



IDP PROPOSAL | COMMUNITY HALLS

Open Halls, Open Futures

Putting Cape Town's community halls to work for learning, culture and livelihoods

A proposal for inclusion in the City of Cape Town Integrated Development Plan.

Grounded in Sections 152 and 153 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

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SUMMARY

The proposal in brief

Cape Town owns a large network of community halls, civic centres and multi-purpose centres. Many of them stand locked for most of the week. They earn the City little, serve their neighbourhoods less and are difficult for ordinary residents and community organisations to book. A hall that is closed on a Tuesday morning is a classroom that never opened, a choir that never rehearsed and a skills course that never ran.

The Service Delivery Party (SDP) proposes that the City adopt an Open Halls regime in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The regime has seven parts:

- **Book at the hall.** Every hall takes bookings on site, with a live public calendar at the door and online.
- **A new Education and Training tariff.** Learning, skills and youth programmes pay nothing in off-peak weekday hours and a fraction of the community rate at other times.
- **Term bookings for anchor programmes.** Recurring classes and rehearsals secure a slot for a full term with one deposit and fair cancellation rules.
- **Opening hours that follow the community.** Halls open early, close late and open on weekends, staffed by shift rosters and trained community custodians.
- **Measured and published utilisation.** Each hall reports booked hours against available hours every month, with clear targets.
- **Ward hall forums.** Communities help allocate time fairly and protect existing user groups.
- **Halls equipped for learning.** Connectivity, furniture, storage and basic audio-visual and music equipment.

The proposal is revenue-positive in principle. Fuller halls attract paying users, spread fixed costs over more hours and make the City's facilities visible again. It is also a constitutional obligation, not a favour.

A hall that stays closed for most of the year is not a neutral asset. It is a service the City has paid for and then withheld.

PART ONE

The constitutional foundation

Section 152(1) of the Constitution sets out the objects of local government. Four of the five apply directly to community halls:

- **Section 152(1)(b):** to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner. A hall that is idle provides no service, and an asset that earns nothing while costing upkeep is not sustainable.



- **Section 152(1)(c):** to promote social and economic development. Training, adult education, tutoring and the creative arts are among the cheapest routes to employment and enterprise available to the City.
- **Section 152(1)(d):** to promote a safe and healthy environment. Open, busy halls in the evenings give young people somewhere to be, which is a direct contribution to community safety.
- **Section 152(1)(e):** to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. Community organisations cannot be involved if they cannot get through the door.

Section 153(a) adds a developmental duty. A municipality must structure and manage its administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and to promote social and economic development. A booking system designed around office hours and administrative convenience, rather than community need, inverts that duty.

Section 152(2) requires the City to strive to achieve these objects within its financial and administrative capacity. The Open Halls regime asks for very little new capacity. The buildings already exist. What must change is how they are managed, priced and opened.

Two statutes reinforce the constitutional case. Section 74 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 allows a tariff policy to differentiate between categories of users, provided the differentiation does not amount to unfair discrimination. A dedicated education and training tariff is therefore lawful and within the City's power. Section 63 of the Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 makes the accounting officer responsible for managing the municipality's assets. Chronic under-use of public buildings is an asset-management failure that the IDP should name and correct.

Constitutional anchor. Sections 152(1)(b), (c), (d) and (e) and Section 153(a) treat these halls as instruments of service delivery and development. SDP holds that these are binding, measurable obligations. Halls that remain closed for most of the year fall short of them.

PART TWO

What the City's own documents show

The City does not publish utilisation figures for its halls. That silence is itself a finding. The City's 2026/27 tariff book (Annexure 6, Recreation and Parks: Halls) does, however, reveal how the system is designed and who it favours.



2.1 There is no tariff for education or training

Learning is priced the same as a birthday party.

Hall users fall into four classes: commercial users, private users, club members and community or charity users. Commercial use is defined as any use that generates revenue. There is no class for education, skills training, tutoring, rehearsal or youth development. A literacy programme run by a registered non-profit pays the community rate. A fee-charging music teacher running affordable lessons is treated as commercial. Concessions exist, but only at the discretion of the Director or an Area Manager in terms of the Concessions Policy, and applications must go through the booking office. Discretion is not a policy. It is a door that opens for some and stays shut for others.

