of well-located affordable housing, and the ongoing failure to achieve socio-spatial transformation. Furthermore, the occupation and residents' practices of informal urbanism are illustrative of much wider processes that have and continue to define urbanisation in the 21$^{st}$ century.

Informal practices of citymaking hold the potential to create more inclusive, equitable and just urban spaces. While we do not want to romanticise the occupation, we argue for a more site-specific engagement with occupation practices, and awareness of the historical context, key actors, and specific claims being made. This differs foundationally from a blanket approach of criminalisation, eviction and relocation. It is our view that through acknowledging and engaging with the historical and structural drivers of spaces such as CGH, we can begin to devise site-specific, granular, and creative solutions as experiments in just development, that will lead to more sustainable and equitable housing and urban environments.

## 2.1. Global context

Like many other cities in the world, the City of Cape Town is facing growing challenges of housing informality, including in the form of 'unlawful' occupation of land and buildings. Across the global North and South, informality and self-provisioning of housing have been central features of urbanisation. While the character and extent of informal housing practices may vary significantly across urban space and time, in every corner of the globe people have built their own homes to access opportunities, care for their families and improve their living standards. There is a large body of literature documenting the role of informal housing practices, including land and building occupations, in the making of cities in North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Africa (Vasudevan, 2023; Shrestha et al., 2021; Grashoff, 2020; Martínez, 2020; Durst and Wegman, 2017; Mayne, 2017; UNECE, 2015).

Even today's most affluent cities, such as New York, London, Vienna, Paris and Shanghai have a rich history of housing informality that continues to shape their present and future (Kelling, 2024; Hauer and Krammer, 2023; Ding, 2022; Usman et al., 2020). In fact, some of these cities have witnessed a surge in occupations in recent years, due in part to recurring global financial crises as well as the coronavirus pandemic and its devastating economic and health consequences. As the pandemic disproportionately impacted already marginalised and vulnerable residents, people were no longer able to afford rental accommodation. Consequently, they had to find alternative housing solutions, including seeking out and repurposing vacant properties (Vasudevan, 2023; Martínez & Gil, 2022; Ogas-Mendez et al., 2022; Gilgoff, 2020). In addition to providing poor individuals and families with a roof over their heads, occupations have also played a vital role in highlighting the structural dimensions and inadequacy of current housing provisioning systems, which are evidently failing to realise long-standing policy objectives of dignified housing for all (Cociña and Frediani, 2024; Rantissi and Gitis, 2024; Mazzucato and Farha, 2023). Despite years of policy and programmatic efforts, housing poverty and inequality are worsening in many cities around the world.

The United Nations estimates that more than one billion people, or one in four urban dwellers worldwide, live in informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa, this figure is more than 50% of the entire urban population (ibid). Residents living in informal housing often lack tenure security, access to basic services and other infrastructure. At the same time, their dwellings may be of inadequate quality, pose health and safety risks, and be overcrowded. Studies have shown that investing in informal settlements and supporting tenure security would result in significant public benefits, including improved community health, education outcomes and economic growth (Satterthwaite, 2011). In some countries, the right interventions into housing in informal settlements could increase the national GDP by up to 10% (Frediani et al., 2023).

For many years, governments have recognised the importance of informal housing provisioning and committed to improving conditions of their residents[2]. There is a growing network of housing movements, organisations, practitioners and scholars[3] calling for governments to accelerate their efforts and engage with housing informality more proactively and progressively to make cities more inclusive, equitable and prosperous. Their message is clear: only if we work with informality as a reality, can we overcome our urban development challenges and create the cities we want and need.

## 2.2. South African historical context

History matters profoundly in shaping the present. Cape Town is a deeply divided and wounded city, defined by centuries of structural violence, displacement and exclusion (Mabin and Smit, 1997; Till, 2012). Furthermore, the past continues to shape contemporary socio-spatial relations. The city is among the most unequal and segregated places in the world (Turok et al. 2021), resulting in stark inequalities between residents in terms of access to adequate housing, basic service provision, education, health and job opportunities. Where you live in the city profoundly shapes your life chances and development trajectories (Turok et al. 2023). Underlying these persistent socio-spatial inequalities is a property regime that stems from the colonial and apartheid project, whose aim was to exclude and displace black, coloured and Indian people from the inner-city. The forced displacement of these populations from well-located land was cemented through key legislation including the Native Lands Act (Act 27 of 1913), the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, and the Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950).

Importantly, as a consequence of forced displacement and exclusion from formal housing, black and coloured workers self-provided housing through informal settlements in the urban periphery. However, by the 1960s, settlements were demolished due to legislation such as the 1951 Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (Pisa) and 1956 Slum Areas Improvement and Clearance Act, alongside the Group Areas Act. In this period urban townships were constructed by the State to house black labour, with many others deported to the homelands (Bantustans). By the 1970s, the state stopped building family housing which resulted in a housing crisis and the further growth of informal settlements. By 1982 approximately 150,000 black and coloured residents had been forcibly removed from central areas to the periphery of the city, better known as the Cape Flats (IJR 2019) and by 1994 3,7 million households lived in informal structures across the

[2] The New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals and Global Action Plan are some of the most recent global policy frameworks that emphasise the need for progressive governance approaches towards housing informality. The Global Action Plan was spearheaded by the Government of South Africa and launched in October 2022. Its ten action areas were formally adopted by Resolution 2.2 "Accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums by 2030" during the UN-Habitat Assembly in June 2023.

[3] Including many of the supporters of this submission, working in cities around the world.

country. At the dawn of democracy, it was well understood that any response to overcome this socio-spatial injustice required a genuine recognition of the past and a new political imagination and capable state to drive transformation.

Land and housing were at the heart of this democratic project. Central here are the constitutional commitments to the right to access to housing, and the construction and delivery of state-subsidized housing to low-income households (Shandu and Clark, 2021; Dugard et al., 2016; Tissington, 2011). The South African housing program is notable for having distributed more than four million housing subsidies since 1994, more than any other democratic government in the contemporary period. Despite the scale of provision, however, this redistributive effort has continued to reproduce apartheid spatial geographies, producing sprawling cities with many Black and brown residents located in the urban periphery (SACN, 2022).

At the same time, the goals of integration, compaction and densification have featured prominently in urban policy, including in Cape Town, especially since the creation of the unified city in the year 2000. Since then, all the Municipal Spatial Development Frameworks (MSDF), Integrated Development Plans, Human Settlements Strategies and key planning documents have highlighted the need for spatial transformation and socio-economic integration. The current MSDF offers a strong vision and framework to promote a more compact, integrated and productive city. It explicitly commits to "addressing spatial injustice and inequality, and avoiding the creation of new structural imbalances; working in partnership with the private and public sectors in achieving spatial transformation by building a more inclusive, integrated, vibrant and healthy city; and proactively responding to social, economic, climate and resource shocks and stresses" (City of Cape Town, 2023, p. 10). The framework promotes inward growth, urban densification and in-fill development, highlighting the potential of utilising public and private land to increase access to adequate housing and drive spatial transformation ambitions (ibid). In addition, it emphasises the importance of a partnership approach and working with communities, stating that "A partnership approach is important to ensure that communities are engaged and support the spatial vision. This will include how the spatial plans will impact on their current surroundings and co-creating a future where more people in the city have access to opportunities, transport and affordable housing" (ibid, page 7).

The City formally acknowledges the violent history of urbanisation, its devastating consequences to black and coloured populations, and the urgent need to promote well-located affordable housing and redress its apartheid geography. It is this expressed commitment that we argue needs to be held at the centre of efforts to re-imagine and re-make this city, and specifically should inform any future vision advanced for the CGH site in particular.

