

31 March 2026

Joint Letter of Demand from the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation (JHF) and the Johannesburg Crisis Alliance (JCA) regarding the Closure of the Metro Centre, Braamfontein, and abandonment of the City of Johannesburg (COJ) Plans Archives.

For the attention of:

- Dada Morero, Executive Mayor, COJ: executivemayor@joburg.org.za
- Floyd Brink, City Manager, COJ: citymanager@joburg.org.za / NolukholoN@joburg.org.za (Secretary)
- Nokuthula Thusi, MMC, Department of Development Planning, COJ: NokuthulaT@joburg.org.za
- Phetsile Dube, Executive Secretary to MMC of Department of Development Planning, COJ: PhetsileD@joburg.org.za
- Siphon Mzobe, Former Acting CFO & General Manager in the office of the CFO at the JPC, Johannesburg Property Company: smzobe@jhbproperty.co.za / clientservicingunit@jhbproperty.co.za (For enquiries)
- Georgina Lefifi, Head of Communications, COJ: GeorginaL@joburg.org.za
- Margaret Arnolds, Speaker of Council, COJ: MargaretA@joburg.org.za / margaretaic.arnolds@gmail.com
- Eric. E Raboshakga, Executive Director: Development Planning: EricR@joburg.org.za
- Gcina Makhubo, Building Development Management Directorate: GcinaMa@joburg.org.za
- Brian Mkhize, Acting Assistant Director NBR: Building Regulations: NkululekoMkh@joburg.org.za
- Hector Makhubo, Deputy Director Legal Administration: HectorMa@joburg.org.za

Introduction

In September 2023, following a transformer fire, the Metro Centre in Braamfontein was closed with immediate effect due to reported safety concerns and structural deterioration. The entire staff component of around 2000 people was abruptly relocated to leased office space around the city and the Metro Centre building was effectively abandoned with no organised plan to decant the equipment or records contained therein.

As a result, millions of rands worth of office equipment, furniture, artworks and other fittings were left behind. Most importantly, however, the invaluable Plans Archive that is housed in the Metro Centre was also abandoned. Two and half years later, the archive remains largely inaccessible amid on-going reports of vandalism, destruction, lack of security, etc. This is a crisis both in terms of heritage preservation and in terms of complying with the city's own building-code legislation.

Statement of Significance

The City of Johannesburg Plans Archive contains the building plans and application material for all properties in the City of Johannesburg dating back to its founding. These files are therefore a record of all information related to a property including drawings, town planning information, engineer reports, legal records and other approvals. There are hundreds of thousands of files in the archive and it is, quite simply, irreplaceable as only a few plans have been previously digitised with the vast majority existing only in single-copy paper form.

Since September 2023, the entire archive, located on the 6th floor and basement of the Metro Centre, has been left in a building that is unsecured and unsafe. There is no regular oversight of the archive, no electricity supply, no lighting, and no adequate fire and flood protection. Should a fire occur or the basement area flood, this archive would be destroyed. There are also no staff members onsite to locate files and facilitate legitimate enquires from the public.

Without access to the information in these files, we have no knowledge of the original architect of the building, the date of the original application, the history and heritage of a property, locations of services, or any access to original drawings and records of approvals. In addition, these documents contain a vast trove of unwritten history – both social and economic relating to the built environment.

Furthermore, the inaccessibility of the archive has had severe repercussions for property owners and developers, causing a negative impact in terms of the economic development of the city.

Property owners are required by financial institutions to produce ‘approved plans’ on transfer of a property. If they have no access to the plans in the archive, property owners are being asked to reproduce the plans from scratch and submit new applications for approval. Depending on the scale of the building, this is extremely costly in terms of professional fees, application fees and the time it takes for approval, holding up the property transfer.

Reproducing a set of as-built drawings of a building is also an expensive, time-consuming process and does not account for the wealth of information contained in the historic records of applications. For example, when buildings are altered, a record of the alterations is of value to inform the design and construction process going forward. We have already heard several anecdotal reports of unauthorised personnel going into the archives and handing over original plans to property owners in exchange for a fee, with no guarantee that the plans will be returned.

