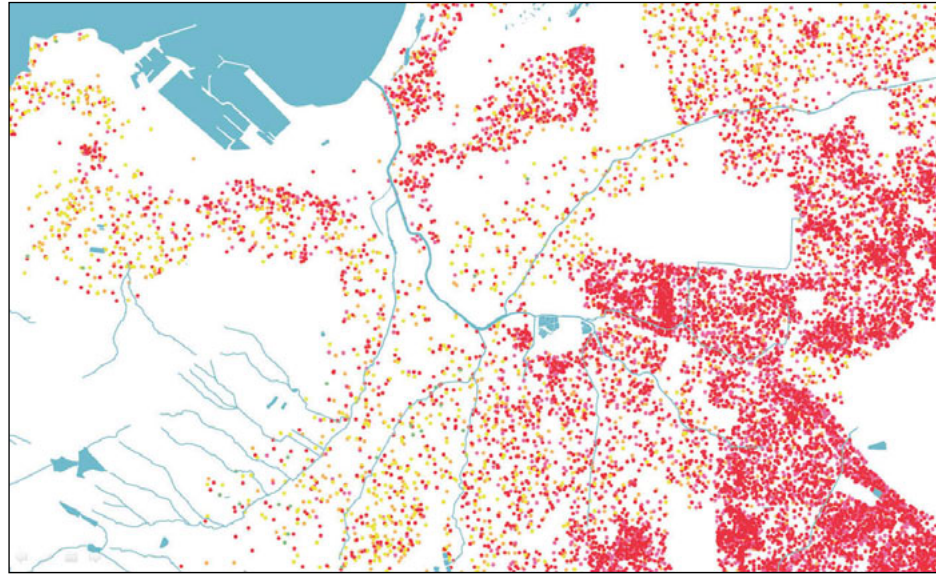
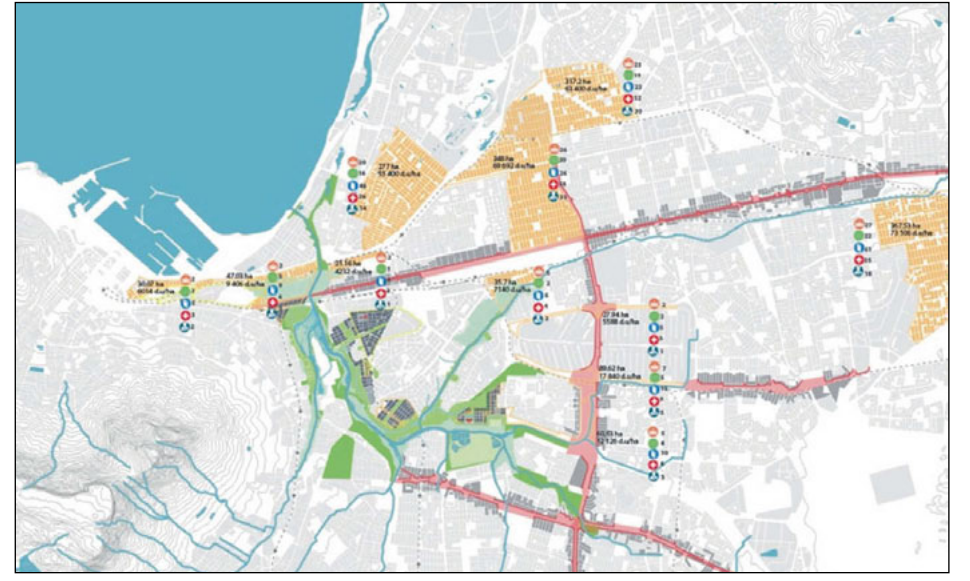




SPECULATIVE SCHEME: Designers of this extended Two Rivers Urban Park schema call it a 'provocation', a means of stimulating debate about a different kind of future Cape Town.



SEEING RED: The concentrations of lower income, represented by red dots, hint at the strategic location of the Two Rivers Urban Park project in bridging divided communities.



FAR-REACHING: Integrated development along the Black River could help trigger game-changing exploitation of some of the city's largest – but not yet available – open sites, marked in orange.

Leading city planners believe bold thinking, coupled with professionally managed projects, could turn toxic Cape Flats waterways into the catalyst of game-changing post-apartheid design, writes **MICHAEL MORRIS**

Mega park could bridge city's divides

IN THE pastelled diagrams, the meandering waterways that converge at the north-western edge of the Cape Flats achieve an almost pastoral aspect, more countryside than city fringe.

