

Durban drums up resistance

DURBAN residents, faced with the prospect of being evicted if the group areas and squatting Bills are pushed through Parliament this month, are exploring avenues of staving off the day of reckoning.

With almost every option stymied by a legal brick wall, the Durban Central Residents Association (DCRA) has launched a campaign to put pressure on big property-owners to resist the Bills.

On Friday, the DCRA sent written requests for meetings to Russell, Marriott and Boyd Trust, the JH Isaac Group, and RMS Syfrets.

It has been suggested that some landlords may face bankruptcy if their "illegal non-white" tenants are driven out as there are few whites who would take places.

The DCRA has also approached a member of the House of Delegates and one of Durban's biggest property-owners,

Pressure put on owners to fight group areas Bills

By Sam Sole

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In a related development, 40 white households have formed the Westville Civic Action Group with the intention of swinging attention away from the right-wing backlash against "grey" areas. They also intend to promote public debate on bringing about a "just and humane solution" to the residential crisis for blacks.

In a statement this week, the group challenged candidates for the October municipal elections to "take the initiative in educating their constituencies about the myths and injustices caused by the Group Areas Act".

Copies of the group's statement have been sent to all municipal candidates as well as businesses, service organisations and property-owner associations.

While the controversial group areas Bills were being debated in Parliament this week, Paul Chetty, a Clare Estate property-owner caught between the law and squatters on his land, found himself more firmly locked into this impasse.

Earlier this year he was forced on pain of arrest to demolish the shacks on his one-hectare property. In reply, the squatters obtained a Supreme Court interdict ordering him to rebuild their homes.

Then Mr Chetty was fined for failing to evict the squatters. Reluctantly, he gave them three months' notice. This deadline was reached on Friday.

Stepping into the breach, the chairman of

the Durban Central Residents Association, Iqbal Mahomed, appealed in writing to the Deputy Minister of Constitutional Development, Roelf Meyer, to intervene to prevent the squatters' homes being destroyed for the third time in 10 months.

The fate of the Bills will also affect the fortunes of squatters in the rugged Welbedacht valley near Chatsworth.

The land is privately owned, but its steep slopes and the absence of amenities have made it a haven for the homeless for almost 20 years.

A number of members of the mixed Indian and black settlement of about 3 000 pay rent, but others stopped doing so five years ago in protest against the absence of services.

The area's 600 black residents would be especially vulnerable as they would face eviction under the amended Group Areas Act, despite some them having lived in Welbedacht for 20 years.

The threat to the community coincides with tentative steps that are being taken to improve the area. The Development Services Board is to improve the main road to the area and is already installing a reticulated water system for most of the valley.

Squatters on land not reached by the reticulation have persuaded the board to provide a plant to chlorinate their water.

Although they represent the beginning of orderly development, they also herald the possibility of eviction for those who cannot afford to be part of the new Indian residential area or are the "wrong" colour.