

# Hijacked homes saga

*Residents fed up with crime and grime as city, JPC contradict each other over issue*

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THERE appears to be miscommunication between the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC) and the City of Joburg over the hijacking of 26 houses in Orange Grove last year.

The properties, belonging to the JPC, were purchased in 2014 for re-development of land close to the new Rea Vaya route, but many were left empty, while others were legally rented out to tenants.

A dissident group was formed and invaded the houses, forcing the occupants, mainly foreign nationals, out even though some had legally purchased the properties or had leases.

illegal connections. The streets are littered with rubbish.

“Mayor Herman Mashaba talks tough on law enforcement and property hijackings, but now refuses to deal with the problems that the city itself has created in Orange Grove.”

McDougall added that the residents’ associations were considering a number of options to force the city to take action, including reporting the matter to the city’s petitions committee, approaching the city ombudsman, or encouraging residents to boycott the upcoming elections.

In the correspondence, the JPC stated that Orange Grove properties have been incorporated in the inner-city project.

The group protested for several weeks, burning tyres and bringing Louis Botha Avenue to a standstill.

Now residents' associations have been informed by the JPC – a document Metrowatch has seen – that the city is refusing to take legal action to evict them. Residents in the area describe it like living in a war zone, with illegal electricity connections, rubbish in the streets, and frequent battles between factions of hijackers.

Residents' associations objecting are Orange Grove, Norwood-Orchards (Nora) and Victoria-Orange Grove West (Vogwra).

JPC chief executive Helen Botes said: "The relocation of the occupants will be dealt with in terms of the tender for these properties, and not through the courts."

She confirmed that none of the properties purchased by the city were required for the city's core functions, and all would be placed on public tender. But Nora chairperson Brett McDougall said this response was unacceptable: "The city is effectively legalising the hijackings, and leaving residents to deal with the problems they create. Crime has increased in the area, and ratepayers are funding the electricity and water used through



ONE OF the houses in Orange Grove which was hijacked last year.

"The relocation of the occupants will be dealt with in terms of the tender for these properties, and not through the courts. When the properties identified have received council approval the community will be informed and consulted on the implementation of the resolution," said the statement from Botes.

The properties are being rezoned and consolidated into land parcels for development, measuring between 1 500m<sup>2</sup> and 6 800m<sup>2</sup> in extent. These consolidated land parcels can be developed with multi-storey, up to four-storey, residential developments

The City of Joburg, however, contradicted the JPC. Spokesperson Nthatisi Modingoane said not all occupants residing in the city-owned houses were illegal occupants, as they had entered into lease agreements with the city.

Lessees with valid lease agreements would continue to occupy the houses in terms of the lease agreements, he said.

"The notion that the city is doing nothing in this regard is false and has no basis. The JPC opened a docket with the police in Norwood for hijacking of the houses and trespass, and an investigation is under way.

"The illegal occupants were served with notices to vacate the properties already. They have ignored the notices. The city is in the process of applying for eviction orders" he said, adding that the finalisation of the rezoning, consolidation and tender process should be finalised within eight months.

Development of the properties would start soon after that.

Illegal connections for municipal services must be reported to City Power or Johannesburg Water for action to be taken against the perpetrators.

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