

28 April 2026

Media Statement regarding the Closure of the Metro Centre, Braamfontein, and abandonment of the City of Johannesburg (COJ) Plans Archive.

On the 31st of March, the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation and the Johannesburg Crisis Alliance (JHF/JCA) issued a joint letter of demand regarding the closure of the Metro Centre in Braamfontein and the abandonment of the invaluable plans archive contained therein. This letter was endorsed by a number of interested and affected parties representing a wide range of civil society.

The letter was sent to the City of Johannesburg (COJ) Executive Mayor, the City Manager, the MMC of the Department of Development Planning, the Former Acting CFO & General Manager at the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC), the COJ Head of Communications, the Executive Director of Development Planning, the Building Development Management Directorate, the Acting Assistant Director NBR: Building Regulations, and the Deputy Director of Legal Administration.

The letter outlined the derelict status of the Metro Centre following its sudden closure in September 2023 due to 'structural issues' that made the building 'unsafe' for occupation. The letter further contained a Statement of Significance regarding the city's plans archive, which dates back to the earliest days of Joburg. The city's mandate is clear: to keep this precious archive safe and accessible, especially since the submission of copies of the original plans is often a legal requirement for property development, home loans, renovations, city planning, approvals, etc.

The demands contained in the joint letter included:

- A written acknowledgement of receipt within 7 days.
- An on-site meeting to be held at the Metro Centre within 14 days with the relevant COJ authorities, the MMC for Development Planning, and civil society to examine conditions in the archive first-hand.
- A full and credible relocation plan from COJ, with timelines, within 14 days.
- Sharing of 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) – 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 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.
- Detailed information regarding any partial relocation and/or digitization processes currently underway should be conveyed to the JHF/JCA.
- Detailed information regarding the storage 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.

A letter of acknowledgement was received from the City Manager on the 6th of April and a ‘follow-up’ letter was received on the 16th of April. These communications outlined vague plans and offered facile reassurances that the authorities have the matter under control. However, there were no timelines offered, no agreement to a site meeting, no indication that the documentation requested would be provided, no details regarding the current status of the archive in terms of which records have been moved vs. those that remain in the Metro Centre, etc.

Furthermore, apart from a promise that ‘once digitised, records will be integrated into a secure electronic system [that will] facilitate efficient access for officials and, where legally permissible, members of the public’, there was no indication of how architects, homeowners, property developers, researchers and heritage practitioners can currently access the records, as is often required by law.

Most glaringly, there was no sense that the COJ understands the urgency of the situation. Not only is this irreplaceable archive degenerating with each passing day, many interested and affected parties are being forced to re-draw plans from scratch, at considerable personal expense, to comply with existing legislation. This clearly has a major knock-on effect in terms of property sales and responsible development at a time when Johannesburg’s property market needs all the help it can get.

As such, the JHF/JCA is proceeding with plans for a **public protest to be held outside the Metro Centre** at a date to be determined. We are also requesting **testimonials from people and organisations who have had issues accessing plans** from the Metro Centre or Carr Street offices (the latter being where the relevant staff and parts of the archive have apparently been relocated in the interim). Testimonials can be submitted through this [Google Form](#) or via email to the contact addresses listed below.

Additionally, we wish to point out the following important points of consideration:

- As custodians of the Johannesburg Plans Archive, the COJ's mandate is to keep the documents safe. This cannot be done in a condemned and abandoned building with no power, no fire protection, illegal occupants, etc. It therefore follows that either the COJ must immediately move the files to a secure location, or they must prove that the Metro Centre is safe.
- The status of the digitization contract with Microsoft needs to be clarified in terms of timelines, how many plans have been digitized, where the digitization is taking place, what happens to the paper plans once they have been digitized, etc.
- We also remind the authorities that digitization isn't a replacement for the paper archive. Rather, it is a delivery mechanism for improved access and a backup against accidental destruction of physical records. All the original paper plans still need to be stored securely in an organized manner to protect against data loss and technological obsolescence (e.g. some of the plans were previously converted to microfiche, with no reliable microfiche reader now available).
- This is not the first time we have alerted the COJ to the dire condition of the archive. The JHF, JCA and several affiliated organizations have appealed to the authorities several times over the years but no action has been taken. For example, following an intervention by several stakeholders, the city made the promise that physical files would be moved by the 15th of December 2024. This has clearly not occurred.

In conclusion, the current situation is totally unacceptable. Despite the COJ's claims that they have the situation under control, we believe that pressure from the public and the media is the only way to force the city to take appropriate and timely action. The time for excuses and delays is over. Our heritage is being destroyed, with very real consequences for property owners and developers, and it is our duty as civil society to raise the alarm.

A full copy of our initial letter of demand along with the COJ's responses is available on our website, along with previous statements highlighting the Metro Centre issue:

www.joburgheritage.org.za/joburg-metro-centre-crisis-precious-plans-archive-at-risk

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

Issued on behalf of

Yunus Chamda – JCA Coordinator

David Fleminger – JHF Chair

Supported by:

- *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)*
- *JHF Heritage Plans Committees (HPC) – East, Central and West*
- *Westcliff Residents Association*
- *Greenside Residents Association*
- *Rivonia Wide Residents Association*
- *Glen Austin Residents Association*
- *Saxonwold Parkwood Residents Association*
- *Forest Town Residents Association*
- *Welridge Residents Association*
- *CraigPark Residents Association*
- *Lower Houghton Residents Association*
- *Constantia Village Residents Association*
- *Parkview Residents Association*
- *Melville Residents Association*
- *Observatory Estate Resident Forum*

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