

KRAAL

Bo Kaap's Informal Settlement



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CURRENT SITUATION

The Kraal is an informal settlement situated at the end of Hout Street in Bo Kaap. The settlement currently has around 25 shacks housing approximately 150 people. The Kraal sits on rocky terrain with steep elevations. During interviews, residents voiced complaints about the lack of ability to move safely throughout the camp, especially during the rainy season. The shacks are made out of various found materials like corrugated metal, cardboard, placards, and other found items, have no insulation, and therefore are extremely hot during the summer and cold during the winter. Sickness among the residents is common because of the cold and wet conditions during the winter months. Fires are also a concern of the residents in the shacks and are devastating when they occur. One of the residents said a fire occurred two years ago and destroyed one-fifth of the shacks in the settlement.

The city provides some basic services including several streetlights, six toilets, and three water taps. The water taps were added in 2002 after extensive lobbying by the community leaders. The city does not regularly empty or maintain the toilets and water taps. If any repairs are necessary or if the toilets need to be emptied, the residents must call the city. There are several streetlights connected to the electrical plant next door that provide minimal lighting at night. The residents do not tap into this power supply to their shacks informally because of safety concerns but would like to have electricity in their homes.

A common concern among the residents is the criminal activity that occurs in the settlement. The Kraal is isolated and relatively unnoticeable from the street. Criminals frequently use the Kraal as an escape route from the central business district to a near-by highway. Some residents are also involved in criminal activity. One resident voiced concerns about the lack of structured activities for the youth in the settlement and said that the kids turned to criminal activity. The community previously built a fence to remove the through-route used by criminals, but officials tore it down.

Even though the settlement is in Bo Kaap, the residents of the Kraal are not considered to be a part of the Bo Kaap community. Half of the residents of Bo Kaap do not know about the Kraal. The half that know about the Kraal have mixed feelings about the settlement. Some of the Bo Kaap residents bring food and other items to the residents in the informal settlement. Others view the Kraal as a crime-ridden area that reflects poorly on the rest of the Bo Kaap community. Most children living in the Kraal go to school in Bo Kaap, and some of the residents have friends in the area. Even though the Kraal is situated in the Bo Kaap neighborhood, it is removed both socially and physically.

PROPOSAL

Through community involvement during the designing and implementing phases, we hope to restore a sense of community inclusion and pride, while increasing the safety and wellbeing of the residents in the Kraal, and further improve the housing conditions and community accessibility. We have created a tentative plan to share with the community that will meet these three criteria through the implementation of additional services and further development of the Kraal.

Community Inclusion and Pride

An appointed leader of the community explained that the residents no longer take pride in their shacks and in their settlement; consequently the Kraal is becoming run-down. In order to combat this we propose the construction of a community center. This center will serve as a meeting place for community members of the Kraal as well as a facility for Bo Kaap residents to come into the Kraal. There will also be a space for a community garden to encourage local food production. The community center will serve as a gateway to a nearby field that currently isn't being used. Our hope is to develop this area into a community park with playground equipment as well as a soccer field. The community will assist in the design process through a Charrette. The community will have the opportunity to collaborate on the materials used for the construction of the center as well as determine any of the features they would like included into the center.

To further expand accessibility into the Kraal, we suggest extending Hout Street into the settlement to lead to the new community center. This street will serve as an entrance for other Bo Kaap residents to come into the Kraal and also provides an opportunity for commercial establishments. By having commercial services located within the Kraal, the residents will no longer need to travel to the central business district for shopping needs. The addition of commercial services also encourages local support and provide economic opportunities for Kraal residents.

Safety and Wellbeing

In order to reduce the amount of criminals passing through the Kraal, we suggest having one exit out of the Kraal at the community center. Currently, criminals pass through the Kraal, climb down the drop off, and then go directly through an empty field that is not used frequently toward the highway. By limiting the open access to the empty land below the Kraal, we will reduce the amount of through traffic. One exit at the top of the Kraal via the community center will also discourage criminal activity because of its public location.

To promote safety further in the community, we suggest expanding the number of streetlights in the Kraal. Currently there are a few streetlights that are spread throughout the settlement that provide some light for the residents. The settlement is located conveniently next to a power station, so the addition of lighting would be easy to implement. We would ask for community's input about the location of new streetlights before further development.

To encourage health and wellbeing in the community, we propose the addition of water and sanitation into each of the shacks. Presently the community shares six toilets and three water taps. The toilets are not well tended for by the city and are frequently broken and/or overflowing. We suggest that the newly constructed shacks (mentioned below) include both running water and toilet facilities. This removes the health risk associated with the lacking maintenance of public toilets and increases the accessibility to water for bathing and other household activities.

Housing and Accessibility

The terrain the Kraal is situated upon is rocky and has steep elevation changes. We propose the use of terracing to even out the elevation changes and make it easier for local residents to navigate throughout the settlement. The community will determine the best locations for terracing and how many terraces are necessary.

Along each terrace, the shacks will be re-blocked. The community will determine the pattern of shacks and how many will be in each section. Typical re-blocking has a cluster of four or five shacks with a shared courtyard. Re-blocking makes it easier for the city to install services, give clear pathways and shared spaces, reduces the likelihood of fires spreading between shacks, and eliminates blind spots to increase security.

The new shacks will incorporate eco design principles. The shacks will be made out of easily accessible local materials like stone and/or clay. Clay can serve as a natural insulation material to regulate the temperature inside the shack. Each shack will be equipped with basic services like electricity and water. The community will design the layout of the shacks and will be included in the entire construction process. Construction training can also serve as a mechanism for future employment and economic security for the Kraal community members.

Concessions

We recognize that extending Hout Street further into the Kraal and opening up the area to more commercial business will create a challenging situation for the city. The City of Cape Town might be unable to zone appropriately for commercial use in the context of an informal settlement. Mixing formal and informal uses will not be popular, but it is a goal the city should work towards because of the economic opportunities that would then be available to the residents of informal settlements.

Although the addition of infrastructure in each shack could be seen as a move towards land tenure, we do not want that to detract from improving the lives of the residents. The immediate goal for the residents of the Kraal is to promote community inclusion and pride as well as the safety and well-being of the residents, rather than to acquire immediate land tenure.

Additionally, these changes and additions in infrastructure would be very expensive and time-consuming. Because the settlement is situated in an old quarry, the land is not well-suited for construction or the installation of infrastructure. The city might feel that there are more economic benefits to be gained from allowing the construction of a large hotel or other businesses than from assisting the development of the current community. A hotel or cluster of business would be able to pay for the construction, thus saving the city money, and would also bring more economic potential to the area.

Conclusion

The issues faced by residents of the Kraal will not be solved overnight. It will take time, energy, and perseverance on the part of the city, residents, and neighbors in Bo Kaap. The most noticeable problem in the area is crime. Our goal is to take one step towards making the community safer for the residents. By improving the infrastructure within the Kraal we hope to also improve relations with the larger Bo Kaap community. Extending Hout Street into the Kraal and adding a community center has the potential to cut off the area as a thoroughfare for criminals evading authorities from the nearby city center. The community center will also be a central space for increasing the civic involvement of the people living there. By improving water infrastructure and leveling some of the areas on the sloped residences, the City of Cape Town will improve the living situation for those living in the Kraal and the other residents of Bo Kaap. None of these innovations will solve all of the problems for people living in the Kraal, but they will be a step in the right direction if designed and implemented with the community used as a driving force towards change.

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