2.2 What it costs to use a hall on the Cape Flats

The rates in our poorest areas, from the City's 2026/27 tariff book.

Facility	Area	Weekday community (R/hr)	Weekend community (R/hr)	Weekday private (R/hr)	Weekend commercial (R/hr)
Andile Msizi Recreation Centre	Site B, Khayelitsha	104	120	160	262
Desmond Tutu Recreation Centre	Khayelitsha	102	120	160	261
Crossroads Multi-purpose Centre	Crossroads	102	120	160	261
Bardale Multi-purpose Centre	Mfuleni	110	127	170	272
Delft Civic Centre	Delft	111	127	170	274
Browns Farm Community Hall	Philippi	111	127	170	274
Dagbreek Community Hall	Mitchells Plain	111	171	214	323
Druivevlei Community Centre	Manenberg	102	120	160	261

Source: City of Cape Town, 2026/27 Budget, Annexure 6, Tariffs, fees and charges book (Recreation and Parks: Halls). Rates are per hour, VAT inclusive, for the main hall. Committee and activity rooms at low-income facilities are far cheaper (R8 per hour weekday for community use), which shows the City already accepts near-zero pricing where it chooses to.

A two-hour evening class held twice a week at Andile Msizi Recreation Centre costs a community organisation about R416 a week at the community rate, or more than R16 000 over a 40-week year. For a volunteer-run matric support programme or a youth drama group, that is a barrier that ends the programme before it begins. The hall then stays empty and the City earns nothing.



The tariff book also defines “weekends” as Friday, Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. At Dagbreek Community Hall in Mitchells Plain, the community rate jumps from R111 on a weekday to R171 on a weekend, an increase of about 54%. Friday evenings and Saturdays are exactly when working parents, learners and volunteers are free.

2.3 Deposits and cancellations punish recurring users

Rules written for one-off functions are applied to weekly classes.

Refundable deposits range from R316 for community use of a small hall (Category D, up to 200 seats) to R1 259 for a large hall (Category A, more than 800 seats). Cancellation rules are severe. Notice of at least 30 days still forfeits 10% of the hire charge. Notice of between 13 and 30 days forfeits a further 25%. Notice of less than 13 days forfeits the entire hire charge. The City also states that an event is confirmed only when its event permit is issued, not when the facility is reserved.

These rules may make sense for a wedding reception with amplified sound and 400 guests. They make no sense for a weekly literacy class of 20 adults. A tutor who falls ill, or a school that changes its exam timetable, should not lose a week’s hire charge for it.

2.4 Existing users have been pushed out

Lobelia Community Hall, Lenteguur, 2022.

In June 2022 the City barred community organisations and social clubs from the Lobelia Community Hall in Lenteguur, Mitchells Plain, leaving a crèche as the only permitted user. A seniors’ club, a community gym, a health support club and an arts and crafts club were among those excluded. Residents protested outside the hall, and the seniors’ club reported having to move into a cramped church venue. The case shows that the problem is not only price. Allocation decisions are made without transparent rules or community input.

2.5 The City has acknowledged the problem

The admission is on record. The fix is not.

Ahead of the 2026/27 festive season, the Mayoral Committee Member for Community Services and Health, Councillor Francine Higham, told festive-season organisers that the City recognises there is room to improve and streamline its venue booking processes. SDP welcomes the admission. An acknowledgement in a meeting is not an IDP commitment with targets, a budget and a reporting line. This proposal supplies those.

2.6 Other cities have faced the same problem and fixed it

Under-use is common. Remedies are known.

Randwick Council in Sydney found its town hall was in use just under 10% of the time, with only seven bookings in 2019. The City of Sydney identified its booking system as one of the central reasons community groups were not using available spaces, and moved to make council



premises free for community groups. In London, Hackney Council reported that introducing a new online booking system increased activity, enquiries and booking income across its community halls. The lesson is consistent: lower the barriers and the halls fill.

Constitutional anchor. *Section 153(a) requires the City to structure its administration and budgeting to prioritise basic needs and development. A tariff book with no category for learning, and rules designed for one-off functions, shows that hall management is structured around administration, not development.*

PART THREE

The SDP Open Halls regime

01 Book at the hall

Every hall becomes its own front door.

