



Open Letter Sample

Open letter to mayor on proper renaming of Hanover Street

By Bonita Bennett Sep 6, 2019

Dear Mayor Dan Plato

I write to you at the request of the Seven Steps members of the District Six Museum, which is an honorary club of ex-resident elders. They have been an important backbone of the museum as well as the dispersed community of District Six, since the club was formed on Heritage Day of 2008.

Life history interviews conducted and archived by the museum are filled with memories of Hanover Street, as are interviews about musical and cultural life in the district.

The significance of this street is unquestionable. Names of streets and other landmarks in District Six are of great relevance to the way that the history of the area is acknowledged, and its tragic past is memorialised. Renaming forms an important part of restitution.

The Seven Steps members wanted me to provide you with this broader context for the renaming.

Previous proposals relating to the development of a Hanover Street precinct go back a number of years. In summary, they include:

Renaming Keizersgracht “New Hanover Street” as it is not actually Hanover Street, but it does follow the street’s contour after the street grid was destroyed. This would ensure that a false history of the geographic site is not perpetuated.

This renaming should be integrated into the broader process of redevelopment and naming streets as houses are built on them.

CPUT had decided to build a student residence on this site, thus destroying this site of ritualised remembrance. We call on the mayor to attend to this matter. Most of District Six was destroyed when homes were obliterated, rendering material traces even more precious because of their rarity.

It is a great tragedy that the redevelopment has been delayed for so long. The District Six Museum supports the broad principle of Hanover Street finding a significant place within the rebuilt District Six, but we believe this is not the correct action at this time.

It is also an act that is likely to be divisive. It also stands to be a wonderful opportunity to build that elusive cohesion we all seek, if engaged adequately and authentically.

Bonita Bennett

On behalf of the District Six Museum community of former and returned residents

Adapted from: <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/opinion/open-letter-to-mayor-on-proper-renaming-of-hanover-street-32285681>