

# Brett Herron, JP Smith in war of words over social housing

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In an emotional press conference, Cape Town mayoral committee member for transport and urban development Brett Herron announced his resignation from the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the city council. He blamed it on the "refusal" of the DA caucus to support social housing at the Salt River market site.



Brett Herron addresses the media in Salt River Market on Thursday. Photo: Thembela Ntongana

Herron held a press conference at the Salt River market site. The site was one of eleven [identified by the City of Cape Town](#) for social housing in the inner-city in July last year.

"The DA Caucus stopped the disposal of the Salt River Market, Woodstock site for affordable inner-city housing development. I cannot in good conscience sit by and watch the party lie to the public about this. Nor can I continue to meet with communities and promise to deliver housing when it is clear that many in the party are opposed to the provision of well-located, affordable housing," said Herron as he read his statement. At one point he broke down.



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Aidan Jones 26 Oct 2018



Some members of Reclaim the City, a group advocating for affordable housing in the inner-city attended the press conference and expressed disappointment that Herron was stepping down. Herron accused ward councillor Dave Bryant of lobbying against the housing project. He also singled out mayoral committee member for safety and security JP Smith.

“There is a handful of councillors in the DA caucus who did not want this project to happen and I was hearing it in the corridors for weeks that it was the ward councillor who was lobbying against it,” Herron said.

“Within the DA caucus there is a group who do not want to integrate communities and do not want these projects to happen,” Herron told GroundUp.

He said the housing development would benefit 700 families who earn between R1,500 and R15,000 a month. It would guarantee a safe refuge for families and pensioners who have lived in Woodstock and Salt River for decades.

Herron said he had made a recommendation to the caucus to sell the land to Communicare, one of the City of Cape Town’s non-profit social housing partners, at 10% of the estimated 2018 value, i.e. R11.4m instead of R114m.

Bryant told GroundUp that the social housing project has not been rejected but has been referred back for further information. “There were queries raised around Communicare and the Transport and Urban Development Authority asked for a more detailed report, which will be presented at the next meeting.”

“I am not opposed to affordable housing. I feel that there is a need for social housing in the area and would like to see the project move forward,” said Bryant.

Bryant said he [put forward a motion](#) to speed up the development of a clear affordable housing policy for the City of Cape Town in June, which was passed unanimously by city councillors at a sub-council meeting.



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Smith responded with harsh words for Herron. “He was profoundly dishonest as to what was said in the caucus,” Smith said that the caucus had been considering Communicare to develop the land, but was concerned by recent corruption allegations against Communicare employees.

“We need a little more time to consider these allegations and decide whether it’s appropriate to allow Communicare to be the preferred developer of the site,” Smith said.

He said he does not recall Herron objecting to this delay. “I don’t recall him putting up a significant resistance. Unlike Herron, who has no respect for caucus confidentiality rules, I am bound by them.”

Smith said he was also concerned that only a third of the development is for “inclusionary housing”. He said, “The caucus was concerned with whether that was actually in the public interest.” The other two thirds of development is commercial, he explained. “We must make sure that we select partners that are actually going to have the interest of the beneficiaries at heart.”

“We must decide if the ratio of social to commercial is right because many people felt it’s inadequate, that you’re dressing up a very lucrative financial development as social housing in order to give it momentum,” Smith said.

Smith told GroundUp he supports social housing both at the Salt River market and in the city centre “as soon as possible”. Smith said the caucus is fully in favour of social housing but wanted to avoid lawsuits down the line, and to carry out the process properly.

Herron claimed that Smith had said the word transformation is a swear word to him. Smith denied this.



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Aidan Jones 27 Jun 2018



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On Tuesday, Herron released a statement responding to charges laid against him by Council Speaker Dirk Smit. According to Herron, the most serious of these charges relates to a \$35 hotel bill charged to the city while he was on official business in China. “Due to a last minute agenda change, I was unable to use one of the nights I was booked i to a hotel. A \$35 hotel booking was made elsewhere so I had a place to sleep. This is presented as evidence of my corruption and a reason for criminal charges against me.” He referred to an extravagant birthday party held by a senior DA leader last year at the One and Only Hotel, which according to TimesLive included a [R3,000 birthday cake gift](#) which was allegedly not declared. “I have not seen the same amplified response from the DA” about this, said Herron.

As this article was going to publication GroundUp received [this memo](#) that Herron sent to the DA Caucus and Communicare on 31 October. Its subject line is: Response to concerns raised by councillors in relation to the disposal of the Salt River Market site to a non-profit company for the purposes of providing affordable housing.

*This article was [originally published](#) on [GroundUp](#).*

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