



an agency of the  
Department of Arts and Culture

**COMMITTEE MEETING DATES:**  
GDRC: 26 February 2020

## GRADING SUBMISSION

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SUBMITTED BY: Built Environment Unit

DATE: 02/26/2020

FILE REF / SAHRIS SITE ID:

ENQUIRIES: Ben Mwasinga/Heidi Weldon

ITEM: Proposed Nomination of Site for Grade 1 Site Status: The Rocklands Community Hall,  
Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa

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### A1. BACKGROUND

**A1.1.** The Rocklands Community Hall was built by the Cape Town City Council in 1981 to serve as a multi-amenities hall for the community of Mitchell's Plain, most of whom that were relocated from District Six under the Forced Removals programme of the Apartheid system

**A1.2.** Because of its central location and size, it is was and still is used for large gatherings. In this instance It was the venue where the historic meeting was held that led to the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) that was to have a profound influence on the democratisation of South Africa.

**A1.3** The UDF was a political organisation that was specifically formed to unite people over a broad spectrum, across racial, religious and social barriers, to resist the oppressive Apartheid political system. As an organisation the UDF was to play an invaluable role in sensitising ordinary citizens to resist the evils of the Apartheid system.

**A1.4** The site is given added significance by the UDF Memorial that was erected by the City of Cape Town in front of the Hall. The Rocklands Community Hall, though a modern building has sufficient significance in three respects, namely: political, architectural and social. The UDF Memorial constructed on the same Erf is included in this proposal.

## **A2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- A2.1.** Rocklands is the first site to be submitted for consideration for as a National Heritage Site that is in a former 'Coloured Township' in the Western Cape. It is representative of a previously marginalised community.
- A2.2.** The site is located Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, in the Western Cape. It represents a significant moment in South Africa's history when the UDF was formed.
- A2.3.** The UDF was a political organisation that was specifically formed to unite people over a broad spectrum, across racial, religious and social barriers, to resist the oppressive Apartheid political system. As an organisation the UDF was to play an invaluable role in sensitising ordinary citizens to resist the evils of the Apartheid system.
- A2.4.** The Rocklands Community Hall has a further architectural significance in South Africa. The Rocklands Community Hall was one of eight identical halls built by the Cape Town City Council in low-cost areas of the Cape Flats in the 1970s and 1980s where many people affected by the Forced Removals of the Apartheid era, particularly those who had lived in District Six were resettled.
- A2.5.** Site visits have been conducted and the Community Hall was found to be in excellent condition by SAHRA. Furthermore, the site managers and owners have given their unconditional support for the grading.

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## 1. PURPOSE OF THE SUBMISSION

- 1.1. The purpose of the submission is to assess whether Rocklands Community Hall, be given a Grade 1 status and subsequently declared a National Heritage Site. The site is in Rocklands, Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town in the Western Cape.



Figure 1. UDF Memorial at Rocklands Community Hall



## 2. DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION OF THE SITE

Commencing on the boundary of erf 11553 at the junction of Park Ave and Lancaster Road, the boundary runs south-east along the erf boundary on Park Avenue to a point opposite the southern corner of the Rocklands Civic Centre. From there it turns to the north-east and runs along the south-eastern wall of the Centre to a point in line with the southern-most corner of the Rockland Public Library, whereupon it turns to the north-west running along the south-western wall of library to a point opposite to the south-eastern facade of the Rocklands Clinic and thereafter turning to the South-west running along the south-eastern and south-western facades of the clinic to a point on Lancaster Road where after it runs along the boundary of the erf to the junction with Park Avenue.

Figure 2. Arial Photo of proposed site



Figure 3. Site boundaries



### 3. SHORT HISTORY OF THE SITE

Mitchell's Plain was established in the 1970s as a township to respond to the housing shortages of the coloured community. Its design was also part of the apartheid's race-based spatial planning and Group Areas Act. As forced removals intensified in Cape Town, Mitchell's Plain became the home for many communities that were displaced from District Six.

Erf 11SS3, including the Rocklands Community Hall, which was built during the early 1980s, provided a convenient space for mass resistance and large-scale political gatherings that were organised by the anti-apartheid organisations. The historic meeting of 20 August 1983 which led to the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) was held at this location. UDF became the largest socio-political movement that united South Africans from diverse backgrounds to fight against apartheid. The site has political, as well as social significance.

