

# Inner City Revitalisation: The Woodstock – Salt River Revitalisation Framework

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## BACKGROUND

*The historic local areas of Woodstock and Salt River are located approximately 3km from the Cape Town Central Business District, between the Devil's Peak mountains and the sea. The areas were established more than 250 years ago and are well - located to metropolitan Cape Town via the national and main transportation routes namely the N1, N2, and the southern and northern suburb corridors. The context of the area is one of extreme diversity of living patterns and standards. The areas have a range of stakeholders including high and low-income residents, street people, business operators, land / property owners, tenants, visitors, shoppers, children and professionals. As does Cape Town citywide, Woodstock and Salt River exhibit urbanisation trends typified by degrees of poverty, unemployment, crime, vandalism, vagrancy, and a lack of vision for public investment and management.*

### 1. Introduction

“Rapid urbanisation in a situation of continued poverty has outpaced the financial and administrative capacity of governments to ensure that cities provide efficient locations for economic activity and satisfy the basic needs of all their citizens” (Rakodi, 1997: 19). While Rakodi writes in an African City context, rapid urbanisation and its associated problems are a global phenomenon.

The nature of urbanisation and its knock-on effects in post-apartheid South African cities, and Cape Town in particular is that migration from rural to urban of the poorest of the poor happens in a number of ways. Patterns of informal settlement on the periphery of the city and seeking opportunities on the street in well - resourced urban areas – ‘street living’ are both manifestations of urbanisation in South African cities. The existing urban poor have ‘settled’ into an informal settlement or state-subsidised housing estate on the periphery of the city, in the metropolitan south east sector of Cape Town. At the same time incidents of street living / vagrancy is on the increase, as is particularly evident in areas such as Woodstock and Salt River.

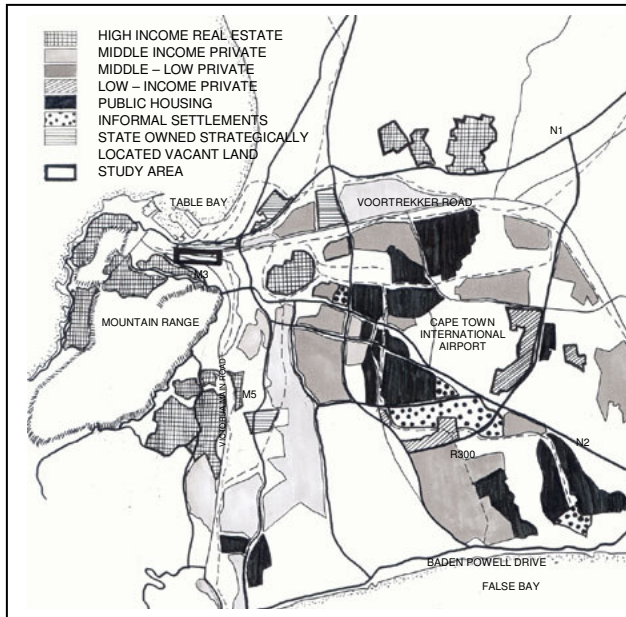
By extreme contrast, Cape Town also boasts residential developments that are among the most expensive real estate in the city and country. Typical of these is their exclusive locality in proximity to high amenity areas including the significant natural assets such as the mountain and sea.

The moderation of the extent of this imbalance in settlement patterns among the rich and poor is possible given the vast parcels of strategically – located vacant state land assets available in Cape Town. These parcels could easily accommodate the poor close to urban

opportunities and amenities on the basis of the following key planning principles:

- Equitable access;
- Efficiency;
- Social justice; and
- Diversity through a range of choices and opportunities.

Figure 1: City of Cape Town: Woodstock – Salt River within the Housing Context and Vacant Strategically - located State Land (2000)



The challenge of the Woodstock – Salt River inner city revitalisation framework was to re-enforce the environment as an “efficient and qualitative living environment”. However, it is inadequate to define these terms only from a perspective of affluent citizens and / or professionals. The reason for this is twofold. One, that Woodstock – Salt River along with the strategically located vacant state land would be under constant threat of privatisation and gentrification, dislocating the poor and entrenching them even further into the city’s peripheries where limited opportunities present themselves. Two, it is claimed that there are no resources, visionary political leadership and will to facilitate improved access for the poor to

urban opportunities. There is no programme in place (other than the reconstruction of District Six) to actively deal with allowing the poor to share access to urban resources and opportunities while at the same time, integrate the post-apartheid racially-divided Cape Town.

