

# THE WALK

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*How five city blocks along Cape Town's Voortrekker Corridor offer a window into the challenges of achieving spatial transformation in South Africa's cities*

PHOTO: SEAN O'TOOLE



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SUMMER, 2019

PHOTO: RETHA FERGUSON

### A BRIEF HISTORY

Established in 1845 as a hard-pack road, Voortrekker Road was the first major arterial road connecting Cape Town to the northern-eastern hinterland. In the 1860s a new railway line tracked the path mapped by the road. Of the distinctive suburbs and settlements established along Voortrekker Road, Maitland is the oldest. Named after Sir Peregrine Maitland, a former governor of the Cape (1844-47), Maitland was once referred to as a "rising suburb". Best known for its abattoir (built in 1914) and cemetery (founded in 1888 and the resting place of early Cape Town's illustrious white citizens), Maitland experienced a boom in the post-war years but slipped into decline when construction started on the N1 highway in the 1950s.

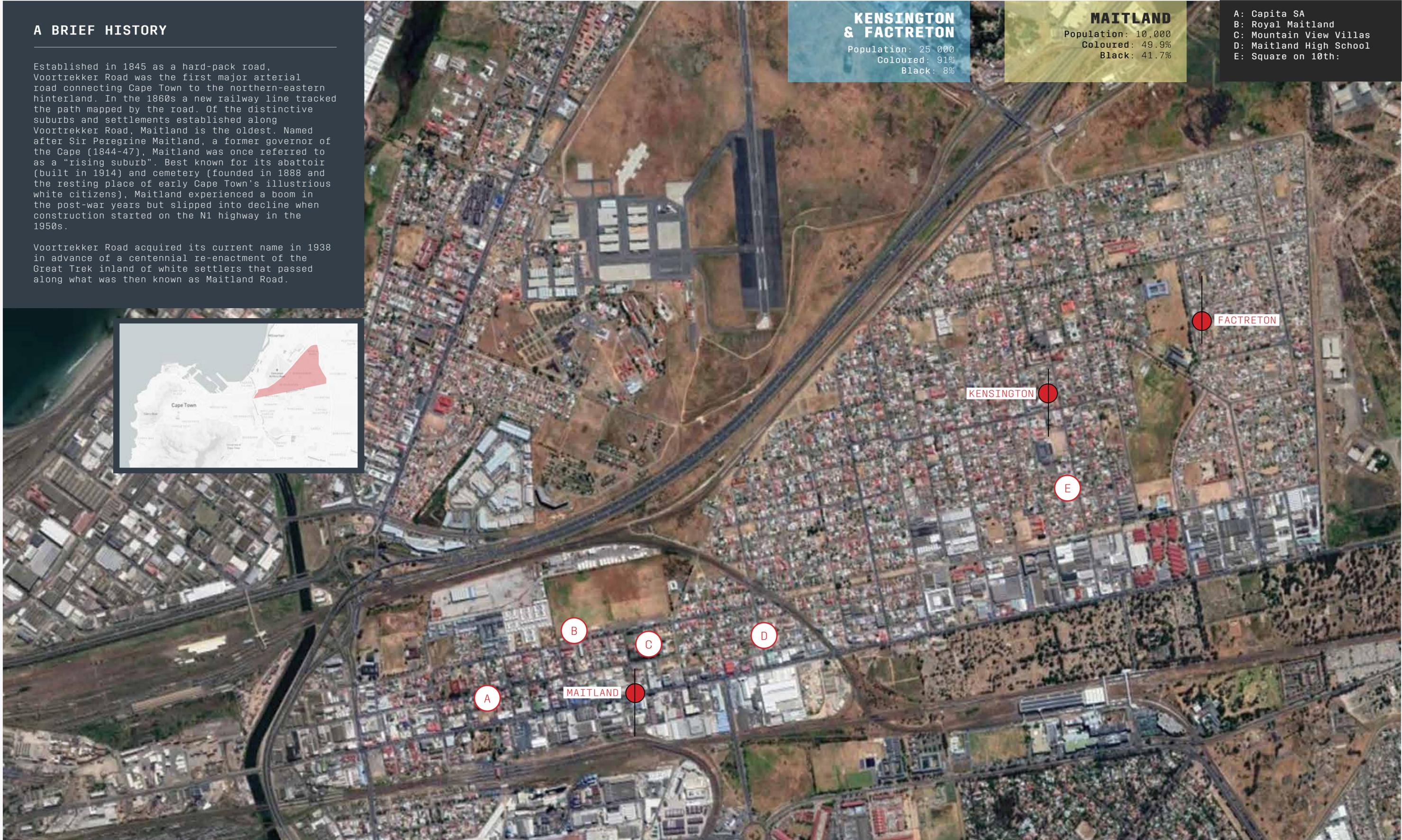
Voortrekker Road acquired its current name in 1938 in advance of a centennial re-enactment of the Great Trek inland of white settlers that passed along what was then known as Maitland Road.