A large proportion of buildings in the city are over 60 years old and therefore subject to the National Heritage Resources Act. Without access to the information in the property files, heritage professionals have no way of building a heritage application as per the requirements

of this legislation. Without access to previous town planning applications and approvals contained in the files, there is no record of these approvals.

Finally, in itself, the plans archive is an important heritage resource and should be safeguarded in terms of the due diligence required by the National Heritage Resources Act.

Should this asset be lost to the City of Johannesburg, the loss of information would be immeasurable. The continued closure of the archive also greatly disrupts the processes of property development in the city, making the job of built environment professionals - architects, town planners, conveyancers and heritage practitioners – much harder if not impossible to do and consequently making these services much more expensive.

As such, the archive containing the entire historic and legal repository of information on the built environment in the City of Johannesburg is at huge risk. Several organisations including the JHF and the Gauteng Institute for Architects have alerted the city to this unacceptable state of affairs several times, starting in March 2025. There have also been a number of media reports highlighting the precarious state of the Metro Centre and the archive. It has also been suggested that the top floor of Museum Africa would be a suitable repository for the relocated archive as it has the space, security and is conveniently located.

To date, no information or plan for the relocation of these archives has been forthcoming from the city.

List of Demands:

Due to the lack of action by the COJ authorities, the JHF, JCA and affiliated organisations acting on behalf of civil society and the citizens of Johannesburg are issuing the following demands:

- A written acknowledgement of receipt of this letter of demand within 7 days from the above date. Should no response of receipt be forthcoming, this letter of demand will be issued to the public and media.
- An on-site meeting must be held at the Metro Centre with the relevant COJ authorities, the MMC for Development Planning, and civil society to examine conditions in the archive first-hand. This meeting should take place within 14 days of receipt of this letter.
- The COJ must draw up a full and credible relocation plan with timelines. This plan needs to be submitted within 14 days of receipt of this letter.
- The three reports that were used to determine that the entire Metro Centre is unsafe for occupation – viz. Structural Engineers' Report, Emergency Management Services

(EMS) Risk Assessment, and Compliance Inspection by the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) – must be supplied to the JHF/JCA within 2 weeks for the sake of oversight and transparency. We are aware that a PAIA request for these documents was submitted by OUTA two years ago but was ignored by the COJ.

- The relocation and re-filing of the archives needs to be done under the supervision of an experienced and qualified archivist in collaboration with current Archive staff so that the complete archive can be ‘re-built’ in a suitable location.
- Information regarding any partial relocation and/or digitization processes currently underway should be conveyed to the JHF/JCA.
- Information regarding the location and backup of digital plans submitted since the closure of the archive should be conveyed to the JHF/JCA and integrated into the new Plans Archive structure.
- The restored Plans Archive needs to be re-opened for full and normal operations as a matter of extreme urgency so that architects, developers and heritage practitioners can once again comply with existing legislation.

Should there be no response from the city within two weeks of receipt of this letter, the JHF/JCA will embark on a public protest action outside the Metro Centre, with media coverage.

Issued on behalf of
Yunus Chamda – JCA Coordinator
David Fleminger – JHF Chair

The organisations listed hereunder support this letter of demand and will explore all forms of action to challenge the outcome/lack or no response. The actions will include demonstrations, litigation and other forms of civic action which will demonstrate the degree of anger and frustration over this travesty of administrative justice.

- Gauteng Institute for Architects (GIFA)
- South African Property Owners Association (SAPOA)
- Johannesburg Attorneys Association (JAA)
- Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI)
- Joburg Community Action Network (JoburgCAN)
- Westcliff Residents Association (WRA)
- Greenside Residents Association (GRA)
- Rivonia Wide Residents Association
- Glen Austin Residents Association



- Saxonwold Parkwood Residents Association (SAPRA)
- Forest Town Residents Association
- Welridge Residents Association
- CraigPark Residents Association
- Lower Houghton Residents Association (LHRA)
- Constantia Village Residents Association
- Parkview Residents Association
- Melville Residents Association (MRA)

For additional information and enquiries please contact: the JHF office: 060 813 3239 / mail@joburgheritage.org.za or the JCA office on 077 461 3542 / Joburg.ca@gmail.com

A record of previous statements from the JHF, COJ and selected media reports can be found on our website: www.joburgheritage.org.za/joburg-metro-centre-crisis-precious-plans-archive-at-risk