

## **City Drags Feet on Public Petition WM Cottage**

By Karibu Staff

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The City of Johannesburg has yet to follow through on its promise to investigate the Petition from the Defend Public Spaces Campaign (DPSC), that Khanya College be the 'guardian' of the Workers Museum and Cottages (WMC) in Newtown. The Petition addresses the threat of eviction Khanya College from the WM Cottages, which is used for educational and cultural purposes. The Public Petition was signed by 87 civil society organisations and 997 individuals. Petition bylaws require the City to investigate the petition's claims and respond to them.

On 22 September 2025, Khanya College and DPSC members handed the Petition to the representatives of the Mayor's Office, Director of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, Phumzile Sithole, Deputy Lawrence Bayana, and senior officials – Stanley Maphiri, and Ms Mirriam. The DPSC members included Snake Park Cerebral Palsy, Bench Marks, the Casual Workers Advice Office, Simunye, Page2Stage, Sakha Ilizwe, and Sakha Impilo/Imbumba Young Solutions.

Sithole agreed to do a site visit of the WMC, and an investigation based on the Petition; and to hold a meeting of all parties.

After weeks of silence, Karibu contacted the Mayor's Office for information. Stanley Maphiri advised, "The City is nearer to calling a meeting with Khanya College and partners." However, his statement raises questions, as Maphiri also indicated that the site visit of the WMC would only take place on 23 October 2025.

The petition was in response to the City's Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage's (DACH) plan to evict Khanya from the Cottages, and use it for offices. The WM Cottages are a heritage site and cannot be used as offices. Already, the DACH uses one of the Cottages as an office. The DPSC believes that the WM Cottages are one of the few spaces available for the working class in Joburg.

Instead of doing a site visit *before* meeting with the DPSC, Sithole alleged that "Khanya College uses the Workers Museum (WM) Cottage as a storage facility." Khanya explained that it operates from its own eight-storey building in the Johannesburg CBD, with huge capacity for storage. In fact, Khanya had offered the DACH space for its staff to leave the Cottages free for its intended purpose: a dedicated public cultural space.

Khanya, therefore invited Sithole to do a site visit. The site visit is still outstanding, which means the City has not conducted the investigation. The lack of transparency frustrates campaigners, who view the City's vague assurances as an attempt to delay a clear decision on the space.

### **Department Clears Khanya**

According to Maphiri, the Mayor's Office has already met with the DACH, which reportedly "found no problem" with Khanya's continued use of the space. His remarks highlight an inconsistency: if the DACH cleared Khanya, why is the City still stalling on formalising its position?

## **Background**

Khanya College's history has been linked to the WMC, after its public campaign in 2003 to make it a heritage site. At the time the City and Joburg Development Agency planned to demolish the workers compound and build a hotel and shopping centre. The campaign for heritage status was successful in 2006, and the WMC was born. Since then, Khanya has been responsible for the educational and cultural work at the WMC with communities and youth, in a largely non-monetary partnership with the City.

## **User Agreement**

In 2021, in recognition of its work, the City gave Khanya a User Agreement for the WMC, which expired in 2024. This facilitated Khanya's work, given its close proximity to the WM. After promises to renew, this year, 2025, the City advised Khanya they want to use it as offices, which meant evicting Khanya from the Cottages. The WMC is a heritage site and cannot be used as offices.

To reiterate, the DPSC believes that the WMC is one of the few public spaces available for the working class in Joburg. Given the general trend in the city, for municipal buildings to fall into decay, the DPSC requested that Khanya manage the whole WMC and its programme development. DPSC activists say that it would help drive traffic to the WMC and popularise the working class' heritage in the city; and improve ordinary people's participation in the Metro.

As the 23 October site visit approaches, the City's credibility hangs in the balance. Its ongoing delays and vague statements have deepened public suspicion that it acts without transparency and without urgency to preserve a key cultural space in Johannesburg's civic life.

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