An approach that prioritises development without displacement would serve as a powerful illustration of a commitment to improving access to well-located affordable housing, realising socio-spatial transformation, and doing so intentionally as part of an effort to halt ongoing cycles

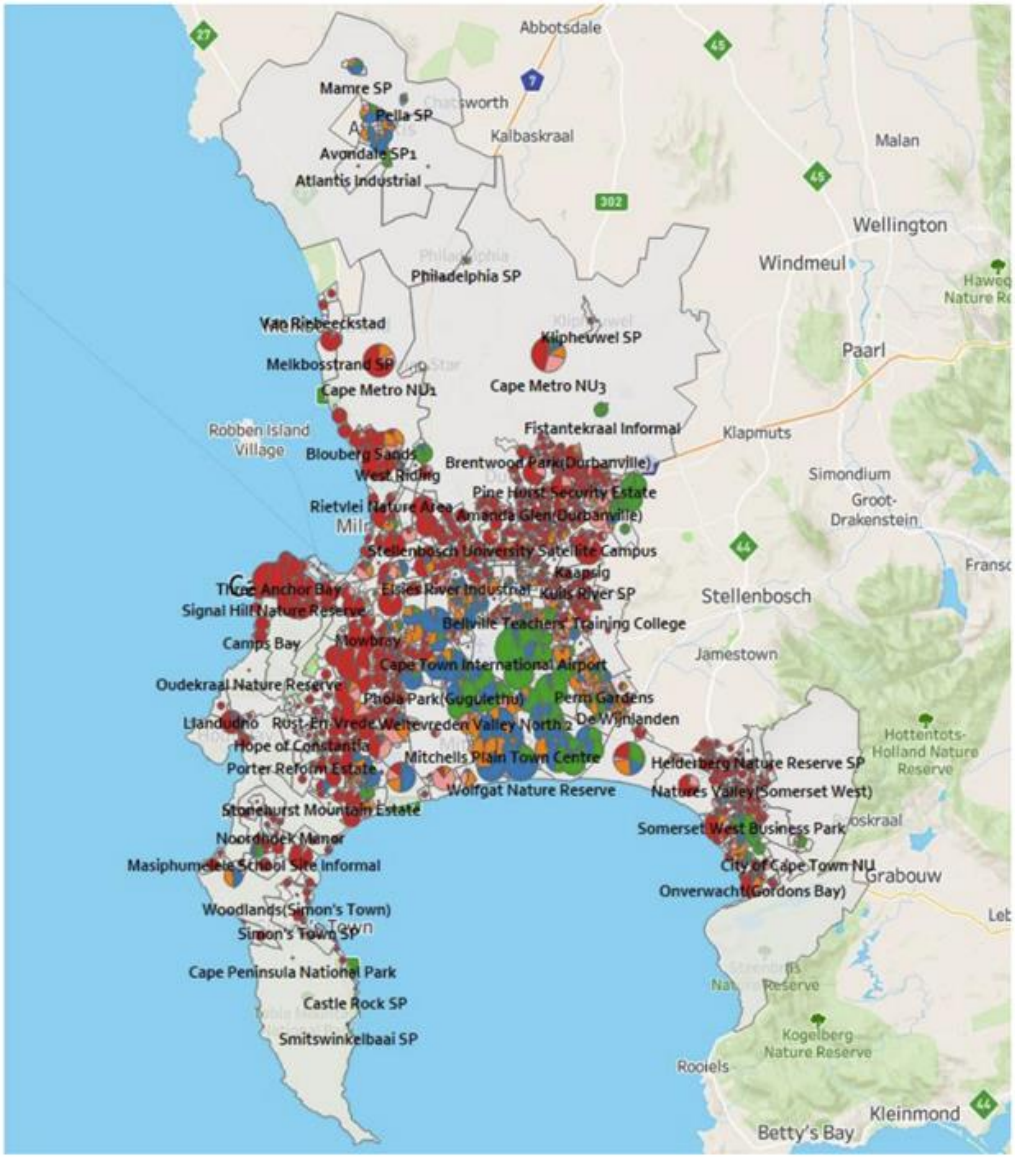
of displacement. Such an approach would explicitly place the marginalised residents of this city at the centre of participatory planning and city-making.

## 2.3 Cape Town's housing crisis

Cape Town is experiencing a deepening housing and segregation crisis. More than 380,000 people are currently on the City's Housing Needs Register (previously known as the Housing Database and before that housing waiting list), while over 270,000 households live in informal settlements, most of which are in the peripheries (City of Cape Town, 2021). While the formal delivery of state-subsidised housing is continuously declining, private market housing remains unaffordable to the majority of the population. More than 75% of all Capetonians earn less than R22,000 per month, which is the minimum amount to qualify for finance to access an entry level home in the city (City of Cape Town, 2021). Many sought after neighbourhoods, like the inner city, therefore remain inaccessible to low- and middle-income households. The affordability gap has worsened with the coronavirus pandemic and associated government lockdowns, which have increased unemployment and poverty to unprecedented levels. At the same time, the residential property prices in better located neighbourhoods have continued to rise. This is especially the case for the central business district (CBD), where the median selling price of apartments increased by 32.8% from R1.28 m in 2020 to R1.7m in 2021 (CCID, 2021). According to the draft Local Spatial Development Framework for the CBD, property is unaffordable for 90% of Cape Town's households who need accommodation, and more than 70% of the accommodation is targeted at tourists and the hospitality industry (City of Cape Town, 2024a).

Despite decades of policy commitments to building an integrated and inclusive city, the City of Cape Town has supported the growth of a property market that is skewed towards luxury accommodation, which stands at 43% of all properties. In comparison, the entry and affordable markets together make up 34% of all properties – the lowest proportion out of all metro municipalities (CAHF, 2021). Rising property prices and lack of affordable (rental) accommodation in well-located areas exacerbate housing precarity and perpetuate socio-spatial segregation. This divergent trend fosters a bifurcated housing system. Figure 1 from the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance shows the distribution of residential properties by market segment, whereas high-end properties (R900,000 to R1.2m) and luxury market (over R1.2m) are coloured in pink and red respectively. More than 50% of all formerly registered properties fall into these two segments, which are located in higher-value areas including the inner-city and the Northern and Southern corridors. The lack of entry level and affordable accommodation (green and blue respectively) in these areas demonstrates a massive imbalance in the housing system.

Figure 1: Distribution of residential properties in Cape Town by market segment.



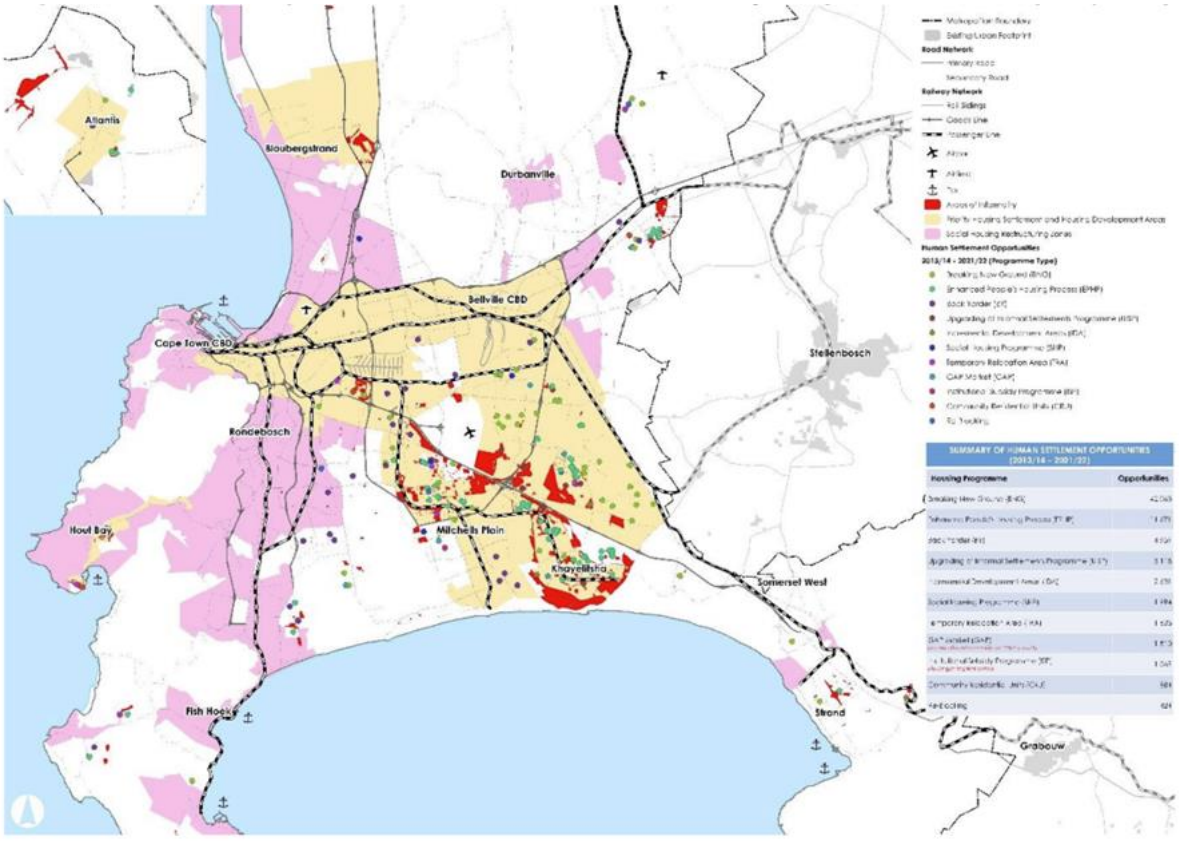

Data source: CAHF's Citymark, using deeds registry data supplied by Lightstone Pty. as at the end June 2021 (sourced September 2021).