Therefore, a holistic debate in inner city revitalisation projects cannot be limited to issues of historic character, clean ups, and crime and grime but should include and represent the range of social and environmental issues and concerns relevant to the study area and the city.

The foundation of leading a qualitative life begins with having one’s basic needs satisfied. In addition, there is a fundamental need to live with human dignity and respect that each individual plays out in the “living environment”. Basic equity with respect for human dignity is presently compromised because of enormous disparities in incomes and access to opportunity and resources between the haves and the have-nots.

“No one today is unaware of this divide between the world’s rich and poor. No one today can claim ignorance of the cost that this divide imposes on the poor and dispossessed, who are no less deserving of human dignity, fundamental freedoms, security, food and education than any of us. The cost, however, is not borne by them alone. Ultimately, it is borne by all of us – North and South, rich and poor, men and women of all races and religions.” (Extract from: Kofi Anna’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Cape Times: December 11, 2001).

Coupled with the current scenario of disparity is the condition of under-performance in local government administration. Our city governors and administrators have not only been

outpaced by the financial and administrative capacity of governments “to ensure that cities provide efficient locations for economic activity and satisfy the basic needs of all their citizens” as Rakodi (1997: 19) argues. They have also been blinded by power struggles, excessive fluctuations in local government politics and leadership accompanied by a lack of vision for the way forward. The more city management shuffles and shifts the more consistent delivery and accountability is affected, especially in under-resourced urban areas.

## **2. Proposals of the Revitalisation Framework**

In the context of these realities, the Woodstock – Salt River Revitalisation Framework explored the definition and debate on “efficient and qualitative living environment”, to accommodate the diverse range of needs including opportunities to live, earn, eat, commute, socialise, and experience a full urban life. The spatial and revitalisation proposals attempted to engage this debate in a realistic way through recommendations that range from ethical principles to practical proposals.

The approach to this challenge was founded on the following proposals that expand the principles of equitable access, efficiency and quality.

### **2.1 Focus on People, Public Spaces and Places**

The Revitalisation Framework focuses mainly on the richness of various cultures and peoples of the area and public spaces and buildings that should be rehabilitated with a view to promoting public use and value. At the same time, the framework seeks to improve possibilities for economic regeneration.

A safe, attractive and user-friendly public realm should invite participation from and accommodate the broader community's needs.

Public places and spaces can become the rooms that ordinary people can have access to in order to relax, have time out, play, sit, think, debate and gather together. They become relief spaces when overcrowding at home is overwhelming and unbearable. They are essential social places and spaces.

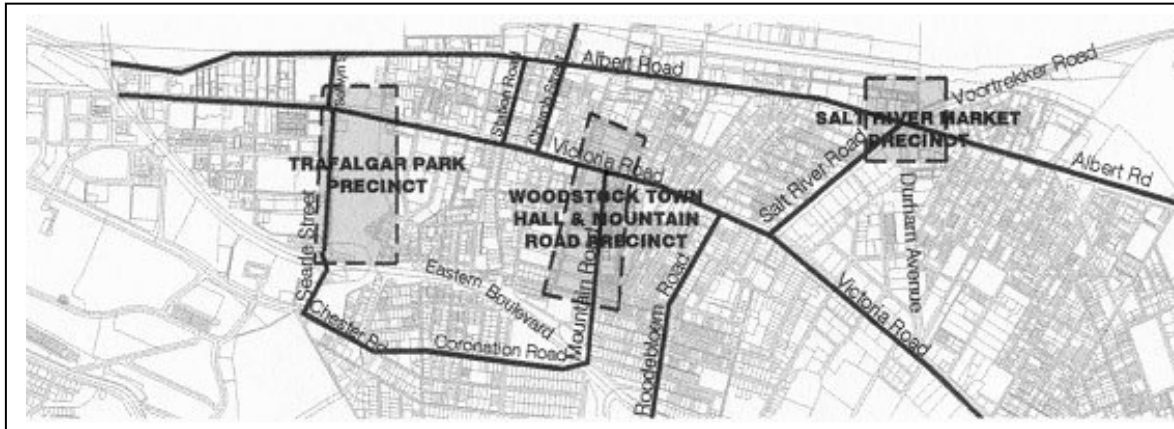
Hannah Arendt, the political philosopher, argued that “real democracy existed only once in this world, among the free Athenians twenty-five centuries ago. The reason this was so, in her opinion, was that the Athenians had instituted a ‘public sphere’ in which each citizen could debate any issue affecting the city, and be evaluated by his peers on the merits of his argument. And the debate was not academic: when the men in the agora heard every opinion, they voted and their decision became law” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993).

