

Families in Cape Town's squalid backyards are still waiting for promised housing project

Since 2016, families living in backyards in Parkwood in Cape Town have staged several protests to demand proper housing in the area.

By [Mary-Anne Gontsana](#) 13 May 2025



Source: iStock

The Western Cape Department of Human Settlements reported in 2019 that building approvals and planning for the Greater Retreat Housing project, that would include Parkwood, would be completed by March 2022. But six years later, there's no progress, and backyarders continue living in dire conditions.

In Parkers Walk are rows of old council-owned flats, each one with families living in the backyard. Some backyarders are members of the extended family; others are tenants who have found nowhere else to live because of the lack of housing opportunities in Parkwood.

Beverley Booyesen has been a backyarder in Parkwood for 14 years. She moved there from Delft where she also lived as a backyarder. She has been on a housing waiting list for more than 15 years, she says.

Booyesen shares her three-roomed zinc and wood home with 12 other people, including young children. Her ceiling is broken, with large holes and exposed electrical cables.

"This is how we live ... look at this place," she said. "My only wish is to get a home and not live in a shack. I don't know what it's like not living in a shack," said Booyesen.

Parkwood resident and chairperson of the Parkwood Backyarders' Association, Dominique Booyesen, (who is not related to Beverley) said backyarders had been looking forward to benefiting from the Greater Retreat Housing project. But since it was announced in 2018, there has been little progress.

"We are in the dark. At this point we don't even know whether this project will still happen because there has been no communication about it with us. Even the ward councillor says he knows nothing.

“We’ve had countless public meetings with the City of Cape Town. Promises were made every time, but nothing would come of them. A steering committee was even formed, meetings were held with the committee, nothing happened,” said Booysen.

Most of the backyarders in Parkwood live in difficult and cramped spaces with little access to toilets and water.

In 2019, it was [reported](#) that the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements said plans for the Greater Retreat Housing project were in progress. At the time, department spokesperson Muneera Allie said, “There are multiple sites for this project that all need to be investigated. Construction could start early on sites that have less encumbrances.”

Sisters Aqeefah Carolus and Gaynor Jacobs live in separate structures with their families on the same plot. “We moved out from our mother’s house in Parkwood because there was no space in the house anymore,” said Carolus, who lives with five other people.

Carolus said when she last checked a few months ago, she had been on the housing waiting list for 19 years.

Carolus’s home is in a bad state. “We use buckets as toilets. When it rains the water comes inside the structure and the roof leaks. We use jars like empty peanut butter or butter containers to catch the leaks.”

Her shack is next to the road, and she says a couple of years back a bullet from a gang shooting hit her shack, grazing her brother’s buttocks.

The Western Cape Department of Infrastructure said this week that development rights had been secured on land on part of the project and a developer would be appointed to start construction this financial year. On another part of the project, a mixed-use development had been recommended, which could include up to 4,500 homes.

Melchior Botes, spokesperson for MEC Tertuis Simmers, said beneficiaries for all projects in the Greater Retreat area would be selected in accordance with the City’s allocation policy.

“The residents of the Parkwood backyarders community are therefore encouraged to register or verify the registration on the database to ensure that they are eligible to benefit from these projects,” said Botes.

Published originally on [GroundUp](#).

© 2025 GroundUp. This article is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).