**KENSINGTON & FACTRETON**  
 Population: 25 000  
 Coloured: 91%  
 Black: 8%

**MAITLAND**  
 Population: 10,000  
 Coloured: 49.9%  
 Black: 41.7%

- A: Capita SA
- B: Royal Maitland
- C: Mountain View Villas
- D: Maitland High School
- E: Square on 10th



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espite significant gains, notably in the areas of essential services and social welfare, South Africa remains a country indebted to its colonial and apartheid past. The social and spatial fragmentation characterizing its cities is a potent reminder of how racist ideologies of the past – along with their material signifiers – continue to reinforce present-day inequalities. South Africa’s built urban environment is, broadly speaking, characterized by low-density urban sprawl and highly unequal land distribution patterns. The endurance of this model disproportionately affects the urban poor, as well as hobbles government in the provision of efficient services. Overcoming the material legacy and infrastructural deficit of apartheid represents one of the key challenges facing South Africa.

South Africa’s democratic government was slow in responding to the challenge of transforming cities through land re-use initiatives, in particular through urban densification. In 2006 the National Treasury announced a new grant for “spatially targeted” investments in under-developed neighbourhoods aimed at addressing the spatial legacy of its racist past. Sixty-five municipalities across the country’s nine provinces have tapped into Treasury’s special financing mechanism, known as the Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant. The grant is conditional on municipalities demonstrating spatial targeting of public investments, services, regulations and incentives to optimise overall connectivity. Cape Town, a city widely viewed as spatially untransformed and still socially segregated, has recognised the potential of this grant as a catalytic tool to create a more inclusive and integrated city.

The City of Cape Town has identified three transit corridors for spatial targeting and investment: the Metro-South East Corridor Integration Zone (MSEIZ) from Khayelitsha to Mutual Station in Pinelands, the Blue Down Integration Zone which will provide a rail link between Khayelitsha and Bellville, and the Voortrekker Road Corridor Integration Zone (VRCIZ).

The aim of these projects, details of which were released in the 2012 Spatial Development Framework, is the creation of an “inclusive, integrated and vibrant” city. Both these integration-zone projects piggyback on existing transport infrastructure. As researcher Mercy Brown-Luthango details in a recent African Centre for Cities (ACC) research report on the Voortrekker Road Corridor, “Greater synergy between urban development and mobility through densification and the provision of quality public transport is considered to be central to the spatial and social restructuring of the city.”

However, what does it mean to be a poor citizen on the receiving end of a top-down planning initiative? How does the ideal of densification and affordable housing dovetail with the reality of Cape Town’s developer-driven property market and persistent insecurity? Is there a disjuncture between planning and lived-reality in Cape Town? Can South Africa’s oldest city be transformed? Where along Voortrekker Road are those acupuncture points? What are the obstacles to transformation? Moreover, where are the success stories? Motivated by these questions, and informed by Brown-Luthango’s detailed report on Cape Town’s transformation agenda, I set out on a series of walks on the western end of Voortrekker Road to explore the realities of densification and urban improvement.

It is an unremarkable walk that crosses four, possibly five city blocks, and takes all of ten minutes, or thereabouts, to complete. Less when the train is late, which is often according to the young township residents who use Metrorail to journey to Maitland, a working-class suburb in Cape Town, for a better education. To be clear, it is not only students of Maitland High School who use the train station, but also labourers. Some work at the large butcheries congregated along Voortrekker Road, others at food processing plants like Albany Bakery, Tiger Brands and Alpen Foods in neighbouring Ndabeni, a large industrial estate founded on the remains of a state-owned farm

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1. Intersection of Hanover and Tennant Street. Donated by Len Copin to the District Six Museum collection

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known as Uitvlugt that in 1901 was repurposed to house expelled black residents of Cape Town. However, that is a different history, and also walk.