The fragmented urban form hampers economic growth and imposes high transport costs, especially on poor and working-class households (City of Cape Town, 2023). Without adequate state intervention, including regulating and incentivising the private sector in building truly affordable housing, this trend is only going to get worse.

Cape Town's population is projected to grow by 800,000 between 2018 and 2028 to just under 5 million people. By 2028, the total demand for housing will range between 479,200 and 529,300 housing opportunities, taking into account new household growth and households currently

living in informal dwellings. Current delivery rates of low-cost housing are far below what is required to reduce the backlog (City of Cape Town 2021, 2023). At the same time, the housing opportunities that are delivered do not significantly contribute to spatial transformation. Most state-subsidised housing units have been pushed into the peripheries, where land has been the cheapest. Figure 2, copied from the draft Municipal Spatial Development Framework 2022 (City of Cape Town, 2022b, p. 120), illustrates the peripheral location of most housing projects and the lack of affordable options in the inner-city and many of its surrounding suburbs (to the North and South Western parts of the City).

Figure 2: Scale and location of government-subsidised housing built between 2013/14 and 2021/22.



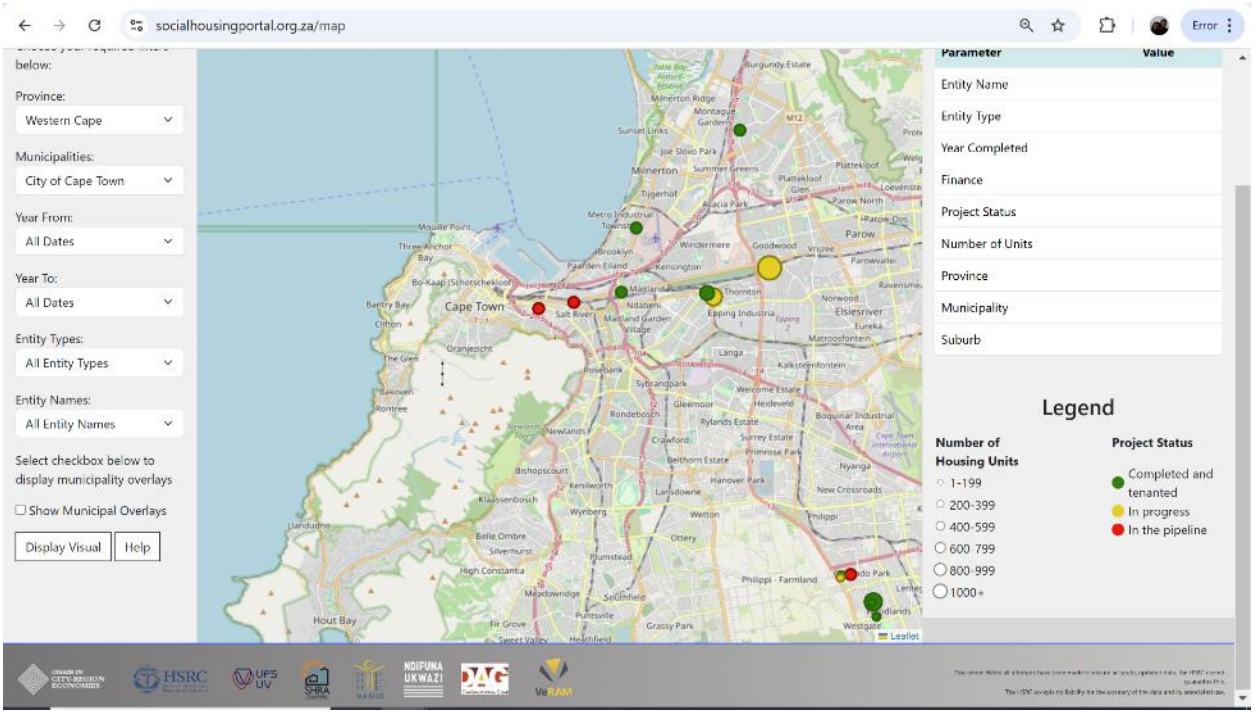

Source: City of Cape Town, 2022b, p. 120.

The previous and current regulatory regimes allow, even enable, the private-sector to deliver largely exclusionary developments in sought after neighbourhoods, which contribute to gentrification and displacement (Cogger and Park-Ross, 2022). Furthermore, inner city areas like Woodstock and Salt River have experienced significant pressures of gentrification and displacement in recent decades. Woodstock's designation as an Urban Development Zone (UDZ) has attracted private sector investment that led to rentals becoming increasingly unaffordable

(Garside, 1993; Cirolia et al., 2021; Urson et al., 2022). While driven by private-sector investments into residential developments, these gentrification dynamics are directly linked to deliberate state policies, particularly the demarcation of the UDZ and associated tax breaks for private developers, as well as state failure to mitigate the negative consequences to low-income households (see also Kern, 2022).

While there have been genuine efforts in recent years to fast-track the release of well-located land for social and affordable housing in the inner-city, actual progress in delivering social housing units has been much slower than anticipated, partly because of considerable financial challenges and accessing national subsidies. Official data from the Social Housing Regulatory Authority, accessed via the Social Housing Portal (socialhousingportal.org.za), demonstrates the limited number of social housing units in the inner-city of Cape Town, and the lack of any completed social housing accommodation in the Woodstock and Salt River neighbourhoods. Figure 3 shows all subsidised social rental housing projects in Cape Town, whereas only the green bubbles are representative of projects that have been completed and tenanted.

Figure 3: Map of social rental housing projects in Cape Town.




Source: Social Housing Portal. January 2025.

## 2.4. Occupations as housing self-provisioning

Within this context of a structural housing crisis, it is estimated that over 20% of households live in the city's 'informal settlements', which are 'unlawful' occupations of land (Cinnamon and Noth, 2023; City of Cape Town, 2021). Others still are living in overcrowded formal accommodation and 'backyards dwellings'. Furthermore, in the Covid-19 moment, many new informal structures and land occupations emerged (City of Cape Town, 2023). Ultimately, self-provisioning of housing fills the cracks in the formal housing delivery system, both reflecting and responding to a growing housing affordability crisis. Indeed, the City is estimating that more than 50% of all new dwellings per annum between 2020 and 2040 will be informal (City of Cape Town, 2021). This also means that the occupation of land and buildings is likely to continue as there are simply not enough state resources to provide adequate housing for all.

Accepting this reality of informality opens up the space to implement innovative responses that can upscale the delivery of housing and integrated human settlements by all actors within the human settlements environment. Furthermore, if proactively engaged and planned for, informality can offer opportunities for growth, social inclusion and the provisioning of adequate housing leading to sustainable neighbourhoods and cities (Frediani et al., 2023; Cirolia et al., 2017; Huchzermeyer, 2011).

Despite acknowledging the growth and significance of informal urbanism, the City of Cape Town has expressed increased frustration towards occupations, viewing these practices as criminal and counter to urban development. The City holds the view that land occupations impede plans for urban development and meeting annual municipal targets. Therefore, it has spent additional financial resources on officers and heavy duty vehicles for the Anti Land Invasion Unit (ALIU) to prevent and respond to the occupation of land (Ngwenya and Cirolia, 2020; Farr and Green, 2020). This rationality conflicts with those of occupiers who do not see themselves as "bad citizens" and instead occupy with the intention to be able to continue to live in Cape Town despite not having the means to access formal housing (ibid). These practices, unfolding 'in the meantime' and out of necessity, play a major role in (re)making the city, in effect producing urban space through everyday practices of auto-construction and appropriation. Hence, it is important to distinguish between vulnerable occupiers advancing collective-life and criminal syndicates; moving away from a broad-based strategy of criminalization and securitization.

Importantly, the constitutional commitment to the right to adequate housing, expressed in Section 26, has been accompanied by specific legislation – to give effect to section 26(3) - to govern the practice of eviction of 'unlawful occupiers from their homes'. PIE (Prevention of Illegal Eviction from Unlawful Occupation of Land Act 19 of 1998) protects against unlawful evictions and is in direct contrast to the violence of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 which authorised the demolition of homes without a court order. It is therefore important to safeguard the Act from regressive efforts to erode and undermine it. Such legislation calls for a nuanced

understanding of occupations and occupation practices, and supports protection of vulnerable urban residents in a society defined by historical violence and deep inequalities. The interpretation of PIE by the courts has been a central feature of litigation on housing eviction in South Africa in post-apartheid (case law), resulting in major principles including meaningful engagement and the provision of alternative accommodation to those facing homelessness. These are a vital form of protection for the most vulnerable urban residents and to prevent unlawful eviction.

