

Protea North Library Falling into Disrepair

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Once a vital study space for residents of Protea North and surrounding areas, including Protea South, Protea Glen, Mapetla, and Naledi, the Protea North Library now stands neglected and unused. The double-storey building is in poor condition. The windows are broken, the trees are overgrown, and the premises have neither been cleaned nor maintained in years. There is no security presence, raising concerns that the building may soon be hijacked and repurposed for unintended use, as has become the case with many buildings owned by the City, by its own admission.

In the early 2000s, the library was a bustling hub, especially on weekends. It served as a safe and quiet space for learners preparing for exams, doing research, or completing assignments, also helping to facilitate community. For many, it was a second home, particularly for those from working class households, where overcrowding and noise often make studying at home difficult.

Community libraries were originally established to support the education of black working class children, especially in townships where literacy challenges are most severe. According to the 2030 Reading Panel, 60% of children in South Africa finish Grade 1 without knowing the full alphabet. By the end of Grade 2, over 30% still struggle to recognise all the letters.

With the Protea North Library closed and few alternatives available, the literacy crisis deepens. The Gauteng Department of Education is overwhelmed, and the odds are stacked against young learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A 2021 report in *The Citizen* revealed that over 60 libraries in Johannesburg have shut down in the past five years. Reasons include vandalism, theft, and arson during periods of unrest. A major contributing factor is the lack of investment in security and maintenance. Municipal neglect has led to the steady decline of these essential public resources.

As community spaces continue to disappear, residents are calling for unity and action. It's time to stand together and protect our public spaces, before they're lost for good.

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