

Cape Town's notorious unfinished freeway finally gives way to Foreshore development

By [Steve Kretzmann](#)

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Development of Cape Town Gateway Precinct, linking the Foreshore to the Bo-Kaap, De Waterkant and the V&A Waterfront, can now begin as land along lower Buitengracht Street has been released to the city by the provincial government.



Release of land along Buitengracht Street is the beginning of the development of the Gateway Precinct. Photo: Steve Kretzmann/WCN

Development has been held back for 40 years because of a road reserve along Buitengracht Street kept by the provincial government for the unfinished Foreshore freeway.

The 11,254m² of land released to the City of Cape Town on 20 January was [announced](#) by the city on 14 February.

The land is made up of vacant plots and parking lots along Buitengracht Street, held in line with a 1970s' plan to create a ring road linking the Foreshore freeway – nicknamed “Solly’s Folly” after city engineer Solly Morris – to Buitengracht Street between Walter Sisulu Avenue and Wale Street.

The city applied to the province in May 2020. It said in a media statement that the road reserve was “outdated” and prevented significant portions of land from being developed.

The Urban Catalytic Investment branch of the city is now in the process of applying to the Development Management Department to rezone the land “to maximise the full development potential” for “retail, commercial, and residential opportunities”.

The vacant land was identified [in a proposal](#) for well-located affordable housing published by housing activist organisation Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) in 2019.

The organisation identified 13,700m² of city-owned land along lower Buitengracht Street that could be developed to provide between 719 and 1,079 affordable housing units in eight to 12-storey mixed-use, mixed-income buildings.

NU did not seem to be aware that most of the land it identified was being held in check by the provincial government at the time.

Nothing decided

Nick Budlender, a researcher at NU, said the organisation would continue to push for affordable housing to be developed along the Buitengracht corridor. He said NU welcomed the release of the land, and that it was “both desirable and possible” to use it to build a mixture of affordable and market-rate housing.

He said the organisation stood by its 2019 proposals, but the number of units proposed would need to be re-evaluated in line with current pricing models.

“The city needs to consult with social housing institutions and companies,” he said.

“Nothing has been decided as yet,” said deputy mayor Eddie Andrews, who is mayco member for spatial planning and environment.

Andrews said the Buitengracht land was part of the Gateway Precinct long-term vision for phased implementation of projects for the western edge of the city centre, parts of the Bo-Kaap, and De Waterkant. This included “significant public realm improvements” along with “possible land disposals in line with the relevant and applicable planning policies”.

He said opportunities for future development included: the Strand Street Quarry as a possible community sports and recreation facility with infrastructure supporting tourism and employment, development of new pedestrian corridors and public parks linking Bo-Kaap, De Waterkant, V&A Waterfront and central business district, as well as new public squares linking Battery Park to Green Market Square.

He invited the submission of ideas and proposals for the land and stated he would announce when a public participation process is opened.



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Unfinished freeway an open question

The question of whether the Foreshore freeway will ever be completed remains open.

Mayco member for urban mobility Rob Quintas said the directorate was working on several proposals for the unfinished freeway.

“The work is still at a very early stage; as such, there is no further information available at this point in time,” said Quintas.

In the [five-year integrated development plan](#) 2022 to 2027, the city states it will “pursue the completion of the Foreshore freeway” as part of a Targeted Road Capacity Enhancement Project. The Foreshore freeway remains listed under Planned Roads and Streets in the [Table Bay District Plan](#), while development of the Foreshore Freeway Precinct is listed as an opportunity.

The [Cape Town State of Energy and Carbon 2021 report](#) also states “a solution will be pursued” for the unfinished freeway, including the viability of completing the inner viaducts.

The report also states public land in the Foreshore precinct can be used for housing provision in the inner city.

The one building that is situated on the former road reserve is the popular Fireman’s Arms pub, established in 1864. Owner Kevin Phelan said upon hearing of the release of the land he wrote a letter to the city stating he’d like to buy the land on which the pub is situated to secure its future.

Phelan said he sent the letter two weeks ago but has not yet received a reply.

“We are still investigating how this building can be incorporated into, or complement future development,” said Andrews in relation to the Fireman’s Arms.

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