At the same time, the solution to the provision of alternative accommodation to those facing homelessness has predominantly been limited to Temporary Relocation Areas (TRAs) on the peripheries of the city, where land is cheaper (Cirolia, 2014). These sites have been widely labelled as undignified and unjust for their living conditions, lack of access to services and amenities, location, and indefinite uncertainty of length of stay (Urson et al., 2022; Ranslem, 2015; Cirolia, 2014). Hence, our contention is that there is a real need and opportunity to be more imaginative and forward thinking in advancing sustainable solutions. There is potential to imagine development on site at CGH through private and state-supported incremental upgrading that co-designs with the current residents. This possibility would create a more just and sustainable outcome than eviction to state constructed TRAs on the urban periphery.

The significance of CGH is that it offers an opportunity and invitation to the City to engage with urban residents who have developed and learnt ways to take on the care-work for themselves and each other. Cissie Gool House, as we show in the next section, is a house of care that has provided hundreds of poor families and individuals - who would otherwise be rendered homeless and living on the streets - with a home, a community and hope. As one important refuge for the marginalised residents of the City of Cape Town, many of whom have had to endure intergenerational cycles of displacement and eviction, CGH deserves recognition, engagement and support.

# 3. Cissie Gool House

## 3.1. Reclaim the City Movement

Founded in 2016 under the banner of “Land for people, not for profit”, Reclaim the City (RTC) aims to increase low-income groups’ access to centrally-located affordable housing and end the displacement of evictees to relocation areas outside the city (Reclaim the City, 2023). RTC is guided by a formal constitution that promotes inclusivity, non-violence, equality, dignity and respect, justice, and transparency, and supports poor and working-class struggles for affordable housing (Reclaim the City, 2023). It is supported by Ndifuna Ukwazi, a non-profit research and legal assistance organisation in Cape Town. RTC’s activities include legal education and advice plenaries, regular meetings, community events, and creative protest actions. Alongside its legal and educational interventions, the significance of the RTC movement and the occupations in the inner-city is to advance “a notion of belonging based on personhood rather than property power” (Urson et .al., 2022). In the act of occupying in the inner-city rather than the periphery, the insistence is for a reimagining of Cape Town beyond spatial apartheid, essentially “prefiguring the kind of affordable housing that they are demanding” (Tattersall and Iveson, 2024). This is powerful for its capacity to imagine and insist on a society that fully realises the promise of ‘post-apartheid’ South Africa.

## 3.2. CGH: A space of care & collective-life

In March 2017, RTC occupied a state hospital that had stood largely vacant for 24 years in the gentrifying neighbourhood of Woodstock. The occupation was renamed Cissie Gool House after the anti-apartheid activist, Zainunnessa ‘Cissie’ Gool. The occupation was a response to the sale of public land for the development of a private school in nearby Sea Point, and was initially designed as a temporary politically motivated tactic by activists that included RTC. However, CGH has since become a home to more than 900 residents, most of whom were either evicted from their homes in Woodstock or nearby Salt River, or were homeless. All of the current residents are unlikely to be able to afford formal rental prices in the area, with the occupation offering refuge for those who have been historically displaced or unable to afford access to formal rental housing in the city.

Many families, having been evicted from their previous homes, are scared as they face another threat of eviction from CGH, and the possibility of being relocated to a far-flung TRA. The occupiers have refused this option as ‘alternative accommodation’, having viewed the impact of this on friends and neighbours relocated to Blikkiesdorp, who continue to live in a state of ‘permanent temporariness’ (Yiftachel, 2009; Oldfield & Greyling, 2015) as these sites have proven to be anything but temporary. Instead, they have held onto the spaces and social relations in Woodstock, where many have lived their entire lives. The occupiers have made the abandoned hospital their home, with as little dependency on the state as possible. Residents and leaders of

CGH have demonstrated what is possible if people work together and support each other. Over the years, CGH has established solid governance structures and social support networks, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Figure 4: CGH Hall leading to kitchen


Source: Tommaso Cosentino

### 3.2.1. Established Governance Structures at CGH

Transforming a hospital into a home is an exhausting task, necessitating planning, strategy and structure. Residents take on leadership roles and responsibilities on a voluntary basis and without payment, reflecting their dedication and commitment to building a better future for the CGH community. In what follows we unpack the structures and practices that support the daily labour of home, place, and life-making at CGH. These insights are based on ongoing engagement and research at the site - including interviews, workshops, and participant observation - as well student Masters' Dissertations (Byrnes, 2023; Cosentino, 2023; Fortuin, 2024) on the everyday household and collective practices.

#### *Leadership Structure*

The house includes a core leadership structure that was first elected by residents in 2018 at the first RTC congress and composed of two tiers, which include chapter leadership and house

leadership. The former, along with leaders from other RTC and allied occupations, focus on coordinating actions beyond the house, including legal engagement, media, and organizing against eviction policy, and law enforcement action. The house leadership, on the other hand, are tasked to coordinate the house, and engage residents to address internal house dynamics. Together, these tiers form the leadership per house and are part of the Reclaim the City coordinating committee, alongside representatives from other RTC occupations (internal communication with CGH leadership; RTC congress documentation, 2022).

The leadership team, which is elected by occupiers annually, is responsible for ensuring that the house rules are followed by all. They organise meetings, and work to ensure that CGH is safe, and secure for residents, especially women and children. To this end, the leadership team occasionally hosts fundraisers to raise money for building maintenance and improvement purposes.

### *Monitors Structure*

In the case of CGH, a 'Monitor's structure' has also organically emerged since 2018. This level of house co-ordination is constituted of residents from each floor in the six sections of the house, and organised further into task-teams focused on internal house issues including youth, maintenance and cleaning, safety and security, and social welfare. These various structures engage through weekly evening meetings held in CGH.

The Monitor's Meetings constitute a bridge between the political mobilization for adequate housing and the everyday life and sustaining of the occupation. It is also a space where the social challenges within the occupation are discussed and solutions explored.

The task teams are the platforms through which the collective practices are planned and carried out. A selection of the task teams and their focus areas are captured in the table below:

Table 1: Task Teams, Roles & Responsibilities

| Task Team | Roles & Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| Security and Safety Task Team | There are security guards on duty at the gates of Cissie Gool House, employed by the Management Agent, who conduct patrols around the perimeter of the building. However, it is residents who ensure that children are indoors by the appointed time of 6pm, and that adults are inside before the lockdown hours of 10pm. Many residents patrol the perimeters during the night as well and engage in broader community neighbourhood watch efforts. Furthermore, the Monitors' meetings are an important space where social challenges and anti-social behaviour are discussed and solutions developed. |
| Welfare Task Team | The elderly residents within the Cissie Gool House community are cared for by their neighbours, and meet regularly in a '60+ Club', as well as an annual 'Elderly Appreciation Day'. For those with ailments, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, fellow residents ensure that they are taking their medication, are eating and taking good care of themselves. |
| Youth and Children Task Team | In interviews, many residents noted that the communal raising of children is a practice that was a key feature of growing up in Woodstock, Salt River, and the surrounding communities. They have attempted to retain this practice in the occupation, including through a Homework club for kids in the afternoons, organising camps, visits to the beach, and netball tournaments. |
| Maintenance Task Team | There are plumbers, electricians and builders amongst the residents of Cissie Gool House. These residents have worked to repair the infrastructure within the building as far as possible. Including repurposing the kitchen space in the old nurses quarters, and using this space for communal cooking for the occupiers. The work of the maintenance task team is ongoing, in efforts to maintain the building and related infrastructure. |
| Cooking and Garden Task Team | The community garden of CGH was started in January 2019, which served as an important support structure during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to contributing to food security, the cooking and garden task teams offer skills training programmes for the elderly and other residents. |

Figure 5: Members of the Garden Task Team preparing seed balls with a makeshift mixer.

Source: Tommaso Cosentino

Figure 6: A section of the Cissie Gool House vegetable garden

Source: Tommaso Cosentino

Figure 7: A member of the Safety and Security Task Team on night patrol duty.


Source: Still from the ‘City Occupied’ short documentary by Sara De Gouveia.

Figure 8: Members of the maintenance task team repairing a break in the ceiling

Source: Kezia Fortuin

Figure 9: Gallery wall showcasing the re-purposing of outside space as a garden

Source: Kezia Fortuin

Figure 10: Corrugated iron sheets used to repair part of the fire-damaged ceiling

Source: Kezia Fortuin

Figure 11: Gardeners, Maintenance Task Team and external volunteers fixing a safety hazard in the garden

Source: Kezia Fortuin

### *House & Section Meetings*

In addition to weekly meetings, and the ongoing work of the task teams, there are also moments when Mass House Meetings are held. The function of these mass meetings is to share information, engage with questions, rally support, and broadly enable a collective dialogue.

There are also weekly Section Meetings, where Monitors meet with and engage the people who live in their same section – or floor – of the building to discuss issues occurring at this level and report to and from the Monitors Meeting.

