

Developer hits back at detractors over proposed R4bn River Club project

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An artist's impression of the River Club development. The developer has slammed claims it would mirror Canal Walk. Picture: Supplied

Cape Town - The developer of the controversial River Club development in Observatory has lashed out at his detractors.

“I am sick of all the lies,” said Jody Aufrichtig, over complaints that his intended plans will mirror Canal Walk.

“It has been frustrating having people lie about what we are planning, a lot of people have fabricated what we have said.

“It’s hard hearing that we have never engaged with anyone when we have spoken to various role-players in the community on a number of occasions.”

Aufrichtig dismissed claims that they are planning to build a replica of Canal Walk.

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“What we want to do is create a development blending different cultures and socio-economic strata.

“I want to make a nice safe environment for the community and not only for Observatory, but for Rondebosch, Langa and Khayelitsha.”

This is the first time Aufrichtig has spoken out amid controversy surrounding the development at the River Club. He said it's become too expensive for him to maintain the area and the area has become a dumping site.

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“Keeping the area clean and making the golf course look nice has cost a fortune. We are talking thousands of rand and to add to it we have to keep the illegal dumping off the site.”

It costs him R1 million just to maintain the area.

For seven years the community of Observatory has been objecting to plans to redevelop the River Club.

Residents have also raised concerns about how the proposed redevelopment on the banks of the river could have a negative impact on the environment and affect the significance of the area's history.

The Liesbeeck River, which is less than 9km long, is situated in the oldest urbanised river valley in South Africa.

The Two Rivers Urban Park is located at the confluence of the Black and Liesbeeck rivers, about 5km from the city centre.

Because of its environment and history, the area has become ideal for a development that could enhance job creation. The redevelopment of the River Club in Observatory is set to cost R4 billion that will include residential, retail and commercial components including a hotel, offices, conference centre and even schools.

The River Club, which is owned and operated by the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust. Indigo Properties, which has been involved in the regeneration of the Old Biscuit Mill in Salt River, the Woodstock Exchange and the Daddy Hotels, and Zenprop, which would fund the development, are the main drivers of the project.

The redevelopment will supply over 5239 jobs during the construction period with a total value of R1.6bn, as well as contributing 13700 indirect and induced jobs. Twenty percent of the residential space will be dedicated to inclusionary housing for key workers, according to Aufrichtig, those key workers include policemen, nurses and teachers. Recently, at a special council meeting of Heritage Western Cape, a decision was made to keep the areas protection status. Initially it was recommended that the areas protection status be withdrawn.

“I think Heritage Western Cape provisionally protected the site without understanding, they should’ve let the process run its course.” It’s now a matter of waiting. They are currently halfway through for the environmental commenting stage. It’s a 60-day period where the public can comment on the various studies they have done on the area. Aufrichtig hopes for construction to start in early 2021.

Tauriq Jenkins, the chairperson of the Observatory Civic Association said: “This is a battle of restorative justice (It) has deep historical roots. It’s important for all the stakeholders to take note. This is a very sacred ground.”

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