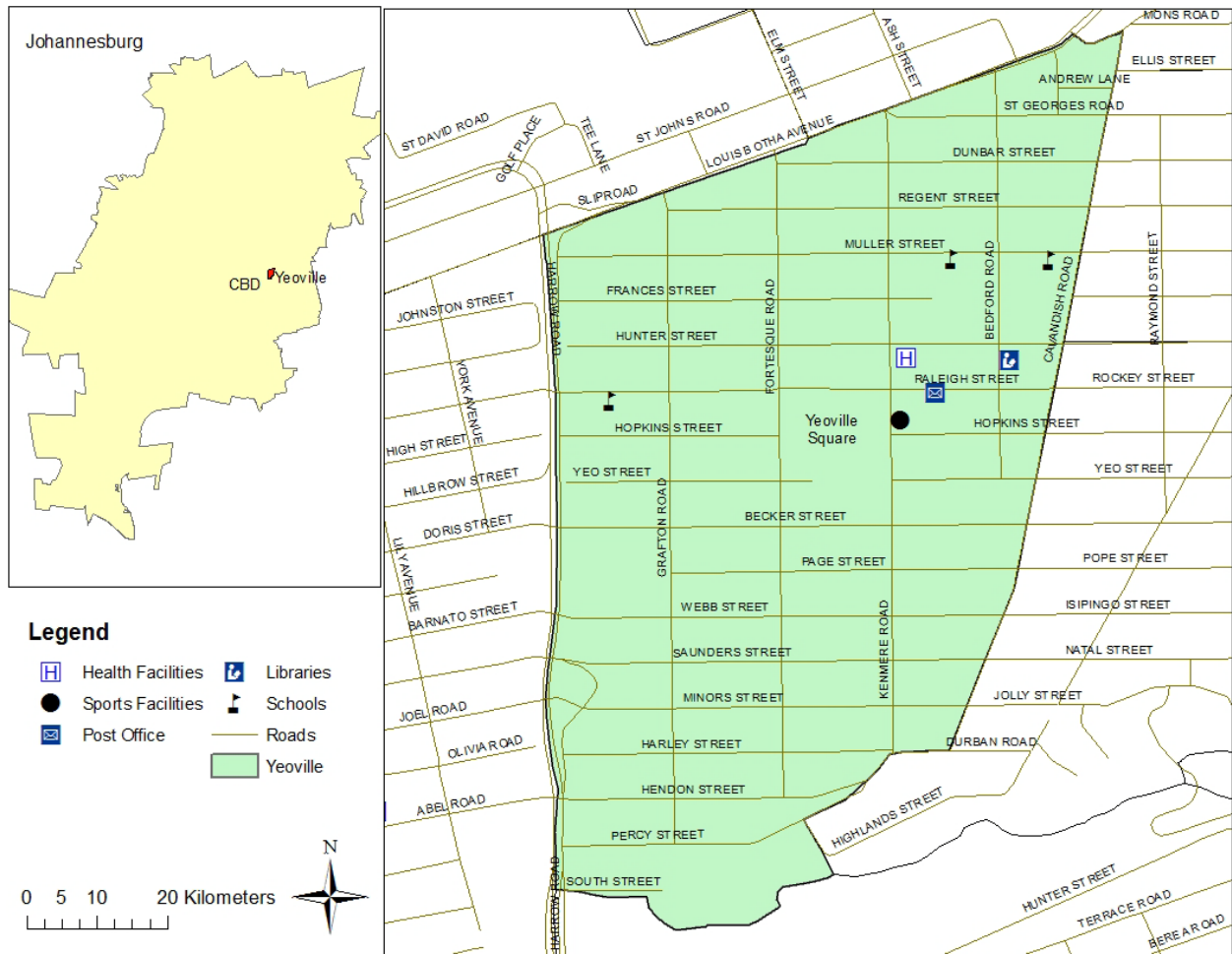


OVERVIEW OF YEOVILLE



HISTORY

As the 19th century came to a close, the mining industry of Johannesburg was rapidly expanding. This economic boom was accompanied by rapid population growth as people from across the country and around the world moved to the Witwatersrand both to work in the mines and to provide the services necessary to support the mining economy. In this context, new suburbs were built around Johannesburg, which were intended to provide the growing upper and middle classes with homes away from the noise and dust of the mines. Yeoville, located just to the northeast of downtown, was designed with the intention of attracting wealthier residents who were seeking homes in a clean and peaceful environment. However, the wealthy residents never