- Each hall has a booking point on site, open during all operating hours, where residents can see availability, book and pay in one visit.
- A live calendar showing booked and free slots is displayed at the hall entrance and published online and by WhatsApp, so residents know what is available before they arrive.
- Recurring education, training and arts bookings are confirmed within two working days.
- Event permits are required only where they serve a real purpose, such as amplified sound, liquor, large crowds or public fundraising. A class, rehearsal, workshop or meeting does not need an event permit.
- Central booking offices and the online system remain available, but they no longer stand between a community and its own hall.

Constitutional anchor. *Section 152(1)(e): community involvement begins with access. Section 152(1)(b): a service that cannot be easily reached is not effectively provided.*

02 A new Education and Training tariff

Price the hall according to the public good it produces.

SDP proposes a fifth tariff class, Education and Training, alongside the existing four. It covers adult basic education, literacy and numeracy, matric and homework support, early childhood development programmes, digital and vocational skills, job-readiness workshops as well as rehearsal and tuition in drama, music and dance.



User and time slot	Proposed tariff	Rationale
Registered non-profit, public school, TVET or public education programme: weekday daytime (Mon to Thu, 08:00 to 17:00)	Free	Off-peak hours currently earn nothing
Same users: evenings and weekends	25% of the community rate	Keeps peak slots available and covers marginal costs
Arts rehearsal and tuition (drama, music, dance): weekdays	50% of the community rate	Supports creative livelihoods and youth programmes
Independent tutors and trainers charging learners an affordable fee	Community rate, not commercial	Low-fee teaching is a service, not a business event
Commercial and private functions	Current rates, reviewed annually	Weekend functions carry the cross-subsidy

Proposed tariffs are SDP's recommendation for the IDP and the next tariff policy review. Eligibility would be verified once a year through NPO, PBO or institutional registration, not booking by booking.

Constitutional anchor. Section 74 of the Municipal Systems Act permits differentiation between categories of users. Section 152(1)(c) and Section 153(a) supply the reason for this differentiation: social and economic development is the priority.

03 Term bookings for anchor programmes

Stability lets a programme grow.

- Education and arts programmes may book a recurring slot for a full school term or a full year.
- One deposit is paid per term, not per session, and is capped at the Category D community rate.
- Individual sessions in a term booking may be cancelled with 48 hours' notice without penalty, up to four times a term.
- Term holders who leave a slot unused for three consecutive weeks without notice lose the slot to the waiting list, so time is not hoarded.

04 Opening hours that follow the community

Halls should open when people are free, not only when offices are.

- Standard operating hours of 07:00 to 22:00 on weekdays and 08:00 to 22:00 on weekends, with shorter hours only where a ward forum agrees.
- Staff work on shift rosters so that evening and weekend opening does not depend on overtime.



- A trained community custodian at each hall, recruited locally through the Expanded Public Works Programme, opens, supervises and closes the hall for evening and weekend sessions. This creates local jobs and builds ownership.

Constitutional anchor. *Section 152(1)(d): busy, well-supervised halls in the evenings are a direct contribution to a safer environment for young people on the Cape Flats.*

05 Measure and publish utilisation

What is not measured is not managed.

- Every hall records booked hours against available hours each month, broken down by tariff class.
- The City publishes these figures quarterly, hall by hall and subcouncil by subcouncil.
- Proposed targets: 40% of available weekday hours booked by the end of year one and 60% by the end of year three, with at least a third of weekday bookings in the Education and Training class.
- Any hall below 25% utilisation for two consecutive quarters is reviewed by its subcouncil, which must adopt a recovery plan within 90 days.

06 Ward hall forums

Communities share in deciding how their halls are used.

- Each ward establishes a hall forum through the ward committee, with representation from schools, early childhood centres, faith groups, senior citizens and sports and cultural clubs.
- The forum advises on the allocation of recurring education and arts slots and on opening hours.
- No established user group may be removed from a hall without written reasons, notice of at least 60 days and a hearing before the forum. The Lobelia exclusion must not be repeated.

Constitutional anchor. *Section 152(1)(e) requires the City to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations. Hall forums give that requirement a working structure in every ward.*

07 Equip halls for learning

A hall becomes a classroom with modest investment.