In reality, to use the phrase of Cape Town architect Guy Briggs, they are virtually open sewers seeping through the scruffy backyard of the city, toxic, littered, inaccessible and hostile to humans.

Yet, is it inconceivable that these rivers and wetlands could, in 10 or 15 years, be the centrepiece not only of a feature of the city to rank with Table Mountain, the Waterfront and Cape Point as a fixture on the tourist's must-do list, but the catalyst of a long-awaited redrawing of the apartheid-city spatial form?

Urbanist Edgar Pieterse, for one, has no doubt about that. The director of UCT's African Centre for Cities regards the precinct as a golden opportunity to create the precedent of an attractive, mixed-use, socio-economically integrated community that could stimulate similar progressive development on the metropole's key undeveloped sites of Culemborg, Wingfield, Ysterplaat and Youngsfield.

These large sites are still held by national departments, which have so far been reluctant to release them.

But in the emerging consensus that bold thinking, coupled with incremental, professionally managed projects, the Two Rivers urban park precinct – incorporating Valkenberg, Oude Molen, the Observatory and neighbouring properties, including the old Athlone power station site – is being seen as a decisive opportunity to break Cape Town's apartheid-inspired socio-economic barriers, and set the pattern for a new, denser and socially integrated city.

Without denser, integrated communities, Pieterse argues, an enduringly divided city will become increasingly volatile and expensive.

The conception of a mega urban park, driven by strong ecological principles, and fringed by up to 25 000 mixed housing units, is one of three speculative planning projects undertaken by the Density Syndicate – South African and



POWER AND GLORY: Including the old Athlone power station site in a greater Two Rivers Urban Park would extend its transformative impact, designers say.

Dutch designers working in conjunction with the city – as an adjunct of the City Desired exhibition mounted by the African Centre for Cities and the International New Town Institute.

The city already has a Two Rivers Urban Park project –

'The problem is that we have island communities'

which, though still at an early stage of planning, and with a smaller footprint, aims to achieve objectives comparable to those of the Density Syndicate's "provocation", a schema intended to provoke debate and fresh thinking.

Belinda Walker, mayoral committee member for special projects, commends the exercise as "extremely useful".

"It's converging with what we had put forward ... they have come from a very differ-

ent viewpoint in an iterative community-driven process, but with a proposal for development, which is encouraging." She agrees the precinct is "hugely strategic".

"This is an ideal place to build more compact forms where you have work and leisure opportunities, and mixed housing, from the wealthy down to less wealthy. This is aligned with what we are trying to do in bringing people closer to where they can find opportunities for work, education and access to facilities, instead of building islands out on the edge and then saying, now, they need a clinic, a park, a school."

The city is at an early stage of assessing the site's considerable infrastructure requirements – especially expanding its inadequate sewage capacity – "seeing what we can do in incremental steps, what to put on budget and what we need to start planning for now".

Walker regards the practical and the imaginative processes as being "two sides of the same coin".

Briggs, a member of the Density Syndicate team, notes that "identifying the problem is a way of steering toward solutions, and the problem is that we have island communities (the site is encircled by Maitland, Pinelands, Langa, Athlone, Rondebosch, Mowbray and Observatory) which are self-referential, inward-looking, and the opportunities to connect are virtually nil".

The objective is "connecting the islands so that neighbourhoods flow from one to the other, by replacing the borders with a series of bridges across the interstitial spaces, the railway lines, infrastructure and open spaces".

Another team member, Khalied Jacobs, says it is "the beginning of an argument as opposed to an end state", and getting existing owners and users of properties in the precinct to "start talking to each other".

And this, Pieterse argues, can be the beginning of a new phase of reshaping the City of Cape Town.

"I am really hoping this ini-

tial and admittedly sketchy and suggestive work can open up public debate which compels us to pursue the Two Rivers project, but in its larger context. The city needs to optimise this opportunity."

This will mean broadening the existing process, or initiating a new one "to bring adjoining communities into a visioning exercise that can treat the work of the Density Syndicate as an input, one way of thinking about the potential", said Pieterse.

"But it would mean bringing in all communities and having properly financed and professionally facilitated public engagement that allows people to enrich initial provocations," he added.

If done in a "careful and thoughtful way, in a year or two we can have something that can be translated into an investment portfolio over the next 10 to 15 years which can be a symbol of our commitment to overcoming our spatial legacies, and to build and live differently".

The proposals "really speak

MICHAEL MORRIS

ACTIVIST Zackie Achmat is vowing to lead a court bid to stop any sale of public land in Cape Town until there is a "genuine" plan to densify and integrate the suburbs – a gesture the city itself dismisses as simplistic.