Overall, it is important to recognise that there is a strong collective governance structure within CGH, designed to support the repair and maintenance in the building, make decisions about internal needs, and to engage with external stakeholders. In addition, the task teams are actively involved in advancing a model of adequate housing provisioning and offer support structures for the residents. There well-established governance structures in place at CGH have been an essential element of organisation both inside and outside of the house, supporting an ethic of mutual support, collective-life, conflict-solution, disciplining of antisocial behaviour, and decision-making. The existence of these arrangements should be recognized as a real asset that the City should work with and build upon in any efforts towards meaningful engagement, partnership and co-design.

### 3.2.2. Repurposing and Repair

Making occupied land and buildings into spaces for medium- to long-term habitation requires monetary and embodied investments in the material conditions of places and infrastructures. To transform the building to residential use, significant repurposing, repair and maintenance was undertaken, and continues in the space. This has primarily involved partitioning living quarters and repurposing spaces for residents' use and needs. One of the best examples is the central hall. Prior to occupation, the central hall served as a nurses' dining room. This hall has remained materially intact, today serving a myriad of new purposes (Cirolia et al., 2021; Scheba and Millington, 2023). Weddings, public and house meetings, community feeding schemes, church services, and a Madrassah are conducted in the central hall. Importantly, these material practices are equally about claims to belonging in the city, and about repairing historical and ongoing displacement.

Figure 12: A meeting with national and international stakeholders in the CGH Hall

Source: authors, 1 December 2023

CGH has offered a space of refuge to residents in their struggle for shelter and survival. In repurposing the building into a home, residents have made contributions towards building upkeep. They repaired a building that had fallen into disrepair, investing money, skills and their own labour to create a living space. As with the governance structures, these community led investments and design, provide evidence of a practice that can be leveraged in working toward a model of co-design on the site that supports long-term tenure security.

### 3.2.3. Addressing social ills

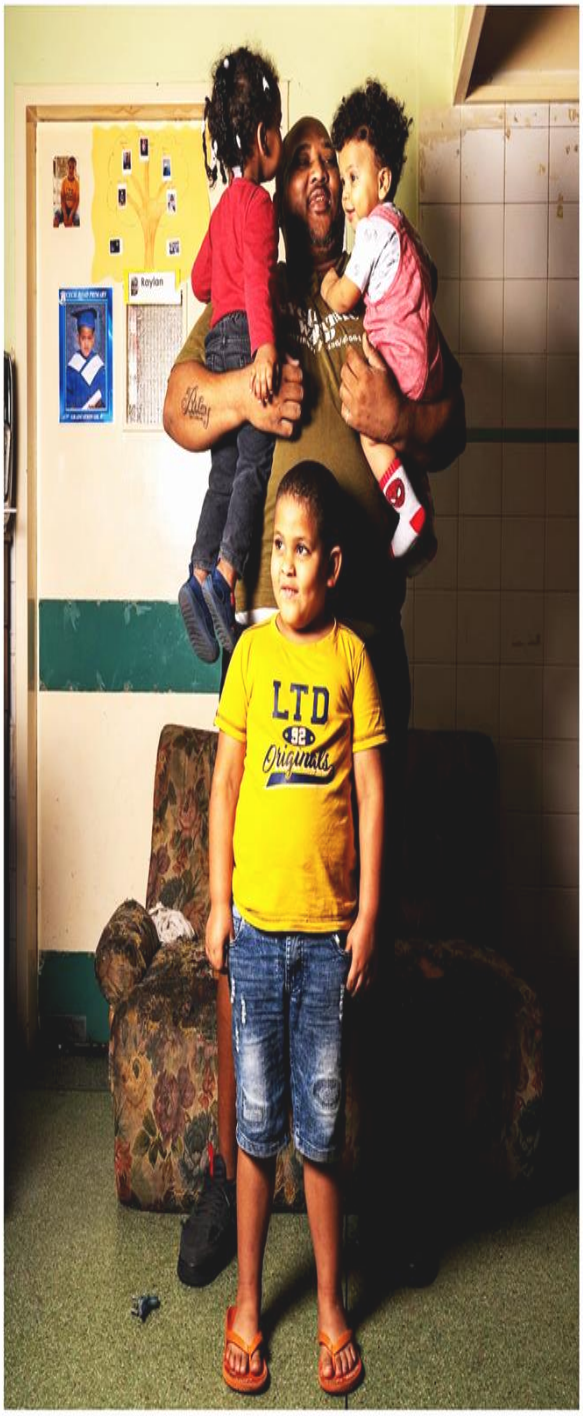
CGH is not immune to social ills and challenges, including substance abuse and gender-based violence. These social ills are a reflection of the reality in Cape Town and South Africa. They are the product of much wider and deeper socio-economic challenges, structural inequality and historical injustices. Importantly, the leadership structures and various task teams of CGH have tried to address these challenges in the occupation, working at times with law enforcement, other state agencies and civil society organisations. However, this work of conflict mitigation and resolution is emotionally taxing and extremely exhausting as the leaders and residents spend significant time, resources and energy, often sacrificing their own family time and wellbeing. They continue due to their commitment to the movement and the house. Nonetheless, the involvement of a supportive state would go a long way in addressing these challenges, which are equally structural, worsened by the lack of work, leisure and related opportunities for youth and adults alike. As argued by Harrison et al. (2018),

"a primary emphasis on policing interventions and a war on drugs are arguably insufficient and inadequate … these responses focus on the symptoms rather than the cause. Instead, at a policy level what is needed are responses that fundamentally address the drivers of drug use, drug trade, gang activity and other related social ills. Two concrete recommendations include firstly an effort to rethink education, beginning at the level of the ECD sector … Secondly there is a need to contribute to the building of resilient, vibrant and supportive communities (Pinnock, 2016). This should include the availability of after-school facilities and activities" (p.58).

## 3.3 A glimpse into CGH: Some resident stories

Below we share a few images of residents of CGH, to offer a small view into their stories (also see www.city-occupied.net). Through these, and many more, you begin to see that CGH is largely made up of people that want a place to call home. They do not want to live with uncertainty and fragility and, in occupying the building, many did so to protect their children from the desolation of TRAs.

Figure 13: Three stories of CGH residents




For me, anything that is growing in the garden is part of life, so you are part of the cycle. If you maintain the garden, you maintain you, and what surrounds you. When you come to the garden, no matter what challenges you face in the garden, you face it together as a team, you see?

My past has badly affected me, so I decided to go in a different direction. For me personally, I want my children to be stable and have a place to go because the stuff I went through in life I don't want them to go through. So, that's why I put a lot of effort in what I do. For the benefit of them.

I moved in here about four years ago, the main thing is a roof over my head, and a place to secure myself. I became a member of Reclaim the City, because they're fighting for people who are being evicted and who are struggling to get a place of their own.
Day by day, people can't afford high rent anymore. I know a lot of my friends don't stay here anymore, because of this.

I just love it here, because I have a lot of memories around here in Woodstock. I love it here, I did make it a home, for me and my family.
I know people on the waiting list for 30 years, 40 years. Why, how can that be? How long must we wait? What's the system?

All they say is that you 'have to wait', and we're going to die still waiting for a house … But if they want to give people houses far away from where they grow up, they want to take everything away from the people. Their history, their memories, everything.

- Miles Sampson


I lived around Brooklyn, but my husband was in an accident and died. I was bedridden and couldn't work. I was evicted and went to live with my sister in a passage, with my two boys. The guys that bought the house sent me an SMS! They said, I must be out, I had 25 days to look for another place because they want to renovate and double the rent. They said they're going to phone the police to confiscate all my stuff and then put me in the street. I believed them.

I was a nervous wreck! I was living in the passage when I heard about this place, I started coming to meetings. We learned about Reclaim the City and all the rights you have! Those that live here were evicted or we can't afford rent out there.

This place was rat-infested, birds lived in here, dirt, human faeces, everything. We cleaned up. That's something I can't understand.

The people outside preferred when this place was empty, rat infested. But we cleaned this place up, room by room. They say we are all bad elements, we are called all kinds of names, but we are families, working people. We have structures, leadership meetings, monitors, a task team, first aid workshop, gender-based violence workshop, psychologists coming here also to see children.

I have a space in the meeting room with the children to keep them busy in the afternoons, to do their homework, there's a library, some nights we have a movie night. We are trying to keep the youth busy so that they don't go into drugs, alcohol. We are a community here with the same challenges as outside, but we stick together and help. Like I say, your child is my child.

- Amanda Gericke

We travelled a lot during my childhood. Most of my childhood was Durban and Joburg, and then I came to Cape Town and I stayed with my aunt. It was a stable environment, structured. We would come to school every morning early, travel to town and come to school, staying all day, until 5 o'clock when they'd finished work.

I went to Walmer High, and my granny was still here, so we'd be in town. It was fun for us because we could do many things.