came to Yeoville and instead it became home to a largely lower-middle class and working class population. It also became one of the predominantly Jewish neighborhoods of Johannesburg with a large number of Eastern European Jewish immigrants settling in the community. With a predominantly white population and proximity to the resources of the city, Yeoville's racial designation became solidified as it was named a white area under the Group Areas Act. Throughout most of the 20th century, Yeoville was a relatively quiet residential neighborhood. However, with the exception of the relatively stable Jewish community, it was not necessarily a place where people settled for extended periods of time. As residents gained wealth and social mobility, many of them moved to Johannesburg's more prestigious northern suburbs. This relative lack of permanency among a large portion of the population created the opportunity for rapid residential transition in Yeoville.

Toward the end of the 1970s, the character of the community began to change as new night clubs and galleries opened up along the neighborhood's main commercial strip of Rocky-Raleigh St. Many of these businesses were new startups but a number of them were businesses that had moved into Yeoville from neighboring Hillbrow as that area began to experience decline. As a result of this growth in clubs, cafes, and galleries, Yeoville became known both locally and internationally as the premier nightspot in Johannesburg. In the 1980s, it became a haven for young writers and film makers. The growth of nightlife in Yeoville largely came at the expense of the community streets and shops that were driven out by rising rents or were bought and converted into clubs and cafes, thus altering the types of goods and services available along Yeoville's main commercial strip and changing the overall atmosphere of the community.

The new progressive, avant-garde character of Yeoville also led to a number of changes in the racial and political dynamics of the neighborhood. In the cafes and clubs of Yeoville, the

strict racial separation instituted under apartheid began to crumble as members of various racial groups socialized together. Additionally, the racial composition of Yeoville's residents began to change. While apartheid laws strictly forbade blacks from renting or owning homes in white areas, white nominees would frequently sign leases for flats and sublet the properties to black residents, all while the apartheid state turned a blind eye. These dynamics established Yeoville as one of the first grey areas in South Africa. Racial mixing in Yeoville was due in large part to the progressive atmosphere of the community but also resulted from pressure from neighboring areas such as Hillbrow and Berea which experienced some racial mixing that then extended beyond their borders into Yeoville.

The political scene in Yeoville in the 1980s was among the most vibrant in South Africa. In general, members of the community were strong supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and mobilized around the organization while it was officially banned, with a number of residents engaged in underground activity on its behalf. Many important political figures both during the struggle and today, such as Joe Slovo have their political roots in Yeoville. While Yeoville was highly mobilized against apartheid, its residents did not necessarily come together as a single community to address political issues. Instead, the large number of activists in the community tended to participate in a variety of organizations that each had political agendas. For example, activity-based groups such as the local photographers and filmmakers organizations, to which a number of residents belonged, had strong anti-apartheid political agendas. The membership of these groups was largely constituted of people who lived in Yeoville because they were attracted to its character, however, these groups did not necessarily represent Yeoville as a community. Following the end of apartheid, a number of ANC activists who had been in

exile moved into Yeoville upon their return to South Africa because of the political and cultural reputation of the community.

As a result of various social and economic factors, Yeoville began to experience a dramatic shift in its racial composition following the transition and went from having a primarily white to a primarily black population. Because Yeoville had been a white area under apartheid law, it provided a higher level of services than had previously been available in the townships or the bantustans, thus attracting many new residents from these areas. In the 1990s, Yeoville also provided a relatively inexpensive housing stock for those looking to move from rural areas into Johannesburg or out of the townships and closer to sources of employment in the central business district (CBD). Because housing in Yeoville consisted of a mix of affordable single family homes and flats, blacks who now had access to neighborhoods near the city, found it to be a relatively inexpensive and convenient place to live. Much of the area's housing stock became available due to the fact that Yeoville had always been a transitional space in terms of residential tenure and housing turnover was relatively rapid. However, the number of houses that went onto the market around the time of the transition was higher than the normal turnover rate and the movement of the white population out of Yeoville in the post-apartheid era was likely accelerated in some cases by a fear among white residents of the increasing numbers of blacks that were moving into the neighborhood. The movement of the white middle and working classes out of Yeoville and the subsequent in-migration of Africans were also driven in large part by the economic changes experienced in the community in the years around the transition.