### **2.2 Spatial Principles and Strategies**

Three key precincts were identified as strategic areas that need to be considered, developed and managed in a holistic way. The three precincts include:

- 'The Trafalgar Park Precinct'
- 'The Mountain Road Precinct'; and
- 'The Salt River Precinct'.

Figure 2: Woodstock – Salt River Main Streets and Public Precincts



The precincts serve to identify areas that contain a number of valued and well-located public assets and places. The tendency over time has been for these assets to work in isolated and fragmented ways. In the context of limited resources the assets, even if they are valued, begin to deteriorate.

The role of the precinct plans is primarily to identify spatial opportunities and constraints and to suggest ways of making these assets work in a more integrated way. The precinct frameworks provide basic guidelines for integrated short term and long term development and investment. They serve as a common point of reference for various public, private and community stakeholders.

Given the reality of limited resources, the Framework provides a 'steering' process that sits alongside the spatial plan that identifies the possibilities for establishing the mechanisms for promoting, financing and managing these precincts, while ensuring access to a broader stakeholder grouping.

### 2.3 Emphasising Social and Environmental Ethics

Given the realities of the 'urban condition', we have to be aware of the turmoil, pressure and tension in our social and environmental structure. There are high levels of social injustice, mistrust and violence around us paralleled by a shift and degeneration of social and family structures.

Having engaged the stakeholders in the area in an extensive public participation process, the Revitalisation Framework assumes that the participants would have the open-mindedness and tolerance that is required to deal with the social ills of the area. In this regard, the Framework supports two key aspects. Firstly, the active involvement of religious, educational and socio-cultural institutions in rebuilding a system of values that would form the basis of positive behavioural patterns. Secondly, the introduction of programmes and events that would re-focus peoples' minds and direct their efforts towards building active, healthy and safe communities and away from racial, income and class biases.

The Framework introduces a strategy that attempts to address the issues and build on the strengths of the Woodstock-Salt River community. It found the work of Antje Nahnsen (July, 2000) towards a Ph.D useful in understanding the notion of “Desire and Fear in Cape Town’s Inner City”.

Nahnsen argues that there is a need for spatial politics of reconciliation that reconciles emotional divisions amongst the people of Cape Town. She says that these fears were created and fuelled by apartheid and are at present sometimes disguised by fears of crime. According to Nahnsen, there is also a need to reconcile different conceptions of the city as a socio-cultural construct that can be understood as an expression of social and cultural values but also an entity for the formation and maintenance of social identities. Urban space in Cape Town has largely been shaped and presently re-enforced by European and western, modernist conceptions of the city and served to largely maintain the identity of a white minority and support an established power base.

The Framework sadly lacks information on the historiography of people of colour, the Khoisan (generally better researched and recorded than other cultures), the Muslims, the Black people whose first experience of the city was through the Cape Town CBD, Woodstock and Salt River. The making and recording of urban space in Cape Town has again largely been dominated by European and western, modernist conceptions. However, there is a wide-ranging cultural history, particularly in the Woodstock – Salt River area that needs to be acknowledged.

The framework therefore promotes the allocation and use of public spaces and responsibilities to various local residents and other organisations to allow them to express and appropriate space freely and openly according to their

understanding of their communities’ needs and cultures. It also expresses the need for the cultural heritage and historiography of people of colour to be recorded as a matter of priority.

In essence when compared to Johannesburg, the CBD of Cape Town is lagging in terms of radical social transformation and racial ‘integration’ since the government of national unity was elected in 1994. However, the transformation in Johannesburg is not without problems and complexities. In “Neoliberalism and Urban Strategies in Developing Countries” (Burgess, B (ed): 1997), it is stated that “different social sectors and activities, previously segregated by apartheid, were placed in close proximity to each other, and this produced a volatile mix whose directions were almost impossible to predict.