The walk to Maitland High heads in the opposite direction of Ndabeni. It begins at Maitland station on Ferndale Drive, and initially leads in the direction of Table Mountain before turning right onto Station Road. From there it is a straight walk across four, possibly five suburban blocks to the high school, a prison-like structure with caged windows. Major sights along the way include architect CH Smith’s Edwardian-style town hall, a vestige of Maitland’s brief-lived independence as a municipality (1902-13), as well as the New Apostolic Church on Royal Road. Opened in 1933, a time of aspirant if restrained modernism in Cape Town, this brick-and-stucco church is located directly opposite the high school, in an area increasingly defined by an assemblage of new medium-density suburban homes. Depending on how you look at it, the walk down Station Road takes in another major sight: Voortrekker Road. Established in 1845 as a hard-pack road, Voortrekker Road was the first major arterial road connecting Cape Town to the northern-eastern hinterland. In the 1860s a new railway line tracked the path mapped by the road. Of the distinctive suburbs and settlements established along Voortrekker Road, Maitland is the oldest. Named after Sir Peregrine Maitland, a former governor of the Cape (1844-47), Maitland was once referred to as a “rising suburb.”

Best known for its abattoir (built in 1914) and cemetery (founded in 1888 and the resting place of early Cape Town’s white citizens), Maitland experienced a boom in the post-war years but slipped into decline when construction started on the N1 highway in the 1950s. Voortrekker Road acquired its current name in 1938 in advance of a centennial re-enactment of the Great Trek inland of white settlers that passed along what was then known as Maitland Road. According to one report, coloured youths stoned the procession. Voortrekker Road has long possessed an impolite

**OUTLIER**

Voortrekker Road has long possessed an impolite streak; it is what makes it distinct from the middle-class suburbs that flourish around Table Mountain



PHOTO: REITHA FERGUSON

streak; it is what makes it distinct from the middle-class suburbs that flourish around Table Mountain.

At the point where the walk crosses Voortrekker Road, there is a tented stall. The proprietor mainly sells fresh produce. Here a single banana costs R2. Further west down Voortrekker Road, near its start, there is a café operated by specialist wholesaler Cool Bananas. The same fleshy fruit at Cool Café costs R4. The price differential is explicable and lays testimony to the complex and diverse nature of the economic fortunes of residents across the various neighbourhoods that constitute the so-called “Voortrekker Road Corridor.”

Cool Café is a part of a cluster of new businesses at the western edge of the 19km-long Voortrekker Road Corridor, an ambitious city-led project that is “prioritising dense, transit-oriented growth and development,” according to Brett Herron, a former member of the CoCT’s Mayoral Committee. This café, along with eateries like jazz-themed Café 65, cater to a new class of worker in Maitland: phone jockeys. Easily identified by their lanyards bearing access-control cards, these modern-day clerks work at a new call centre owned by specialist UK outsourcing firm Capita. This part of Maitland, bordering the suburb of Salt River and abutting the Black River, is distinct from the area around Maitland train station. It has noticeably gentrified, inaugurating a vogue for flat whites and other connoisseur coffees along Voortrekker Road. Even Botes Meat Centre, opposite Nazir Essa’s dental practice, has a big espresso machine to make the magical black elixir.

The tone and temper of life nearer Maitland’s former town hall and the busy train station is, however, very different. There is less sheen about the businesses. A bag wholesaler occupies a former Standard Bank outlet. There are many specialist traders offering foodstuffs for Maitland’s flourishing community of migrants, some from as far afield as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Nigeria. Maitland is known for its high concentration of foreign African



PHOTO: RETHA FERUSON

1. Luptatum et quate ommoluptas rat excearc iatiis necabo Korere is et fuga. Nam cum et iernam quatem faciaes tendemo

migrants. Their business premises typically feature a visual collage of fish and livestock.

But for an aging four-storey garment factory, most of the businesses and residential homes in central Maitland are single-floor establishments. Along Station Road, nearing Maitland High, there are some two- and three-storey apartment blocks, some predating the current drive towards densification. Mostly the residential types are standalone homes. These houses, some dating back to the early

twentieth century, recall a time of urban expansion and low-density garden suburbs reserved for particular racial groups.