Later in life, I had a hard marriage. I went through a lot, it affected me physically and mentally. Then I came back to Cape Town, my mother is in Woodstock and my son. But, it's a small place, and I was there for about a month and put my name down here at CGH, attended meetings. This is my fifth year here.

Cissie Gool House has actually changed me from being shy and not talking out. It's made more active, it's made me not keep things in … I have people on my floor that look after me. If I'm sick they will come and check on me. If I'm not here, they will look for me. I love this.

I'm happy here. I'm in my own environment, my own space. I'm on the first floor in K-Walk. I have good people, I can communicate with all different people here … we live with each other, we communicate, no matter what race you are, no matter what type of person you are.

I've been involved in many things since I came here – like the kitchen and the eviction task teams. I know now what my rights are. You can't just evict. You have to go through procedures. By being here you learn a lot. But I think one of the main things that most people are here for is evictions. They didn't know their rights, and so they obviously just gave in.

- Shenaaz Samodien

Source: City Occupied (2021).

# 4. Development without Displacement

## 4.1. A partnership approach: seizing the opportunity

"A partnership approach is important to ensure that communities are engaged and support the spatial vision. This will include how the spatial plans will impact on their current surroundings and co-creating a future where more people in the city have access to opportunities, transport and affordable housing" (City of Cape Town, 2023, page 7).

Importantly, the above quote, emphasising partnership, is taken from the current Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework of the City of Cape Town.

The leadership of CGH have for years reached out to the City to discuss opportunities for collaboration and partnering. Indeed, in the beginning, there was an initial period of dialogue with a few city officials, some of whom provided some technical support or helped get some limited public resources to the occupation to fix critical infrastructure issues (water and electricity). CGH leaders also made plans for organising an 'open house' and photo exhibition at the occupation, which were testimony to their efforts to construct a positive relationship with the local state. Later on, they invited the mayor and city officials to their co-design exhibition and workshop in June 2023 (Scheba et al., 2024).

Since the end of 2018, however, the approach towards the occupation by the City has become defined by antagonism, criminalisation and refusal to engage meaningfully with the leadership and residents. On several occasions, the mayor and city officials have described the occupation as an "orchestrated building hijacking" and the main obstacle to developing the site (Metelerkamp and Payne, 2023). In a press release dated 29 September 2024, the City's Mayoral Committee Member for Human Settlements, Councillor Carl Pophaim, claims that "The illegal occupation of the Woodstock Hospital site has been the single biggest delay to this development" (City of Cape Town, 2024b). In reality, however, a shift in narrative and approach is a possibility. There is an opportunity to meaningfully engage in discussions about the future for the site.

There are existing governance structures, existing efforts to co-design, bottom-up design practices, very real everyday efforts and labours to make home and sustain life at CGH. There are undoubtedly social challenges at the site, but CGH is also a space of care, of home, of struggle, and an insistence on belonging & dignity. There is a real opportunity for the City to take seriously the promises of a post-apartheid South Africa, and to open up to the genuine potential for co-design and collaboration with the CGH community.

## 4.2. Co-design as meaningful participation

Residents have been engaging in a co-design process to advance an inclusive future housing model for the site. This co-design process should be leveraged to advance a partnership approach, defined by participatory planning and meaningful engagement.

As mentioned, in the beginning, co-design did involve engagements with a few progressively minded political leaders and administrators. During this period, the City commissioned a pre-feasibility study which found that the building is structurally sound and suitable for redevelopment (Stedone Developments, 2019). In addition, the NGO Development Action Group produced a report documenting the story of the movement and repurposing practices of the residents. These reports, in combination, acknowledged the insurgent design practices of CGH residents and suggested that "The precinct is suitable for redevelopment and inclusion of different types of housing options to accommodate listed restitution beneficiaries" (Stedone Developments, 2019).

However, by 2019 there was a change in political leadership. Consequently, despite the strong case for 'development without displacement' as offered by both reports, the City abandoned these earlier attempts. In February 2021, CGH was served with a court order for the City to conduct a survey of the residents. Later in 2021, a tender was put out for a Building Management Agent (MA), placed on the site in April 2022.

Despite the political shift, the CGH residents continued this work of imagining and planning, advancing an internal resident-led co-design process from September 2021. The process began with support from the Cape Town Commoners Project, and a local architect, with additional support from researchers, including International Labour Research And Information Group (ILRIG); Ndifuna Ukwazi, and City Occupied project. As explained in the Cissie Gool House Co-Design documentation (co-design working committee, 2022), in response to the question 'Why co-design at Cissie Gool House?':

"Up to now the Occupier Community at Cissie Gool House have largely been focused on resisting eviction. Now there are clear indications that the right of Occupiers to continue to stay at CGH is being recognised. A positive sign has been the Tender put out in October 2021 by the City of Cape Town for a Building Management Agency for Cissie Gool House … The Tender also confirms that Cissie Gool House will be redeveloped for social housing. A team of Consultants have already been appointed and have commenced work on this. These positive developments raise a number of questions which the Occupier Community at Cissie Gool House must start addressing as a matter of urgency" (p. 2)

The questions and solutions being explored through the process included valuing the existing self-management systems, mapping a vision for the house, and a focus on advancing design interventions that account for the needs of the CGH residents (ibid). The process consisted of several workshops over the period September 2021 to December 2022, and culminated in two exhibitions, one at the CGH hall on 3 December 2022 and the second in the heart of the city at the Cape Institute for Architecture (CIA) from 7-21 June 2023.

Figure 14: CGH Co-Design Exhibition at the Cape Institute for Architecture

Source: authors. June 2023.

A few significant take-aways from this process include that there is a well-structured governance model at the occupation, residents have been (re)designing the building, and they have demonstrated a clear ability to contribute to, plan, and imagine a future for the occupation. Finally, the co-design process has at various stages attempted to engage with state actors and structures, in an effort to advance dialogue. However, this has not been reciprocated as yet.

There is an opportunity now to advance the co-deign in a meaningful way. The process is illustrative of what true and substantive public participation should look like in a country Constitutionally committed to participation. There is no more compelling example of public engagement than what CGH has already self-organised. The City must engage with the co-design process in good faith, to the benefit of all parties, and to advance the commitment to a democratic project.

Figure 15: Reimagining the model (workshop mapping the CGH journey, 8 June 2024)

Source: authors

## 4.3. Alternative Development Model

In this section we spell out some ideas on the possible 'how to' in advancing an experimental approach, supporting 'Development without Displacement', concretely and practically. In addition, in Section 5 we share global examples of how some of these approaches have been realised in practice.

An updated assessment of the current status of the building, infrastructure, common and private spaces is required to determine urgent needs for investments in repair and maintenance on the site. This should be done in collaboration with the leadership structures and residents, who have invaluable knowledge of the space they've been living in for 8 years.

Building on the existing design model developed during the co-design process, a new **pre-feasibility study** is required for the site that considers a wide range of funding sources, including potential housing grants to be used. In addition the pre-feasibility should grapple with tenure options, governance and maintenance, repairs and maintenance, service provision and infrastructure, and related expertise required. Below we reflect on some of these considerations and options, to be developed further with guidelines, vision and time-line mapped more carefully in the study.

There is also room to engage Architecture Sans Frontières (ASF-UK) (www.asf-uk.org) around their methodology (including their work in the inner city of Johannesburg, see https://www.asf-uk.org/pages/104-south-africa) on guiding thematics and options. The Box below, shared by Dr Beatrice De Carli, reflects on the work of ASF-UK in the inner-city of Johannesburg, and the cross-cutting lessons for considering the prospect of transitioning an occupied or Temporary Emergency Accomodation (TEA) building into long-term adequate housing.

**Box 1: Dr Beatrice De Carli reflects on the work of ASF-UK in the City of Johannesburg**

30 January 2025

Since 2022, Architecture Sans Frontières UK has been dedicated to supporting the right to adequate housing in Johannesburg, where many residents face challenges in accessing affordable and secure housing. Our "Change by Design" initiative specifically aims to collaborate with residents of informally occupied buildings in inner-city Johannesburg, alongside their support organisations, to advocate for their housing claims.

This work has been undertaken in partnership with 1to1 – Agency of Engagement, the Inner City Federation, the Inner City Resource Centre, the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, and the International Institute for Environment and Development. We have also received invaluable support from various universities, including Wits University, the University of Johannesburg, the University of Cape Town, University College London, and the University of Sheffield. Over the past three years, we have engaged with residents from approximately ten informally occupied buildings.

Our collective efforts in the inner city of Johannesburg have confirmed a fundamental hypothesis: that inner-city buildings—whether unlawfully occupied, temporarily established, or abandoned—are vital resources for providing affordable housing opportunities in well-located urban areas. We view these buildings as essential pathways to ensuring residents have access to adequate housing, considering factors such as habitability, service provision, cultural suitability, and more. Our co-produced multilingual guidebook, Our Right to Adequate Housing, elaborates on these dimensions and their significance to inner-city living.