Figure 4. UDF gathering at Rocklands Community Hall



Figure 5. Anti-apartheid activists gathering at Rocklands Community Hall

#### 4. SWOT SUMMARY

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community hall is still in use</li> <li>• Vital part of the community's sense of place and pride</li> <li>• Pioneering community award winning community hall.</li> <li>• Played a role in national liberation politics (the establishment of the UDF)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairly modern building despite its unique design</li> <li>• The building is fenced off for security purposes.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage people to value heritage in previously marginalised spaces.</li> <li>• The hall has both historic and cultural significance to community of Rocklands and the surrounding areas, solidifying a community's past, preservation can help strengthen a community's future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime in the surrounding area leaves the building vulnerable to vandalism</li> <li>• There have been reported break-ins and theft of property.</li> </ul>

#### 5. MOTIVATION FOR NATIONAL DECLARATION

##### **Its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa's history.**

One of the early award winning community halls that was designed to be "people's places" in areas where people displaced by the Forced Removals were settled The UDF which that was formed in this building was to contribute significantly to the downfall of Apartheid.

##### **Its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.**

The design of this building is based on an award the design of this building was used for other community halls elsewhere in the country winning design concept. The building has landmark qualities In Rocklands. It has succeeded in contribute to the social wellbeing of the local community

##### **Its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.**

The prototype of these "people's place" halls was the Westridge Community Hall that was designed by architect Graham Parker whilst being employed by the Cape Town City Council. The Rocklands Hall was based on the same design. Graham Parker was awarded an architectural Award of Merit by the then Cape Provincial Institute of

Architects for his design. As the result of the success of the design, a number of halls, based on this design were also built in other South African provinces

**Its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organization of importance in the history of South Africa.**

The Rocklands Community Hall was constructed by the Cape Town City Council in in 1981 to serve as a multi-amenities hall for the community of Mitchell's Plain, most of whom that were relocated from District Six under the Forced Removals programme of the Apartheid system. Because of its central location and size, it is used for larger gatherings. In this instance it was the venue where the historic meeting was held that led to the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) that was to have a profound influence on the democratization of South Africa.

## **6. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Rocklands Community Hall was built by the Cape Town City Council in in 1981 to serve as a multi-amenities hall for the community of Mitchell's Plain, most of whom that The political significance of the Rocklands Community Hall in Rocklands, Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town is the most outstanding form of significance that would warrant its formal protection in terms of the NHR Act. This hall was the place where the United Democratic Front (the UDF) was constituted on 20 August 1983. The UDF was a political organisation that was specifically formed to unite people over a broad spectrum, across racial, religious and social barriers, to resist the oppressive Apartheid political system. As an organisation the UDF was to play an invaluable role in sensitising ordinary citizens to resist the evils of the Apartheid system.

There was consensus that unity was the only way to resist and break down the last vestiges of Apartheid which prevented the democratisation of South African society and its political system which deprived the voiceless masses from having a direct say in matters affecting them.

By the 1980s the fight for democracy in South Africa, which started with the Soweto Uprisings in 1976, was intensified. A huge rally was organized in the Rocklands Hall, in Mitchell's Plain to protest against the Tri-Cameral system, i.e. a parliamentary system proposed by the National Party government to create a system of government based along racial lines. Once again, the majority of the population (read Black South Africans) was ignored and was not included in the proposed new governmental structure and was seen as

another ploy to divide-and-rule. The protest rally was attended by approximately 10 000 people.

What made the Rocklands gathering all the more significant was the presence of a large number of well-known anti-Apartheid veterans, e.g. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Allan Boesak and several 1950s activists, including Albertina Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha, Helen Joseph, Frances Baard, Archie Gumede and RD Naidoo. The leaders of the rally and those present expressed the view that the most effective way to combat and breakdown the evil system of Apartheid was through unity.

The UDF was born from this resolution. The Rev Frank Chicane was the first speaker to address the gathering and called it the day "The turning point in the struggle for freedom". Delegates of 565 organisations from all over the country were part of the constitution of the UDF. Dr Alan Boesak, a prominent theologian and campaigner for democracy, led the steering committee.