As Johannesburg began to expand out from the CBD in the 1970s, new economic and commercial nodes such as Sandton began to attract residents away from areas closer to the city such as Yeoville. In addition to residential relocation, these alternate nodes also began to attract

shoppers and businesses away from the CBD and Yeoville, leading to a further decline in retail activity along Rocky-Raleigh St, where businesses had already been struggling to pay the increased rents resulting from the new cosmopolitan nature of the community. In the 1990s, in addition to the expansion of alternate economic nodes, Johannesburg saw new nodes of nightlife emerge in places like Melville, which attracted clientele away from Yeoville's clubs and cafes. The bars that remained began to draw a much rougher crowd and became associated with heavy drinking and crime. Additionally, for reasons associated with changes in the housing market described below, an increasing number of impoverished residents began to move into Yeoville and many of the businesses that had previously flourished were no longer economically viable because of the changing patronage in the area. Therefore, shops began to deteriorate and the products they sold became directed towards a lower income clientele. The economic decline of the community was accompanied by an increase in crime which drove many homeowners to disinvest and leave Yeoville. National chains such as FNB, CNA, and KFC also decided to abandon the area, although some chains such as Nando's and KFC have recently returned.

The most significant source of disinvestment in the 1990s was a move by banks to redline the area, refusing to give 100% loans for properties in Yeoville. This severely limited opportunities for people to purchase businesses and homes in the area and led to a dramatic decline in property values. With an exodus of home and business owners and fewer potential buyers, many owners were unable to sell their properties and simply abandoned them. The presence of vacant buildings in Yeoville resulted in a large number of invasions in which squatters would move into abandoned properties. Often, the squatters would pose as the owner of the home and charge rent to additional tenants. The ward councilor recently attempted to put an end to this practice by telling potential renters that before entering into an agreement, they should

have the “property owner” bring documents proving ownership to the ward councilor to inspect. However, this does not appear to have had much of an effect.

The prevalence of building invasions in Yeoville has had a substantial effect on housing conditions in the community. The rooms that are rented out in invaded buildings are often overcrowded, with multiple families sharing a small house or apartment. Often individual bedrooms, living rooms, and even hallways within a building are rented out to families or multiple individuals, causing severe overcrowding and hazardous living conditions. Although these rental arrangements are often crowded and unsanitary, rents tend to be just as expensive as more formal arrangements. Landlords are able to charge exorbitant rents because the tenants are often in circumstances that would preclude them access to more formal arrangements. For example, someone who is unemployed or an illegal immigrant is likely to have a difficult time finding a legitimate rental. Landlords posing as owners of buildings and sometimes those that own the property legitimately would take advantage of these people by offering overcrowded living spaces at high rents.

These informal rental agreements and building invasions also played an important role in further changing the racial composition of Yeoville. As white property owners abandoned buildings en masse when they were unable to sell them, it was largely Africans that moved in. The legacy of apartheid meant that a large portion of Johannesburg’s unemployed population was African. Additionally, the promise of economic growth post-transition, particularly in Johannesburg, attracted a number of immigrants from other parts of Africa hoping to find work. Many lacked proper documentation and many had difficulty finding jobs once they arrived. Because it was difficult for the unemployed and illegal immigrants to enter into legitimate leases, they were attracted to areas such as Yeoville where they could find housing, albeit in

overcrowded conditions, through these building invasions and informal rental agreements. These conditions in the housing market are one of the primary reasons for the fact that within the span of a decade, Yeoville went from being about 85% white to about 95% black.

While informal housing arrangements occur in Yeoville in the form of building invasions, there have been very few informal shacks established in the community. One reason for this is that the area is relatively densely developed and there are not many open spaces that would provide room for shacks to be built. Also, the local government has been very active in ensuring that any informal shacks that are established in the community are promptly removed. When shacks were set up at the Yeoville Community School playground, they were immediately removed by the police.

Recently, the housing market in Yeoville has begun to recover. A few years after redlining was instituted by the banks, it was declared a form of economic apartheid and made illegal. In conjunction with a booming housing market in Johannesburg in general, this has caused property values to begin to increase. Under these circumstances, as of recently there is a growing black middle class emerging in Yeoville.