- Free public Wi-Fi in every hall, building on the City's existing public Wi-Fi programme.
- Stackable tables and chairs suited to classes, a projector with a screen and a whiteboard.
- Lockable storage so that term holders can keep materials and instruments on site.
- A basic sound system and, in selected halls, an upright piano and rehearsal mirrors for music and dance.



- Partnerships with corporate social investment programmes, SETAs and the provincial Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport to co-fund equipment.

PART FOUR

Why open halls pay

The City does not publish hall utilisation or revenue per hall, so the figures below are illustrative. They use the actual 2026/27 rates for Andile Msizi Recreation Centre in Khayelitsha and an assumed current pattern of ten booked hours a week, all weekend private functions.

Use per week	Current pattern (assumed)	Open Halls pattern	Annual revenue under Open Halls
Weekend private functions at R182/hr	10 hrs	10 hrs	R94 640
Weekday education and training (free)	0 hrs	20 hrs	R0
Weekday arts rehearsal at 50% (R52/hr)	0 hrs	8 hrs	R21 632
Weekday evening private use at R160/hr	0 hrs	6 hrs	R49 920
Weekend commercial use at R262/hr	0 hrs	4 hrs	R54 496
Total booked hours and revenue	10 hrs R94 640 a year	48 hrs	R220 688 a year

Illustrative scenario over 52 weeks. The point is the mechanism, not the precise number: a hall that is visibly busy with classes and rehearsals attracts more paying private and commercial bookings, and fixed costs such as security, cleaning and maintenance are spread over nearly five times as many hours of public benefit.

The larger return is not on the City's balance sheet. It is in the matric learner who passes, the adult who learns to read, the young actor who finds work and the music teacher who builds a small business. That return is exactly what Sections 152(1)(c) and 153(a) require the City to pursue.



PART FIVE

Implementation and accountability

Phase	Action	Responsible
First 100 days	Publish a register of all halls with current operating hours and 12 months of booking data. Suspend event-permit requirements for classes and meetings.	Recreation and Parks; Community Services and Health
Year one	Adopt the Education and Training tariff in the tariff policy review. Launch on-site booking and public calendars in 30 pilot halls on the Cape Flats, starting with Khayelitsha, Mitchells Plain, Philippi, Delft and Mfuleni. Establish ward hall forums.	Council; Finance; Subcouncils
Year two	Roll on-site booking out to all halls. Appoint community custodians. Equip pilot halls for learning.	Recreation and Parks; EPWP
Year three	Reach 60% weekday utilisation citywide. Independent review of the regime reported to Council.	City Manager; Council

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Reporting
Weekday hours booked as share of available hours	Not published	40% (yr 1), 60% (yr 3)	Quarterly, per hall
Share of weekday bookings in Education and Training class	No such class	At least one third	Quarterly
Halls offering on-site booking	Not standard	30 (yr 1), all (yr 2)	Annual report
Average time to confirm a recurring booking	Not published	2 working days	Quarterly
Halls with a functioning ward hall forum	None	All wards with a hall	Annual report

CONCLUSION

From locked doors to open futures

Community halls were built with public money to serve the public. On the Cape Flats they are often the only large, safe, accessible indoor spaces in a neighbourhood. Keeping them closed for most of the year, pricing learning like a party and burying access under rules made for weddings is a failure of service delivery that Sections 152 and 153 do not permit.

SDP asks the City to include the Open Halls regime in its Integrated Development Plan, with the tariff, booking, opening-hours, utilisation and governance commitments set out above. The buildings are already standing. The City need only open the doors.



Optimal use of public halls is not generosity. It is the City meeting its constitutional duty.

SOURCES

References

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Sections 152 and 153.
- Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, Section 74.
- Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003, Section 63.
- City of Cape Town, 2026/27 Budget (June 2026), Annexure 6: Tariffs, fees and charges book, Section 5, Recreation and Parks: Halls.
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- Cape Town Etc, "City works with Klopse groups ahead of festive season".
- City Hub (Sydney), "Councils reduce community venue hiring fees to address 'chronically underutilised' spaces".
- London Borough of Hackney, report on the viability and future use of community halls.