During the period of high apartheid (1948–90), Maitland was a whites-only enclave with a working-class identity. Since 1994 this suburb of 10,000 has witnessed a pronounced shift in its racial make-up. Unlike neighbouring Kensington and Facreton, whose 25 000-strong population mostly self-identify as coloured (91%), Maitland’s current population is now mostly coloured (49.9%) and black (41.7%). Escalating home prices have made rental arrangements more commonplace in Maitland. In Kensington and Facreton it is the opposite: rentals only constitute about a third of tenancy types. The new walls and abundant security fixtures crowning most of the homes and businesses on the walk between the train station and Maitland High speak to a pervasive complaint about life in all three these regions: insecurity. This complaint escalates the further east one travels along Voortrekker Road. In September 2018, Kensington and Facreton residents blocked off several streets along Voortrekker Road, their protest action aimed at highlighting rampant gang violence. Gang tags marking territory are visible throughout the Voortrekker Road Corridor. The Sexy Boys, an offshoot of the notorious 26s gang, claim substantial real estate in Maitland. A cement-block wall along Cannon Street, in an area of former railway houses, reads “Sexy Town”. All of which makes walking through Maitland a nervous exercise. This fact is essential to register. Big ideas, whether they have to do with nation building or retooling a city’s urban fabric and mix, are tempered—as much as tested—by walking.

In March 2011, around the time a group of urban planners were drafting Cape Town’s City Development Strategy, a long-term “action plan to support and manage growth” in the city, *People’s Post*, a local community newspaper, reported that large groups of students from Maitland High were wilfully ignoring the 8am school

bell and arriving late for class. Shrugging off the prospect of detention, scholars were described as huddling in groups and smoking. Others were described as running to the nearby convenience stores, a mix of formal and informal businesses on Royal Road that cater to residents of the neighbourhood’s

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new housing estates. Quizzed about their behaviour, one student told *People’s Post*: “Most of us come from the township and we don’t even leave the house with a meal in our stomach, so that’s why you see them [students] running to the shop and stopping before we go into school.”

One student, Cindy Lethundi, told how she travelled to Maitland by train from the outlying township of Khayelitsha. Erratic train schedules aside, Lethundi’s morning schedule included dropping off her younger siblings at a day-care centre in Maitland before rushing to school. “It’s not that I arrive late every morning at school. On most occasions I just make the bell and escape detention,” she explained. Lethundi’s story speaks to on-going difficulties in this transforming neighbourhood, particularly in the area around Maitland High School. These difficulties are worth enumerating, as they buttress the ACC’s broader findings about the Voortrekker Road Corridor. The abandoned public swimming pool at the corner of Royal and Essex roads is a physical embodiment of the micro-scale challenges

of transformation. For much of the past decade, residents have been complaining about this site. Located close to Maitland High, the pool facility fell into disuse around the time of the 2004 opening of Royal Maitland 1, a medium-density housing scheme developed by the Cape Town Community Housing Company (CTCHC). Designed by architect Jac Snyman, the development was intended for “gap market” buyers—being households earning too much to qualify for state housing subsidies, but not enough to participate in the competitive property market. The first phase of the housing estate comprised 168 residences with one- and two-bedroom units. A recipient of an award from the Southern African Housing Foundation in 2006, the housing project has since been expanded to incorporate a second phase.

Royal Maitland now represents a beacon of sorts for the low-income residents of Maitland, Kensington and Facreton. In 2012, it was reported that a confidence trickster from the community, posing as a city official, swindled 50 Facreton residents out of their money with promises of a house in Royal Maitland. Those deceived included Jessica Abrahams, a 27-year resident of Facreton. “I paid her R400 at first. She returned, saying I needed to pay another R300. We never got hold of her again.” Encoded in this testimony, reported in *People’s Post*, is a story of deferred aspiration, of wanting to move up, but finding oneself perpetually stuck. It is a commonplace story in Facreton.

Viewed from above, Facreton is an assiduously planned suburb with a substantial number of similar-sized public parks dotted across the neighbourhood. On the ground, it is barely distinguishable from Kensington. Both suburbs originate out of the destruction of an earlier, culturally mixed settlement located between the suburbs of Maitland and Goodwood. Historian Sean Field has described how the community of Windermere/Kensington was once home to 55–60% black residents. Fields describes its destruction by apartheid planners between 1958 and 63, and the



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1-7: Various scenes captured by the author during his walks through the Voortrekker Corridor. The photographs show different housing developments in the area, from the old to the informal settlement (3) and the quality of services available to residents of the informal community (2). Residents of the informal settlement are willing to pay rates and taxes if that means they will get a better quality of services delivered by the council

ALL PHOTOS: SEAN O'TOOLE

development of the so-called “model coloured townships” of Kensington and Factreton as “tragic examples of apartheid’s social engineering”.