While the housing market has started on a path to recovery, the local economy in Yeoville remains relatively depressed. Unemployment has increased dramatically since the 1990s. This is due in large part to the changes described in the housing sector, which have resulted in an increase in the number of unemployed who are moving into the community. In order to eek out a living, many of these people have turned to the informal economy which has boomed in Yeoville since the mid 90s. There has been tremendous growth in the number of street vendors, people braiding hair on the street, spaza shops, vendors who braai traditional foods on the pavement, and shebeens. As the informal economy grew, contention between

informal vendors and formal shop owners mounted as there was often overlap in the goods traded. Additionally, the informal traders would often set up their stalls in areas that obstructed formal businesses and deterred customers, leading the owners to press the government for the removal of these informal traders. Eventually, the vendors organized themselves into a local traders association to represent their interests. Relations between the government and the informal traders have been particularly contentious. In an attempt to remove traders from the streets, in 1999 the government built a market for them to sell their goods. This effort was largely unsuccessful because prior to building the market, the government failed to consult with the traders about how to best accommodate them in an off-street location. The market was too small to accommodate all of the traders. Additionally, traders within the market realized that there was now a gap on the street so they maintained their market stalls while supplying stalls on the street with goods to sell. Some of the profit from the street vendors would then be returned to the patron in the market. When officials would attack stalls on the street, the street vendors would simply take their goods to the patron's stall in the market under the unspoken agreement that the patrons would protect the street vendors so long as the street vendors did not alert the police to their arrangement. Eventually, the whole market proved ineffective in removing street vendors and remains largely unused. However, as vendors moved back to the street they agreed not to trade in the same goods as formal shop owners and they agreed not to obstruct entrances to their stores, creating a less contentious relationship between them.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

As a historically white area, Yeoville has not had major issues with the lack of services that have been experienced in other parts of Johannesburg. Infrastructure issues that do exist are primarily the result of pressures on the system resulting from population increases associated

with overcrowding in the community. Population growth has placed a strain on the sewer system in particular, resulting in sewer pipe bursts and water spillages. Additionally, there have been a number of blackouts related to pressures on the electric infrastructure. In terms of infrastructure maintenance, until recently, the roads in Yeoville had been subject to years of neglect. However, a recent intervention by the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) has provided funds and resources for repairing them. As part of this project, the JDA has also been installing street lights throughout the community. While infrastructure is present in Yeoville, many residents do not have access to it because of service cutoffs. Due to economic circumstances, many residents have been unable to pay their bills and have had their water and electric services cutoff by the city. This has led to a dramatic increase in the number of illegal connections. It is rumored that when city officials go to a house to cut off the power, they often return later to install an illegal hook up. However, cutoffs are not only the result of non-payment on the part of residents. Often, building owners will cutoff services as a means of evicting tenants.

While much of Yeoville's infrastructure is at least partially able to meet the needs of the community, the government provided services such as schools, clinics, libraries, police stations, and community centers have been far less effective. School quality has experienced a significant decline over the past decade. The increasing population of Yeoville has led to significant increases in class sizes and schools are becoming overcrowded. Enrollment at the Yeoville Community School increased from about 580 students in the late 1990s to about 940 currently. The facilities are unable to absorb this rapid increase; however, unlike other schools in the area, the Yeoville Community School has continued to accept students, which has led to a dramatic decline in educational quality for students as a result of larger class sizes. Additionally, many teachers in the schools are non-native English speakers whose ability to communicate material to

their students is limited by their knowledge of English. Most of the children of the few middle-class residents of Yeoville attend private schools outside of the community, thus providing limited opportunity for inter-class interaction among children. Additionally, due to the changing demographic composition of the community, schools no longer provide a forum for inter-racial interaction among children since there is no longer a substantial white population. In a country attempting to foster a non-racial society, residents argue that this lack of interaction will negatively impact prospects for integration in the long-run by hampering children's ability to look beyond their own racial boundaries, which will lead to racial bias. Additionally, the awareness of the dramatic differences in the quality of predominantly white and predominantly black schools has contributed to resentment among students, parents, and community members in Yeoville whose schools are poorly maintained relative to schools in white areas.

Community recreational facilities have also shown a dramatic decline in quality over the last decade. The community pool has fallen into disrepair and was recently closed by the city. The community park has become a hang out for drug dealers and drunks and is not a friendly environment for kids to play in. In spite of this fact, many children still utilize the playground, which is largely unsupervised. The community recreation center is often unavailable for public use because it is frequently rented out to church groups for their meetings. When the recreation center is available to children in the community, there is a fee for participation in recreational activities, which many are unable to afford. The sense of deterioration and a lack of safety in the public environments severely hinders opportunities for inter-racial interaction.

