Cape Town: Tyres burn in homes spat

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Backyarders in Makhaza have been scattering rubbish and burning tyres on busy Lansdowne road every evening for the past week in protest over their exclusion from a housing project in the area.

Hundreds of backyarders from Sections 41 and 42 are outraged over residents in an informal settlement in K-Section being allocated houses in the proposed Nonqubela Housing project to take place on land identified in K-Section.

The backyarders say the 163 houses to be built in the Nonqubela project are supposed to be for them, but the previous ward councillor, Tobile Ludidi, sold them out by allocating the houses to residents of the K-Section informal settlement.

The continuing protest was sparked on Monday last week when people squatting on vacant land in K-Section were moved off the site in order to make way for the construction of the RDP houses. Backyarders said there wouldn't be a project until they were put back on the Nonqubela housing list.

Protesting backyarder Masibulele Mpompo said he had been living in a shack behind his parents' house for 19 years and there were three other shacks in the yard.

"We can't live like this. The city needs to build us houses. How can they take people from other areas and build them houses in our area. What about us?" said Mpompo.

The city called a halt to the housing project after protests began last week.

Angry backyarders, who did not want to be named, said they would prevent any housing project taking place until the proposed houses were allocated to them.

The backyarders claim when they first heard the proposed houses would be allocated to other people in 2009 they reported the matter to housing MEC Bonginkosi Madikizela, who promised to investigate.

"Till now, we don't know what he found. They can't take people from other areas and give them houses while we are waiting."

But on Saturday, the K-Section informal settlers now in line to benefit from the housing project, launched their own protest. They blamed present ward councillor Danile Khatshwa for siding with the backyarders, as he also lived in a backyard.

About 150 K-Section residents have been taking to the streets surrounding K-Section since Saturday, demanding Khatshwa provides them with answers.

A housing beneficiary from K-Section, Mzothando Skwasha, 45, said everyone was given a chance to register for a house and backyarders were "busy with politics".

"People are living with fear because of them. We don't know what they're up to. Every night they have meetings and throw rubbish in the streets," said Skwasha.

K-Section community leader Thamsanqa Kondile said Khatshwa was siding with the backyarders.

“Ever since the backyarders started to protest he’s been behind them. He doesn’t care for us.”

He said it was Khatshwa’s fault that construction at the housing project had been halted when the backyarders began their protests last week.

“We want to know why he is choosing sides. We will protest until the project is back on track,” said Kondile.

Khatshwa said he was aware of both protests. He said he met with the backyarders on Monday last week and the only reason he hadn’t yet met with the K-Section informal settlers was because they threatened to beat him up.

He said he needed to organise police protection before he could attend their meetings.

Cape Town human settlements mayoral committee member Ernest Sonnenberg said the aim of the Nonqubela Housing Project was to “eradicate the informal settlements in K-Section”.

Sonnenberg said due to the large number of people in the informal settlement, not all of them could be accommodated in the housing project and the city, together with the province, was “in consultation” with community leadership to resolve the issue. – West Cape News