



OBSERVATORY  
Civic Association

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60 Trill Road  
Observatory  
7925  
26<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Ms Vivienne Sasman  
Admin Assistant: Good Hope Subcouncil 16  
10th Floor, 44 Wale Street, Cape Town  
URBAN MANAGEMENT: AREA 1 (NORTH)  
Email: [vivienne.sasman@capetown.gov.za](mailto:vivienne.sasman@capetown.gov.za)

Att: Mr Gerswhin Foudien, sub-council manager.

Dear Ms Sasman

**Proposed Lease of City land, portion Erf 26168, Station Road Observatory for security purposes by PRASA – Comment to Ward 57 sub-council**

The Observatory Civic Association wishes to note its strong objection to the proposed leasing of a portion of Erf 26168 in Station Rd Observatory, as indicated in the letter dated 29 November 2021 addressed to the manager of Sub-council 16 and circulated for comment on the same day.

We do not believe the plan to lease the land to PRASA for security purposes is in the interests of the local community for the reasons outlined below.

Instead, we believe City land should be deployed for social benefit and we outline below an alternative that should be considered in preference to renting the land to PRASA.

1. The suitability of the site for a community upliftment / development activity
  - a. Observatory has a sizeable population of persons living on the streets for whom both the Observatory Civic Association (OCA) and the Observatory Improvement District

(OBSID) are attempting to develop services so as to assist as many as possible to leave street-based living and achieve some measure of rehabilitation. In this regard, the OBSID, in conjunction with other community partners, initiated a supportive housing project, now known as the Observatory Rainbow House, to assist homeless person to get off the streets and be given skills and orientation to enter the labour market in a graded process.

- b. In 2020/1, the project was supported by a local NGO, Streetscapes but the NGO could not continue to manage the project through 2021. Community efforts through the OCA and OBSID helped to keep the project running through various lockdowns and economic downturns.
- c. The management of the project has now been taken over by another community development NPO, the Rehoming Collective, run by Mr Carlos Mesquita.
- d. Their plans are extensive and include supportive accommodation elsewhere in Observatory as well as services to the homeless to assist with the rehoming process. The more professional Hub services such as computer training and social worker interventions will be run elsewhere in Observatory but a more informal area will be needed for less formal interventions and 24-hour services.
- e. The Rainbow House is located on Station Road as the closest property to the Erf currently in question for the lease. That space under the bridge slated for rental to PRASA is perfectly situated for the outreach and extension hub planned by the Rehoming Collective as part of this work. It is a covered space in close proximity to the Rainbow House.
- f. The Rehoming Collective plans to apply to the City to lease this space as an open and attractive urban space which also serves as a point in the start of a journey for homeless people that will see them re-homed with dignity. It is important that the space becomes known to serve the entire community and especially the homeless in terms of becoming the open door to take them on this journey. Please see the attached brief outline for this initiative. A more detailed proposal will be made by the Rehoming Collective to the City to rent this space shortly. As we understand, the organisation was awaiting funding before applying to the City to lease this land and the funding has only been confirmed in the last few days.
- g. For that reason, we believe that it would be entirely inappropriate for the City to lease the land to PRASA for security purposes when a social enterprise, attempting to address a wicked social problem in our community, would make far better use of the area for its drop-in zone activities, including a 48 hour emergency shelter space and a 24 hour emergency lines, as well as supporting various other activities that are linked to the hub.
- h. Such activities would, in any event, be a more successful contribution to promotion of security both for the community and for PRASA.

- i. The lease should therefore not be granted to PRASA since there is more cogent and pressing community need for which that space can serve. The Rehoming Collective will be submitting a proposal to rent the same space for the purposes described above and will have the support of the OCA and the OBSID on the basis that there will be substantial community benefit from deploying the space for a community project.
- j. Once the land is leased to PRASA, the opportunity to realise the benefits of a community initiative to address homelessness will be lost.