Around 1999, the government built a new clinic in Yeoville but like other services in the community, service has been sub-par. There has not been enough staff or resources to meet community demands. Patients would line up in front of the clinic at 5am, hours before it opened

everyday hoping they would be seen by a doctor. Once the cap of patients for the day was reached, those who had waited for hours would be turned away only to line up again the next morning. Additionally, the clinic closes everyday at 3pm when many residents are still at work.

While the majority of services in Yeoville are insufficient, many residents praised the public transportation system as being particularly effective. Yeoville is served by mini-bus taxis as well as the metro bus service. Public transportation is the most common method of getting to work for most of Yeoville's residents who work all across Johannesburg. Because of the community's proximity to the transport network hub in the CBD, the public transportation routes are relatively efficient in getting people to jobs across the city. Also, while the library has historically been inefficient and poorly serviced, a recent project led by the JDA is building a new facility in Yeoville that will be much larger and better able to serve the community.

Among residents, the deterioration of services in Yeoville was attributed to two primary factors. First, the growing population of the community means that the demands on services and infrastructure are exceeding their capacity, leading to rapid deterioration, which pre-existing maintenance plans have been unable to keep on top of. Additionally, the changing class character of the community is often cited as contributing to deterioration. Until the late 1990s, when Yeoville was a more middle-class community, there were a larger number of homeowners who had a vested interest in maintaining community life and resources. However, as Yeoville has become a more transitional space in which residential tenure is often no more than a few years and homeownership levels are minimal, residents no longer feel a connection to community life and upkeep. Also, as the community has become more impoverished, residents are often more concerned with meeting basic survival needs and lack the time and energy to focus on ensuring proper service delivery.

POLITICS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

There are four key civic arenas in Yeoville; the Community Policing Forum (CPF), the ward council, the Yeoville ANC branch, and the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF). The CPF holds regular meetings open to the public and attempts to solicit public support for crime fighting activities in the community. The ward council and the Yeoville ANC branch also hold regular meetings which are open to members of the public. In addition to these organizations, the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum is an aggregation of representatives from various organizations in the community including NGOs, religious, ethnic, and political groups. YSF meetings are not open to the public but are attended by leaders of the member organizations. Leaders of the YSF also sit on the ward committee and serve to pass on community demands to the ward councilor.

While Yeoville was once a hotbed of ANC activity and political opposition to the apartheid government, the years following the transition saw a dramatic decline in political activity and community participation. While there are a few very active community members today, community participation in political processes has virtually disappeared. Meetings of the ANC and the ward council struggle to get the 50 attendees to a meeting required for a quorum. The primary reason cited for this decline in participation was a general frustration with the ability of the local government to meet any of the community's demands, resulting in disillusionment among community members and an eventual withdrawal of the public from politics. The ward councilor was described as doing the bare minimum for Yeoville. Community frustration was also expressed in relation to municipal government as a whole. Lifelong community leaders with connections to the upper echelons of municipal government voiced frustration with their inability to get government officials to respond to problems in Yeoville. A

frequently cited example was the fact that it took a multi-year battle with Pikitup to get them to respond to trash collection needs in the area.

The local ANC branch was also seen as becoming less effective in terms of community development. Because Yeoville has always been dominated by ANC voters and lacks competition from other parties, there is little incentive for the party to invest in community development. Around election time the branch plays an active role in mobilizing voters but has only limited visibility in the community otherwise. Attendees at ANC meetings tend to only be die-hard ANC supporters.

In addition to the frustration with government effectiveness, the socioeconomic status of Yeoville residents was also cited as a primary reason for a lack of participation in the community. Confronted with more immediate survival needs, civic activism was not a priority for many poor residents. Because there is such a large poor immigrant community in Yeoville, this focus on basic needs is compounded by the fact that many illegal immigrants worry that interaction with the government will result in deportation. Additionally, notifications about community meetings are posted in English, limiting involvement by non-English speaking foreign residents.

While community participation in political structures has declined over the last decade, participation in religious organizations has increased dramatically. Because many of Yeoville's residents are foreign nationals and have only limited connections in Johannesburg, the growth of church participation was often described as an attempt by immigrants and newcomers to Yeoville to integrate into a local community. There was frustration among community activists that while local churches have the potential to be positive influences on community

development, they tend to be more inwardly focused and with the exception of one church in Yeoville, they don't play a significant role in mobilizing the larger community for development goals. There were however some examples of churches that while not reaching out to the community as a whole, did provide services to their members such as free legal counsel and food.