Despite its current social challenges, in particular the scourge of gang violence, Kensington has a resilient character that stems from its sedentary population. This virtue is also a possible stumbling point for the city’s planned densification initiatives. During field research into everyday lived experiences and emerging practice in this suburb by ACC researchers Kensington’s aging residents revealed that they were not in favour of conjoining their properties with surrounding properties for densification. Many rejected the idea of constructing a secondary dwelling for rental purposes. Homeowners in Maitland expressed similar views.

To date, most of the densification projects in this region have been new builds on greenfield sites. Royal Maitland is a striking example of this trend.

The fate of Maitland’s derelict pool is currently holding up the planned third phase of this ambitious housing project. The land on which the pool is located is owned by CTCHC, an affordable housing authority that is funded and wholly owned by the National Housing Finance Corporation. While earmarked for housing development, Cape Town’s city government in 2007 (and again in 2014) identified the swimming pool as a Grade IIIB structure. This means it has sufficient intrinsic significance to be regarded as local heritage resource and alteration is thus regulated.

The gears of bureaucracy are slow moving. Over the past decade, as city officials have debated the fate of the pool facility, residents have seen its corrugated-iron roof and timber beams disappear. The Edwardian-style building is currently blackened with fire smoke and features substantial graffiti, including crude tags linked to Maitland’s gang network. The pool facility was fenced off in 2012 following a spate of negative media reports. This hasn’t dissuaded local

youths and drifters from accessing the site and using it as a place to pause, sleep and perform other illicit forms of community.

The pool was, for instance, front-page news in February 2011 edition of the local community newspaper. “Pool facility a problem, say residents,” declared the headline. The article described how the site was being used for drinking, drug use, fighting and the illegal dumping of refuse. “We cannot live like this, because this facility attracts all the wrong attention and it’s only getting worse by the day,” an anonymous resident was quoted.

Little has changed in the ensuing years. When I visited the tumbledown site a drifter was washing his shoes in the pool. “So many crazy things go on in there,” resident Zaitoon Barends said in May 2015. “Vagrants, drug addicts and children bunking school have made the site their home. School children hide there and smoke drugs instead of going to school.” The repetition in this complaint might seem petty but it nevertheless highlights the intersecting spatial and social challenges faced by residents of Maitland, Factreton and Kensington.

During their in-depth fieldwork, ACC researchers registered widespread alienation among respondents living in these three neighbourhoods. There is a commonplace perception that “the government” doesn’t care about the citizens of these embattled communities. In Maitland, the development aspirations of residents were more diverse than those in Factreton and Kensington, where safety is the biggest concern. Topping the list of desires in Maitland is the demand for more social facilities for the neighbourhood’s youths, followed by better roads, improved access to bus services, safety and – counter-intuitively, given the low-density sprawl – complaints about overcrowding.

Graham Daniels, the chairperson of the Maitland Neighbourhood Watch, who in 2015 called for the abandoned pool to be redeveloped, echoes aspects of these research

findings in a statement. “The [pool] site has become a haven for criminals and homeless people and even prostitution,” said Daniels, ploughing a familiar furrow. He invoked a slippery term, commonly used by office-bearers and urban practitioners, to drive his argument. “Developing it [the pool] is the answer. It needs to be developed into a community hall type of thing where different activities can take place, like a hub for the community.” Development is a noun, but it also denotes an action. The exclusionary logic of apartheid, which was as much an architectural and planning event as a social phenomenon, institutionalised racial biases that continue to underpin the atomised form of South African cities. In her report into the Voortrekker Road corridor, ACC researcher Mercy Brown-Luthango notes: “South African cities today are still marked by social and spatial fragmentation as well as unacceptably high levels of inequality.” Poor households are disproportionately affected by spatial fragmentation, as are city governments. “The unit costs of providing infrastructure and services to low-density forms of development is far greater than that for medium or higher density development,” writes Brown-Luthango.

In November 2017, a report in the *Cape Argus* noted how the city’s MyCiTi bus service – part of its larger Integrated Rapid Transit (IRT) system – was promoting new development along Voortrekker Road. The mayoral committee for transport and urban development released a statement that spoke of the local authority’s policy to prioritise dense, transit-oriented growth and development in these integration zones. “The city seeks to create more inclusive communities with access to improved services, job opportunities, and affordable housing and public transport.” The statement lauded completion of the second phase of the Capita call centre in Maitland as “a shining example of what we are pursuing”. Reportedly, this second phase has added 1000 new jobs to the existing 700 employees already based at the centre.