Our extensive documentation of inner-city buildings in Johannesburg indicates that, in general, residents across most of the properties we have visited have been effectively self-managing their homes—sometimes for decades. They have established efficient systems for managing day-to-day operations, including maintenance, security, rent collection, and cleaning. There is considerable capacity and enthusiasm for self-management and resident-led repair and maintenance. Socio-technical organisations, universities, and inner-city social movements have played a crucial role in supporting these efforts, often with very limited financial and human resources.

While day-to-day operations are generally well-managed, the uncertain policy context and lack of tenure security, combined with limited access to financial resources, pose significant challenges. These factors hinder residents and their support organisations from saving effectively and addressing longer-term structural issues, as well as ongoing maintenance needs.

In Johannesburg, our findings suggest it is essential for local government to recognise and support the immense potential within these self-managed communities. By implementing

policies and legal mechanisms that provide tenure security and access to financial resources, local governments can empower residents to take charge of their living conditions and actively participate in the upgrade, repair, and maintenance of their homes. This approach would not only enhance the quality of housing but also foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents. Unlocking policy and financial opportunities for self-management and community-led initiatives can lead to transformative change in Johannesburg's inner city.

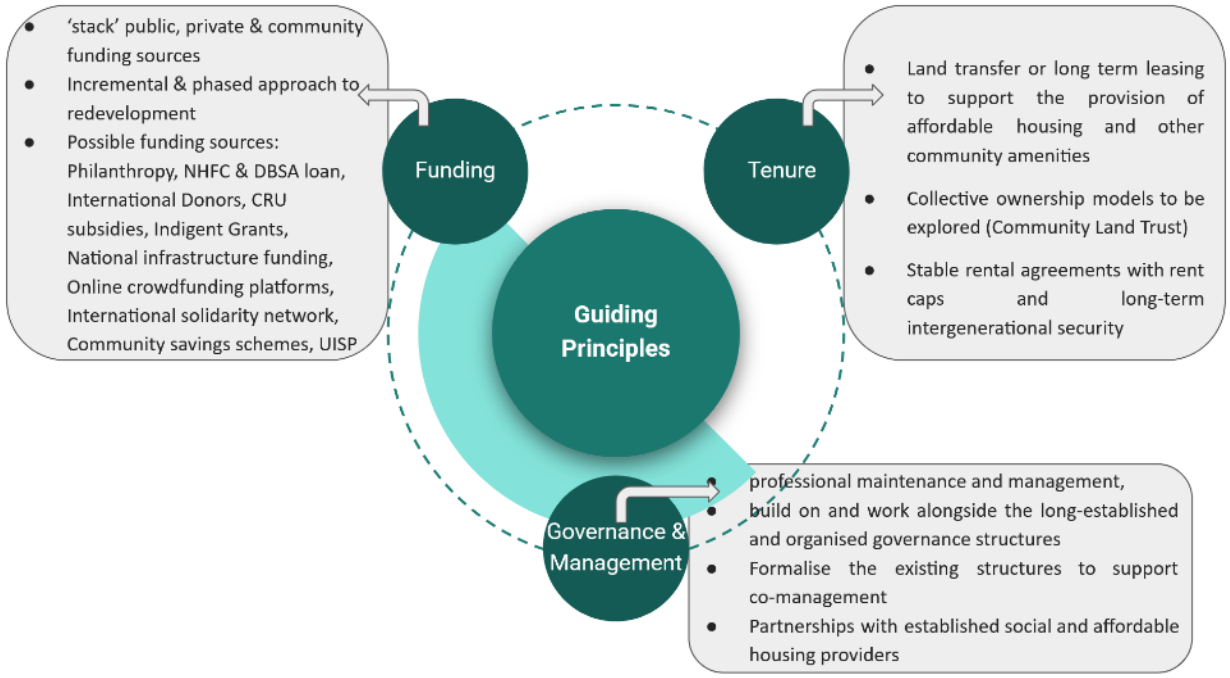
Alongside the work and advocacy of ASF-UK and 1to1 – Agency of Engagement, there's an existing wealth of technical assistance capacity in Cape Town and the rest of the country that can and should be leveraged, both in the Universities and Support institutions (this includes many of the South African based signatories on this submission).

Table 2: Alternative Development Model - Key Thematics & Options

| Key Thematics | Options |
|---|---|
| Guiding Principles | ● A recognition from the City that CGH residents have invested a significant amount of their own energy, labour and resources into the building and site to make it their home.<br>● Their efforts should be recognised and appreciated. Any future (re)development of the site should be built on CGH community's previous investments.<br>● An acknowledgement from the City that maximising the number of genuinely affordable homes for existing CGH residents should be the basis of assessing any future development proposals.<br>● A genuine attempt to engage with the residents, governance structures and systems already in place to co-design and implement the redevelopment of the site. This will require innovation, experimentation and collaboration. |
| Funding | We acknowledge that there are limitations within the housing subsidy system and social housing subsidies may take time (5 years). However, it is useful to be guided by an effort to 'stack' public and private funding sources, and to focus on short, medium and long-term funding options, supporting an incremental and inclusive development approach. There are complementary sources of funding that could be sourced and combined (See diagram below). Recent debates and efforts by stakeholders in the City of Johannesburg have highlighted the potential to tap into the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme to fund the refurbishment of occupied buildings. This is one option that should be explored further. Examples from other contexts (e.g. Brazil) highlight the potential of combining public, private and community funding when financing upgrades to building occupations. |
| Security of Tenure | A proper exploration of tenure mechanisms and which would be most appropriate in the context of CGH would be helpful. These could include lease-hold, cooperative and community land trust models. Internationally, there is strong precedent for the use of long term leasing to support the provision of affordable housing and other community amenities. Community Land Trusts ("CLTs") provide an established mechanism that could be utilised in South Africa. A clearer indication of timelines for when and how the land |

| | |
|---|---|
| | release process will unfold to allow sufficient time to develop robust, implementable proposals. |
| Governance & Management | The building will need professional maintenance and management, but this should build on and work alongside the long-established and organised governance structures already in place, to both increase effectiveness and reduce costs. Formalising the existing democratic structures into a cooperative housing model could be explored as a way forward. |

Figure 16: Alternative Development Model - Key Thematics & Options



## 5. Global Precedents

In this submission, we argue for the importance of inclusive development that 1) recognises the capacity of everyday people to imagine and make the city, 2) commits to meaningful engagement with urban residents regardless of the designation of their practices as 'informal', and 3) explicitly works to heal the socio-spatial wounds of apartheid, including no longer perpetuating ongoing cycles of intergenerational trauma and displacement.

We propose the importance of advancing development without displacement, that relies on imaginative funding, tenure, and governance mechanisms. We believe this is both a possibility and an opportunity to elevate Cape Town as an imaginative, just and inclusive city. Furthermore, there are global examples to draw from, lessons to be learnt, and models to borrow in carving out this path.

International experience advanced by progressive and experimental local governments, shows that development without displacement is within the realm of possibility. In cities around the world, governments have demonstrated how the state can work with occupier communities and other stakeholders to upgrade informal settlements, respecting citizens' rights and making their places dignified and liveable. There is a rich body of literature that has documented experiences of informal settlements upgrading, including cases of building occupations, from which one can draw inspiration and important lessons for the Cape Town context (Cociña and Frediani, 2024; Dovey et al. 2023; Cirolia et al. 2017; Gouverneur, 2014). In the sections below, we briefly present four examples where governments engaged constructively with informal occupier communities and collaboratively co-designed development that did not result in large-scale displacement, but strengthened citizenship rights, improved housing quality and promoted spatial justice.

### 5.1. São Paulo, Brazil

One of them is the municipality of São Paulo in Brazil, which has developed systems and administrative processes to regularise inner-city occupations in collaboration with housing movements, residents, technical assistance organisations and the national sphere of government. Since most of the city's vacant buildings are privately owned, the municipality typically has to purchase the property from the private owner first, before embarking on the remodelling process. The Brazilian constitution explicitly recognises the right to housing and the social function of property, and through the 2001 City Statute and 2014 Strategic Master plan, the municipality developed an institutional framework that emphasises a participatory approach to remodelling underutilised and occupied buildings into adequate housing. Technical assistance organisations support the technical process of refurbishment, while housing movements play a key role in governing occupations and connecting them to the wider housing struggle (Alberti, 2022). The State provides tenure security, upgrades bulk infrastructure and, depending on the specific housing programme, supports occupiers in accessing affordable finance. One example of

such a participatory refurbishment process is the Elza Soares occupation (Lord Palace Hotel), which started as an occupation of 200 families in 2012 and was collectively managed by the housing movement “Frente de Luta por Moradia” (FLM) (Cash, 2016). In 2018 refurbishment started and in 2022 families began to move back in. The tenure, governance and finance instruments that supported this movement from occupation to adequate, secure and long-term housing for families in need can be carefully considered and offer lessons for Cape Town. There is an opportunity to advance regeneration that is collaborative as opposed to antagonistic and anti-poor. The two images below show the transformation of the Elza Soares occupation before and after the refurbishment.