After its establishment, the UDF was at the forefront of protest action and its members were largely responsible for the intensification and sustenance of resistance in the period from 1984 to 1986 by organising rent boycotts, school protests and workers strike amongst many other forms of resistance. At its peak the UDF had some 700 affiliates. The most important of these were students/youth organisation, trade unions, civic and women's organisations and church groups. Most of these bodies had a considerable influence in the communities in which it operated and considerably contributed to the success of the UDF to become one of the important forces that contributed to the fall of Apartheid. As such the UDF should be commemorated for its contribution in breaking down the stranglehold of Apartheid.

The City of Cape Town took the initiative by erecting a memorial in front of the Rocklands Community Hall to commemorate the formation of the UDF in the Rocklands Hall. Commendable as the erection of the memorial may be, the community hall cannot be separated from the memorial as they are closely connected and should therefore be seen as one entity of great provincial, if not national, significance that deserves formal protection in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999). The memorial is protected in terms of section 36 of the same Act.

The Rocklands Community Hall has a further architectural significance in South Africa. The Rocklands Hall was one of eight identical halls built by the Cape Town City Council in low-cost areas of the Cape Flats in the 1970s and 1980s where many people affected by the Forced Removals of the Apartheid era, particularly those who had lived in District Six were resettled. It was intended to be a "people's place" to provide in the social and recreational



needs of the people living in the area, most of whom were from the lower income group and therefore not able to provide such amenities of their own.

The prototype of these "people's place" halls was the Westridge Community Hall that was designed by architect Graham Parker whilst being employed by the Cape Town City Council. The Rocklands Hall was based on the same design. Graham Parker was awarded an architectural Award of Merit by the then Cape Provincial Institute of Architects for his design.

As the result of the success of the design, a number of halls, based on this design were also built in other South African provinces. Ironically the Rocklands Hall, as a "people's place" would be intricately connected to the peoples' movement, amongst others the UDF, in which it was founded. This award once again establishes its significance and its connectedness to the memorial erected in front of it.

The Rocklands Hall continues to serve its original purpose to be a "people's place" and the demand for the use of this hall is of such a nature, that bookings have to be made long in advance. Besides its recreational use, it is currently also used, amongst others, as a venue where people receive social grants, a meeting place for senior citizens, sports clubs, a creche, church services etc.

## **7. INDICATION OF OWNER'S ATTITUDE**

The site owners and managers are the nominators and fully support the grading of the site.

## 8. INDICATION OF CURRENT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The site is owned and managed by the City of Cape Town. The Rocklands Hall continues to serve its original purpose to be as a community hall. Besides its recreational use, it is currently also used, amongst others, as a venue where people receive social grants, a meeting place for senior citizens, sports clubs, a creche and church services.

Figure 5.  
Rocklands  
Community Hall



Figure 6. UDF  
gathering at  
Rocklands  
Community Hall



Figure 7. UDF gathering at Rocklands Community Hall



## 9. DESCRIPTION OF SITE BOUNDARIE

Rocklands Community Hall, Corner Lancaster Road and Parker Street, Rocklands, Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town. Commencing on the boundary of erf 11553 at the junction of Park Ave and Lancaster Road, the boundary runs south-east along the erf boundary on Park Avenue to a point opposite the southern corner of the Rocklands Civic Centre. From there it turns to the north-east and runs along the south-eastern wall of the Centre to a point in line with the southern-most corner of the Rockland Public Library, whereupon it turns to the north-west running along the south-western wall of library to a point opposite to the south-eastern facade of the Rocklands Clinic and thereafter turning to the South-west running along the south-eastern and south-western facades of the clinic to a point on Lancaster Road where after it runs along the boundary of the erf to the junction with Park Avenue.

## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Rocklands Civic Centre be granted Grade 1 status by the Grading and Declarations Review Committee.

<b>Prepared By:</b>		<b>Supported By:</b>	
Ben Mwasinga Manager: BEU	Signature	Name and Title	Signature
<b>Date:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

<b>Date:</b>
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<b>Recommendation supported by Council</b>		<b>Recommendation not supported by Council</b>	
Name Chairperson: Council		Signature	
<b>Date:</b>			