Blacks didn’t want to lose their provisional stakehold, which permitted easy access to business districts and work, whilst whites didn’t want to antagonize their new black neighbours out of fear that they would ‘gang up’ on them. Despite increased tensions and white flight, the inner city retains a strong multiracial character”.

## **2.4 Economic Possibilities**

The economic strategy in the Framework focuses on commercial revitalisation, which in many ways influences the overall investment climate for residential and other markets in the area. The focus is largely on the revitalisation of the main roads in the study area (Victoria, Albert and Salt River Road). A series of secondary main streets is also identified.

The Revitalisation Framework takes the view that through active public investment programmes and obviating crime, the area would generally create demand for commercial, retail, industrial and residential space, thereby

revitalising itself over time. It assumes that economic possibilities would be harnessed through a committed public investment and community involvement programme. It also relies on the fact that the study area is strategically located in relation to the City Centre.

Among other economic strategies, the Framework promotes the establishment of a Main Streets Programme (MSP). This programme was first initiated in the United States in historic districts such as Washington DC around 1976. The National Trust for Historic Preservation operates a main streets centre (established in 1980) that supports redeveloping the economic vitality and physical improvements of key economic hearts located within historic areas (Source: 'Main Streets Revitalisation Programme' by Kennedy Lawson Smith, undated).

The programme supports an approach based on the strength of civic structures. It is community and business-led and relies on limited support from local authorities. The emphasis of the MSP is on physical improvements, restoring character of place, and economic development. The success of the MSP in the United States created substantial new investments as well as a significant number of jobs. Adapted appropriately to the Woodstock - Salt River context, there is no reason why a programme of this nature cannot achieve the same level of success, while promoting the diverse range of people and needs in the area.

### **2.5 Approach towards Roles and Responsibilities in Managing the Framework**

The Revitalisation Framework is predicated upon two key factors. One, the enthusiasm demonstrated by the stakeholders to be involved in revitalising the area. Two, the fact that the study area's potential is dependent

on building a trusting relationship between the Woodstock - Salt River community and the City of Cape Town.

The Revitalisation Framework needs to be developed through a partnership between the City of Cape Town and the stakeholder groupings in the study area, one that is established on the basis of trust and commitment on either side. It is imperative that each takes its role seriously and responsibly. The Revitalisation Framework relies on a level of local governance and responsibility for supporting the proposals that would be initiated through the local civic groups. In both instances of civic and local governance, leadership is critical.

### **3. Complexities and Limitations of the Framework**

The Revitalisation Framework is limited regarding the problem of crime, gangsterism and drugs. The Framework recognises that drug dealers, addicts and gangsters are an unfortunate reality in the study area. A series of negative factors allows crime to fester. There are limited economic opportunities and social support programmes for deprived people. There are excessively wide gaps between the haves and have nots which resulted in a negative build up from the apartheid era.

The Framework therefore deals with this issue in two ways. One, it hopes that through building a positive system of social values and ethics, those involved in drugs and gangsterism would form a part of this process out of choice for a different lifestyle. Second, it appeals to those involved in these activities and who may become aware of the Woodstock – Salt River Revitalisation Framework, to recognise that there are positive alternatives to being engaged in drugs and gangsterism.

These alternatives may well provide more positive choices to live a healthier life as part of a healthier society. The framework accepts that it cannot change the non-conforming lifestyle people live in their private spaces. However, it can promote a range of public areas for a wide use and purpose and where certain behavioural rules apply that every user must abide by.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Woodstock - Salt River area has not been supported substantially through public investment in the last 10 years. The Revitalisation Framework was commissioned to deal with this neglect and to encourage support for the area's upliftment.

The proposals and strategies contained in the framework respond to a wide range of issues and needs and include a wide range of stakeholders. For this reason, it is imperative that:

- the framework is driven by a champion and visionary and has the support and commitment of all the major organisational stakeholders and residents of the area;
- small, practical and attainable projects are pursued to address slowly but surely the degradation of this inner city area; and
- the historical value of the area reflects its role as a model for racial, class and income integration that should serve to inform the development of strategically located vacant state land, to accommodate previously marginalised communities and encourage integration in the inner city.

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