Figure 16: Elza Soares Occupation before refurbishment.

Source: https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2023/04/16/hotel-de-luxo-em-que-elza-soares-e-garrincha-foram-barrados-por-racismo-em-sp-vira-moradia-popular-e-ganha-mural-da-cantora.ghtml

Figure 17: Elza Soares Occupation after refurbishment.

Elza Soares occupation after refurbishment. Source: authors; January 2023

## 5.2. Barcelona, Spain

Another example is located in Barcelona, Spain where local government has constructively engaged with occupations undertaken by members of the housing movement 'Platform for People Affected by Mortgages' (PAH) (Martinez and Wissink, 2022). As part of their Obra Social campaign, the PAH occupied vacant buildings owned by banks that were bailed out by government after the 2007/08 global financial crisis. Under the leadership of Mayor Colau, the city council exercised a careful and respectful discourse about occupations and entered into

constructive negotiations with the movements to find mutually beneficial solutions. Banks, developers and private owners participated in many negotiations, which ultimately increased the social housing stock in the city. The municipality even encouraged the establishment of local housing co-operatives to keep ownership in the hands of the community and rents affordable. Besides political will and adequate public resource allocation to deal with the challenge, regular channels of communication between the council and housing movements were crucial to the success. The productive alliances between a progressive mayor and councillors on the one side, and housing movements and occupiers on the other side, created a fertile ground for realising the right to dignified housing. This is a mode of 'new municipalism' that can be tested in Cape Town, and prove to be incredibly powerful in tackling our apparently intractable challenges and ongoing racial and spatial divide.

### 5.3. Bogotá, Colombia

In Bogotá, the city administration established an Integral Neighborhood Improvement programme (MIB) in response to informal urbanization and the housing deficit. It is a set of policies to integrate precarious settlements into the urban structure, improving living conditions and reducing socio-spatial inequalities. The case shows the importance of comprehensive approaches to urban development that include both material and symbolic aspects of habitat and residents' rights in central areas of interest to real estate developers. The study highlights the importance of maintaining open channels of communication, citizen participation and the importance of protection instruments. Furthermore, it shows that there are avenues to address apparently irreconcilable rationalities and logics (Gonzalez, 2021).

In 1996, Los Olivos was part of a massive legalization process, which during the first term of Mayor Mockus "officially recognized the existence" of 281 informal neighborhoods, a process that lasted 10 years. The 2012 mayoral program "Bogotá Humana" formulated a Land Use Plan (POT) that sought to densify the city, protect the environmental edge, and reduce segregation. This POT sought to counteract the "neoliberalization of urban space" by confronting the interests of real estate actors with a shift in urban policy that broadened participation and intervened in the land market to encourage social housing in the 'Expanded Center', incorporating more than 6,000 hectares to the urban renewal treatment and proposing revitalization as an alternative for the protection of dwellers in urban renewal areas.

The first inhabitants of Olivos, who had actively participated in the social construction of the territory, were the ones who resisted displacement and claimed their right to remain, with the support of local officials and politicians of the territory. This resistance triggered the application of instruments for the protection of the inhabitants, with their involvement in the public initiative 'Los Olivos Project'. In addition, the invitation to participate in the decisions of the 'revitalize your block' plan empowered the community to negotiate design and housing typologies with the construction company.  A legal process allowed preferential rights for original owners, social

compensation, strata conservation for replacement properties and housing subsidies for rental homes. The innovation of the project, with the participation of the community in the process, resulted in homes, adjacent to the residential apartments, for the residents linked to the project.

Figure 18: Los Olivos project.

Source: authors, January 2023

## 5.4. Vienna, Austria

Vienna, the capital of Austria, is widely regarded for its high quality of living. In 2024, the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Vienna the most liveable city in the world for the third time in a row. Widespread access to affordable and adequate housing is a key contributing factor to Vienna's success. The city has one of the largest social housing stocks in the world. More than half of its 2 million large population live in social rental housing - either provided by the state or the third sector (cooperative housing associations). While the history of Vienna's social housing sector - particularly during the period 1918 - 1934 famously known as Red Vienna - has been well documented, the significance of informality, self-provisioning and state governance in its emergence is far less understood. Yet, according to Hauer and Kramer (2023), "Vienna was one of the European 'capitals' of informal urbanization in the 20th century".

Using historical and present-day geodata and surveys, the authors illustrate the remarkable scale, persistence and transformation of informal settlements over the course of a century. What is now one of the wealthiest and most densely regulated cities in the world has in fact been shaped by a long history of incremental and self-provisioned forms of housing, driven partly by extreme social and economic hardship. Following the housing crisis after WWI, dwellers of informal settlements together with professionals organized as housing construction cooperatives and – with financial and material support of the City of Vienna – improved living conditions and collectively constructed urgently needed housing units. Today, the housing cooperatives have turned into limited-profit housing associations as an important pillar of affordable housing provision in Austria.

Additionally, following WW2 instead of evicting and relocating unlawful occupiers, the city began to formalise and legalise informal settlements from the 1960s onwards, incorporating them into the urban fabric through creating new zoning schemes and amending development control regulations. According to Hauer and Kramer (2023), about half of today's vast suburban residential areas originate in the informal peripheries that emerged from 1918 to the 1960. The formalisation and legalisation process was not without challenges and took place over many decades, resulting in a “patchwork of both legal status and urban tissues”. Importantly, the informal housing practices fed back into the formal planning system, both the planning instruments and officials who were executing them. From this emerged a general attitude of compromise in planning that has contributed to making the city one of the most livable places today.

Apart from the approach of incorporating informality into a today highly refined social housing policy system, Vienna also developed an UN-award-winning approach to Urban Renewal for dealing with dilapidated housing stock from the 1970s onwards. The so-called Soft Urban Renewal emerged out of civic protests against the demolition of old buildings and the willingness of public authorities to design a programme that would allow the renovation of existing residential buildings, while avoiding eviction and displacement. The underlying legal framework and financial subsidies for urban renewal were meant to incentivize private landlords to invest in the dilapidated residential buildings but in parallel to guarantee residents the right to stay through rent caps. In addition, the implementation of urban renewal offices fostered participatory processes and community engagement (Kirsch-Soriano da Silva et al., 2025). Today, the number of substandard housing units (lacking sanitary and/or heating facilities) have been reduced from 42% of the total of Viennese dwelling units in the 1970s to 4.5% in 2014.

## 6. Conclusion

What happens to Cissie Gool House is of global significance. It is a local illustration of what is at stake in cities around the world. Every day we see a deepening crisis of housing poverty and inequality, manifesting on top of persistent historical injustices. Within a failing housing system, poor and working-class families are struggling to keep a roof over their head, while real estate wealth is soaring, contributing to displacement and segregation. In a context like Cape Town, which is among the most unequal and segregated cities in the world, the inevitability of informality and self-provisioning are obvious. As authors and supporters of this submission we are deeply invested in the future of CGH and its residents: its ramifications go well beyond Cape Town and South Africa.

What is at stake here is the political ask of doing things differently. The City of Cape Town is given an opportunity to truly co-design an urban space that is genuinely inclusive, integrated and transformative. CGH is an opportunity to achieve what governments in South Africa – and the world – ought to do: create cities for all. Now is the time. CGH is the place.

The CGH community is ready to work with the City and other stakeholders to redevelop the site. We have provided evidence about the labour, time and resources CGH residents have invested into the space, transforming an abandoned hospital into a home of care. We described the governance and leadership structures, task teams and solidarity networks that CGH established over time, which makes a solid foundation for collaboration, experimentation and co-design. We have pointed at international examples to show that a development without displacement approach is possible and offered insights into how this may be achieved in the specific Cape Town context.

We understand that this is a risky and difficult path but argue that it is worthwhile and beneficial for all. The authors and signatories to this submission comprise a network of locally embedded and international urban scholars who have dedicated their professional lives to more just and equitable urban futures. We believe that a different urban world is possible.

In writing and supporting this submission, we aim to embolden and support the City to pursue a ‘development without displacement’ approach. As scholars we are here to walk along this less travelled road, offering our knowledge and research skills, facilitate learning and exchange, building capacity and document lessons. We sincerely hope you’ll take up this challenge and are ready to be called on to support.

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