The influx of young lanyard-wearing workers into Maitland has noticeably improved Voortrekker Road’s coffee culture, expanding the options beyond Broadway Confectionery and Deli, a decades-old local institution. But it has not noticeably changed residential patterns. “Unlike in many other areas across Cape Town, there is already an acceptance of the viability of rental as a tenure option,” notes the ACC report. Gabieba Jordan, an estate agent with Meggar Property in Maitland, confirmed that there has been an uptick in rental enquiries from Capita employees. However, safety and security remain a concern. The more upwardly mobile tend to opt for neighbourhoods like Goodwood, Jordan added. The new developments on Maitland’s north-western edge have, however, proven popular.

Rental for a two-bedroom unit in Royal Maitland is currently priced at around R8500. Apartments at The Square on Tenth, a private residential complex in Kensington, are slightly less. Completed in 2012 and located near an industrial estate with numerous garment factories, the seven-floor Square on Tenth is composed of 400 units and was developed by Maitland fashion entrepreneur Farrell Suttner. The residential high-rise is a radical departure from Kensington’s existing residential typology, which is resolutely low-slung and suburban. In 2012, Suttner described the development as “a flagship for the area”. However, a series of news articles in 2012 and 2013 suggested the mass-housing scheme was plagued by sanitation and crime issues.

Gabieba Jordan at Meggar Property is familiar with the problems these new gap homes present. Meggar handles the administration of rentals for many older blocks in Maitland, including Hams Court, opposite Mountain View Villas, a newer privately-funded development adjacent Royal Maitland. Launched in 2015 by private company Finserve, Mountain View Villas directly neighbours on Maitland’s derelict pool. Meggar briefly serviced rentals at Mountain View Villas but withdrew from the

arrangement following persistent complaints about quality. In 2015, a wall in the estate fell on a resident as she hung her laundry.

The incident highlighted broader complaints at this mass-housing development. Cynthia Chivambo, a tenant, noted: “If you look round the complex, you will see cracked walls everywhere. When we ask them [the developers] to fix it, they tell us it’s not their fault. I believe cheap material was used. People pay a lot of money [to live] here. We can’t live like this. Something has to be done.”

Quality issues notwithstanding, Mountain View Villas and Square on Tenth are notable examples of the catalytic effects of government-led neighbourhood development projects in the neighbourhood development projects promoted in the Voortrekker Road Corridor. Both developments make good case studies of shifting urban trends in the face of entrenched resistance to densification among older residents

Overcrowding is a persistent complaint among Maitland residents, ACC researchers found, this despite the average dwelling density along Voortrekker Road being 15 units per hectare. The city aims to achieve densities of 40–45 units per hectare. “Given Voortrekker Road’s well-endowed transport capacity, such as the railways, the road network and the last phase roll-out of the MyCiTi bus network, it is essential to get more people to live on the corridor,” offered urban planner Walter Fieuw in 2016. This densification is happening, albeit not always in the orderly way envisaged by planners.

After authorities evicted squatters and fenced-off the abandoned pool at the corner of Royal and Essex roads in 2012, Royal Road’s itinerant homeless population relocated to a nearby recreational facility where they erected their shelters behind the park fence. Drug dealers also transferred their activities to the park. When I visited, the park it was empty. Royal Road’s homeless now squat two abandoned buildings on a greenfield site opposite Maitland High School. The site has some portable toilets provided by welfare

## The Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant

The need to remake South African cities is as much a national project as a municipal one. The national overhauling of the segregated form of South African cities was largely ad hoc until 2006 when the National Treasury announced a new grant for “spatially targeted” investments in under-developed neighbourhoods. Sixty-five municipalities across the country’s nine provinces tapped into Treasury’s special financing mechanism, known as the Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant. The grant is conditional on municipalities demonstrating spatial targeting of public investments, services, regulations and incentives to optimise overall connectivity. The language of technocratic planning can be opaque, but it is easy enough to illustrate.