The argument is at the heart of efforts to confront the lingering post-apartheid challenge of making Cape Town a more equitable and accessible place for people subjected to race-based spatial planning – the subject of a conference that took place this week on urban density and access.

But, while Achmat called for a "radical property realignment" in the city, suggesting existing policies were inadequate, veteran councillor and mayoral committee member for special projects, Belinda Walker, said that while densification was essential and a core element of city planning, integration required subtler management to avoid the pitfalls of social engineering at one end of the scale, and, through inaction, preserving the status quo at the other.

Walker said in an interview the city did not sell off land lightly, and that Achmat's threat would make no contribution to overcoming "awful apartheid boundaries" between communities, and densifying the city to ensure a sustainable future.

into the entire spectrum of people, from the homeless to the enlightened middle class which believes in the importance of an ecologically driven model for development".

Just as important is "educating the market that you can combine social, public and privately financed accommodation, combined with commercial activity, in a single precinct, which is the norm of all great cities. You don't get fantastic cities without that mixture".

"What makes the provoca-

Threat to stop land sales



RADICAL: Zackie Achmat seeks integration.

Speaking at the conference last Monday, held under the auspices of the City Desired exhibition at the City Hall, mounted jointly by UCT's African Centre for Cities and the Netherlands-based International New Town Initiative, Achmat praised the Spatial Land Use Management Act as "one of the most radical tools to integrate cities", and to ensure cities were shared by all, with priority given to poor, deprived communities.

"It means everything must be owned by them too, not by white people, or rich black people, but all of us. So

what are we going to do? We will stop the sale of land in the city by going to court until there is a plan to densify – not two or three little projects, but a genuine plan to integrate the province.

"We cannot let Rondebosch, Claremont or Salt River remain unchanged... we must ensure a radical implementation to bring the people closer to the city."

Businessman Martin Kearns, on the other hand, said while the private sector "sometimes comes in for unnecessary bashing because we are seen as evil", the business opportunities inherent in "density and access" meant it could be a vital agent in making better neighbourhoods.

But it was profit-driven. "If we are not making money we cannot do anything."

The public sector could stimulate investment by structuring tax incentives for particular development, such as affordable housing.

Kearns said: "If there's a way to make money, the private sector will be involved. It's pretty simple. Tax incentives are one way to stimulate this, and everyone benefits."

International New Town Initiative director Michelle Provoost said that "to say private parties and developers are the bad guys is just too easy".

"Partnerships are vital, and it's possible if you have a strong vision for the common good."

opportunity that only comes every 50 years or so."

Pieterse adds: "We don't need to turn this into a political controversy. Because the economy is growing so slowly and the low churn in real estate markets is more or less matching demand, what you really need to focus on is bringing a manageable number of housing opportunities to market to cater for the gap (between low-cost and bonded accommodation) and those entering the market for first time, and that will cascade over time."

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Ritchie appointed as Star editor

KEVIN Ritchie has been appointed editor of The Star newspaper, Independent Media said yesterday.

"Kevin Ritchie, who will be at the helm of one of the group's flagship publications, is a veteran of Independent Media," the company's chief of staff Zenariah Barends said.

"He is a former editor of the Diamond Fields Advertiser in Kimberley, and managing editor of the Saturday Star. His previous position was as The Star's deputy editor."

Wally Mbhele, meanwhile, was appointed as editor-at-large for the group's Sunday publications.

"Wally Mbhele, a seasoned journalist who has held various editorial positions at several publications including City Press and Sunday Times, has worked as a newspaper journalist for over 20 years," said Barends.

Mazwi Xaba was appointed deputy editor of the Sunday Tribune.

"Xaba is a former editor of Independent's popular brand of isiZulu newspapers, Isolezwe. He was among

the founding editorial leadership who oversaw its growth from its launch in 2002," she said.

Executive chairman of Independent Media Dr Iqbal Survé said the company was committed to excellence, equity and diversity.

"We are a non-racial South African company, and as such it is our responsibility and duty to reflect this in every aspect of our business," he said.

"I am proud of our diverse workforce. The new Independent Media is founded on the principles of non-racialism, and this is reflected in the leadership team and at all levels of the business."

The latest appointments were in line with a series of senior appointments over the past few months. "We expect to recruit more senior and executive appointments in the near future as we grow and develop our business into a leading multi-platform media company, grounded on the principles of non-racialism and equity." – Sapa