## 2. Pedestrian Access

- a. From the documentation for the proposed lease, it appears that PRASA intends to secure the entire open space available under the bridge. The borders of the marked-up space in the map extend up to the steps of the subway and abut the Obz Lifestyle Informal Market site.
- b. This means that PRASA intends to close off pedestrian access under the bridge. This is a problem for pedestrian mobility as those who walk between the subway and the workplaces and homes to the north of Station will have to cross Station Road by foot (rather than walking under Station Rd bridge).
- c. There is no safe pedestrian crossing anywhere near this site and it is implausible that pedestrians will walk 50m up Station Rd to cross the road at the traffic lights on Lower Main. More likely is that they will take an easy shortcut across the busy Station Road directly at the start of the bridge.
- d. The nett result will be increased danger of motor vehicle accidents involving pedestrians – pedestrians who would have used the path under the bridge to walk across to their destinations. If pedestrians cross the road just after the bridge, it will also disrupt vehicular traffic and increase risk of vehicle collisions.
- e. The closure of space under the bridge on the east side of Station Road behind a metal fence (opposite Cape Mental Health, and currently used for parking) has meant that public space is no longer accessible at all. It is an example of dead space and a waste of a potentially beneficial use of public spaces.
- f. We fear that the same will occur with PRASA leasing this erf as PRASA, unlike the City of Cape Town, are under no obligation to respond to local community needs.
- g. The plans of the Rehoming Collective for renting and utilising the space under the Station Road bridge will not interfere with pedestrian movement by people seeking to walk to and from the subway. Rather, the plans are to not to fence off the area and close it to the community but to keep it open and attractive so that it is part of the vision of the community working with the homeless to rehouse them.

3. Alternative space available to PRASA.
  - a. If PRASA wish to erect structures or cages for security purposes, there is ample room on their existing property behind the fence along the railway line to do so. It is inappropriate for PRASA to consume publicly accessible space for their security purposes.
4. Rental
  - a. The rental appears to be about R 3 per square metre per month. We hope that the City will be willing to lease the area for the same rental in response to a lease application that will be proposed by the Rehoming Collective.
5. The policy context
  - a. The City released a [notice in 2020](#) indicating its intent to pursue a “socially sensitive and flexible approach” to homelessness “that will see the development of a well-informed, caring and right-based strategy to address the plight of those who sleep on the streets.” The City’s then Mayoral Committee Member for Community Services and Health, Councillor Zahid Badroodien, was quoted as saying that the City is “committed to civic participation with the people of Cape Town to design caring solutions to support those who sleep on our city’s streets.”
  - b. We believe that granting a lease to PRASA for a section of an erf ideally suited to creating a safe space for persons living on the street run by an independent operator is contrary to the City’s [own stated policy intent](#). Using suitable public land to afford the Rehoming Collective opportunity to rent that space for an initiative for street-based persons would be more in line with a desire for “caring solutions” rather than renting it to a State-owned enterprise that has other land it can use for its security needs.
  - c. We are proposing “civic participation” (the OCA, OBSID and the Rehoming Collective in collaboration) to find caring solutions – one part of which includes utilisation of the space in question for the Homeless Hub activities.

Lastly, we also note that the letter refers to a notice that was put out for public comment in May 2021 regarding “Leases, lease renewals and encroachments of a minor nature.” The advert was circulated in the Burger and the Cape Argus on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2021 with a deadline for comments, at the time, of one month.

As far as we can tell, this notice was not circulated in any community newspapers nor by email to organisations registered with the City such as civic associations or community organisations. We did not, to our knowledge, receive this notice, so could not comment at the time.

We draw attention again to our comments on advertising of notices under the Municipal Planning By law when comments were invited by the City on the MPBL in 2021. We urged that any advertising or notices should be directed, amongst others, to local Civic Associations and Interested and Affected parties registered with the City. This does not seem to have been followed in this particular case. We note this only to urge the city to be consistent with its stated intent of Section 5 of the System of Delegations adopted by the City of Cape Town on 26 March 2020; resolution C05/03/20.

So, in summary, we strongly oppose the granting of the lease to PRASA for the portion of Erf 26168 under the Station Road bridge because:

1. This space is better suited to address social needs related to homelessness in Observatory. A proposal to this effect will be made shortly by the Rehoming Collective with the support of OCA in conjunction with OBSID.
2. The rental of this land to PRASA will interfere with pedestrian mobility and increase risk of accidents involving pedestrians and motor vehicles on Station Rd.
3. PRASA has access to other land for its security needs.
4. PRASA's security needs should not take precedence over the needs of the community – particularly when they have other alternative land.
5. As community organisations, we are working with an NPO addressing the needs of people living on the street and want the City to support this initiative.
6. Renting the land to PRASA would not be consistent with the City's own stated policy intention regarding how best to address the problems of homelessness.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal and trust our comments will be seriously considered.

Yours sincerely



Leslie London  
Chairperson