**THE SWIMMING POOL**

The abandoned public swimming pool at the corner of Royal and Essex roads is a physical embodiment of the micro-scale challenges of transformation. For much of the past decade, residents have been complaining about this site. Located close to Maitland High, the pool facility fell into disuse around the time of the 2004 opening of Royal Maitland 1



PHOTO: SEAN O'TOOLE

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authorities. The community shows signs of a fragile permanence. Washing is hung out to dry on weekends. On Sundays, men sit at a makeshift table and play cards. A wooden lean-to is fitted with a TV aerial.

This pattern of formal/secure and informal/insecure living is commonplace across the length of the Voortrekker Road Corridor, where backyard dwellings and shack settlements coexist alongside more durable homesteads with a full complement of basic services. There are seven informal settlements in Maitland and Kensington. One of the smallest is located on a wedge of land between the railway and Maitland's historic cemetery. The site is sparsely occupied. It has a single tap installed next to a block of five concrete flush toilets. As is the pattern across the region, its occupants survive from doing piecemeal work. Some residents have lived at this site for over a decade. Its proximity to Cape Town's CBD is its chief virtue. The city habitually removes residents, but many return. "We don't want to be moved," resident Denvel Pigland told *People's Post* in 2017. "They must provide us with services here. These shacks are our homes."

Backyard rentals are a step up from life in an informal settlement. The types of backyard accommodation available in Facticeon and Kensington differ significantly, ACC researchers found. Whereas in Facticeon the structure is more often than not a shack constructed of wood and corrugated iron, in Kensington backyard rental accommodation consist of brick and mortar structures more typical of middle-class homes with living quarters for domestic employees or accommodation for elderly parents or adult children. On average five people will share a backyard structure in Kensington and Maitland, less in Facticeon. ACC researchers heard uniform complaints about lack of access to water and electricity, as well as overcrowding. It has been reported that some Facticeon landlords do not allow their tenants to use basic services after 8pm. Others charge exorbitant weekly service bills.

In 2011 Facticeon's backyard dwellers were thrown a lifeline when the community was identified as the pilot site for a mayoral improvement project. Essential services like electricity and running water were rolled out to backyarders. Milia Visser, a Facticeon mother of four living in a tiny iron structure was provided with her own electricity meter box, a toilet, and fresh running water. Four years on, there is widespread discontent among backyarders in Facticeon. Some backyard residents have described the upgrade project as "useless".

Many complain about the poor quality of the toilets and electrical installations and in some instances a total lack of delivery.

"I have lost relatives because we don't have electricity," Lulama Onrust said. "We have to use an illegal connection which is very dangerous. It's not built to sustain all of us at the same time, so we have to take turns to cook." Onrust paid more than R100 per week for her illegal connection, which is no small sum given that backyarders here typically earn a combined monthly household income of R1000-R5000 per month. "If we have our own boxes it will be much better because we can save a lot of money. We were supposed to get electricity boxes as promised by the mayor, but up to this day, we are still waiting. We have lost hope."

Backyard dwellers are a particularly difficult class of resident to access, in part because they are hidden from plain view, making them easily exploitable. Among the respondents canvassed by ACC researchers, most expressed a willingness to pay the city for better services directly. "The one consistent finding across the three study areas and across different housing typologies was that all respondents indicated a willingness to pay for better services if these were to be provided by the City," notes Brown-Luthango. She motivates for further research to determine the exact number of backyard dwellers in Facticeon and their specific needs and ability to pay for services.

**T**he uneven development along Voortrekker Road, and the desolation it continues to inspire among residents is part of the crippling debt of South Africa's apartheid past. Optimistically, integration zones such as the slowly transforming Voortrekker Road Corridor represent "a significant moment for cities to remake the spatial form of the apartheid city," according to Walter Fieuw. Access to equitable housing is central to realising the promise of this moment. There are, however, many obstacles. The need for affordable housing in this region, writes ACC's Mercy Brown-Luthango, has been met by a "lack of a clear vision and common

understanding amongst different role-players when it comes to the goals for affordable housing in the city." Finance options available to potential buyers are limited. The price of land, especially prime urban land as in Maitland, is another factor.

The concept of densification is another issue that requires "much stronger engagement and community participation," notes Brown-Luthango in her report's conclusions. Despite being one of the "central pillars" of the investment strategy for the Voortrekker Road Corridor, ACC's research has revealed persistent community misapprehension around densification. "This resistance might be due to misconceptions and fears about increased crime and social dysfunction associated with high densities," notes Brown-Luthango. Her report motivates for a communication and education drive by city officials. An *imbizo* (gathering) at Maitland's controversial pool would be instructive, for all parties.

A recent announcement displayed in the foyer of Maitland's old city hall told of yet another legal hearing to determine the fate of the pool. As before, the notice posted by Heritage Western Cape drew attention to the pool's possible cultural significance. That significance is more than just architectural but also, potentially, social. It is not a far-fetched assertion. In his 2009 book, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, historian Jeff Wiltse writes how the history of American swimming pools dramatize that country's roiling transition from an industrial to a modern society, in part because they often served as "stages for social conflict." The Maitland pool offers a similar lens for relooking the country's fractured history and race politics.

The earliest reports of Maitland's open-air pool date back to the 1930s. Along with Maitland's large dairy, abattoir and "well laid out" cemetery, this public amenity (early on described as a "swimming bath") was frequently singled out as a

marker of Maitland's urbanity. The freshwater pool was unique in certain respects, especially when compared with other suburban pools in Sea Point and Claremont. Similar to the public pool on Long Street, it was enclosed by a concrete courtyard and bordered by cubicles. It offered no reclining verge or patch of lawn. The pool's status as a whites-only leisure space is perhaps more critical now than its well-defined portico and classical columns.

In a 1995 profile of Peter Marais, then a rising politician who later became Cape Town's mayor and premier of the Western Cape premier, journalist Mark Gevisser recounted the following anecdote:

Marais first realised the plight of his people when, aged twelve, he watched his father – a "great man" who wrote popular morality plays about the dissolution and redemption of the coloureds – being humiliated by his white foreman. "I asked my dad, 'how can you let him speak to you like that? Why don't you bugger him up?' So he replied, 'Because he's a white man.'" From that moment on, the young Marais hated The White Man. It festered for a couple of years, until he organized a gang "to go beat up the white schoolchildren in Maitland, because they had a swimming pool and we didn't."

We gave them a good working over. I came back, and I sort of had a feeling of achievement: 'Hell, I've hit a white child! I hit him pow-wow! I'm stronger than you.' We talked for days about it."

Whether embellished for or not, the story is insightful. The battle to overhaul apartheid was won, in part by challenging its deterministic logic at crucial pressure points: for Marias, nearby a whites-only public pool. However, apartheid is not dead, at least not structurally and spatially. In Maitland, a derelict pool redolent of lapsed privileges and hard-won victories still stands. Should the pool be demolished? The answer is complicated and points to difficulties confronting the larger Voortrekker Road Corridor project. Safety advocates have long motivated for the pool's demolition, which would enable the construction of further medium-density homes. But what about rehabilitating the pool? It is not far-fetched speculation. Brown-Luthango's report notes that the provision of social services and infrastructure such as schools, libraries, recreational and cultural facilities in more impoverished neighbourhoods "create a sense of place, local identity, dignity and promote spatial equality in the city."

Unloved as it is, demolishing the pool will not address the root social causes of crime

“

*The one consistent finding across the three study areas and across different housing typologies was that all respondents indicated a willingness to pay for better services if these were to be provided by the City*

”

and violence. As Brown-Luthango states in her report, there is a need for recognition of “more holistic planning” to address these issues.

Civil society engagement and community involvement here is vital. “This perhaps points to some of the shortcomings of the current strategy for the Voortrekker Road Corridor, which seem to be highly centred on economic efficiency and the need to address crime and violence from that perspective, without a concomitant focus on the social drivers of violence and crime,” offers Brown-Luthango. So the pool remains, for now. This cipher of struggle and change is a short walk from Voortrekker Road. The walk, which might initially seem unremarkable, crosses four, possibly five city blocks, and takes less than ten minutes ■

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It also draws on various reports in People’s Post (2011-17) written by journalists Tauriq Hassen, Tiyese Jeranji and Luvuyo Mjekula, notably Hassen whose reporting was especially valuable.

Other valuable sources include: Sean Field, *Oral History, Community, and Displacement: Imagining Memories in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2012.

Walter Fieuw, ‘Voortrekker Road Corridor Holds the Key to the Future of Cape Town’s Growth,’ *Future Cape Town*, 27 June 2016: [http://futurecapetown.com/2016/06/voortrekker-road-corridor-holds-the-key-for-cape-towns-future-growth-future-cape-town/#.W8ccw1JoQo\\_](http://futurecapetown.com/2016/06/voortrekker-road-corridor-holds-the-key-for-cape-towns-future-growth-future-cape-town/#.W8ccw1JoQo_)



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