

An overview of Montclair

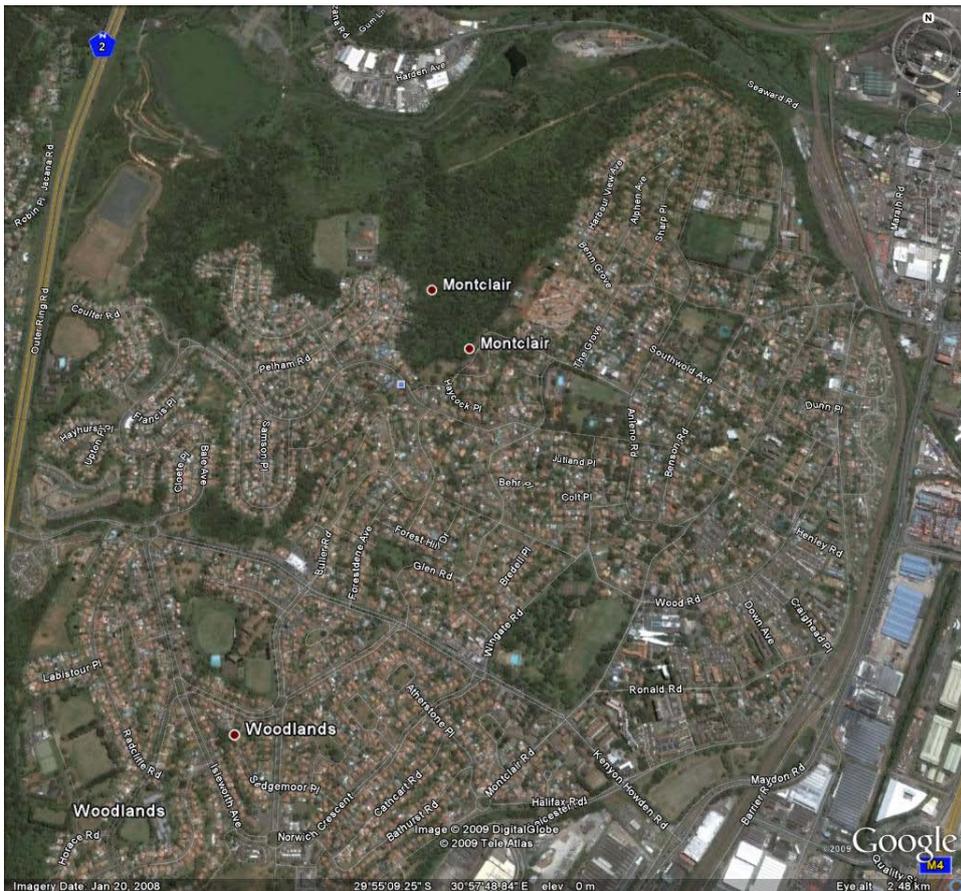
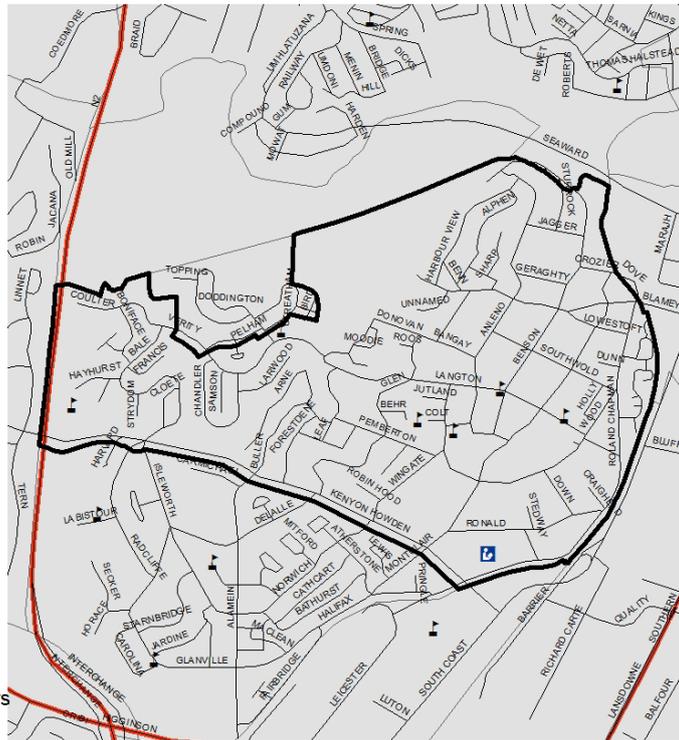
Montclair

Legend

-  Hospital
-  School
-  Library
-  Road
-  Highway



0 0.2 0.4 0.8 Kilometers



History

Montclair is a suburb located in the southern part of Durban, the second largest city of South Africa. The locality is located near the biggest port in Africa to its eastern direction and the national airport to the south of the city. It is adjacent to industrial areas such as Jacobs and Prospecton. Under the Group Areas Act, Montclair was characterised as a white only middle and working class suburb.

Montclair was made up of farms before it became the present day suburb. The farm owner with the largest tract of land arranged for a race course to be established in his farm. White people came all over Durban and surrounding towns to participate in racing tournaments. The owner sold some land to the government and also donated some land to the people who lived there at the time. The railways bought some land from the farms and built houses for its employees.

In 1958, 1600 Africans and 175 Indians were driven away from Woodlands and Montclair. Organisations such as Natal Indian Congress (NIC), South African Indian Congress (SAIC) and the African National Congress (ANC) opposed the evictions and passed resolutions resisting the practise. These organisations went to the extent of staging demonstrations, protests and submitting petitions voicing out their strongest condemnation of the law. The residents of Montclair generally supported the National Party, the party that had initiated and led apartheid for four decades.

In the submission to the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), the ANC disclosed that it was responsible for the bomb blast which occurred in the Montclair Pick and Pay shopping complex that injured one person in 1986. Prior to that incident, two bomb blasts rocked Montclair. One bomb exploded in the police station and the other took place in the electrical power station.

In the post-apartheid era, the domestic workers of Montclair invited and arranged for the former President of the ANC, Thabo Mbeki, to come and address them at Montclair hall when he was mandated by the ANC to embark on a listening campaign in KwaZulu-Natal in 1998.

Another historical event that caught media attention concerned the proposed removal of a homeless shelter called the Ark from the Point waterfront area to the southern part of Montclair. Many residents vehemently opposed those plans and it was even suggested that this was a point of unity between residents. In the end, the plan to move the Ark there was scrapped. An agreement was also concluded which led to mosque to be relocated to Springfields.

Changes

The advent of democracy and, prior to that, the abolition of the Group Areas Act, provided a new complexion for Montclair.

Black South Africans, who are comprised of the Africans, Indians and coloureds, were allowed to purchase houses and to stay in formerly conservative white areas. The prices were affordable for the government employees such as teachers, nurses, clerks and other employees of the private sector who could secure enough money to purchase houses at Montclair. White people who were averse to these changes left Montclair for other places. Most of those who left were old people and those who are in their middle ages. Many of them, according to one informant, went to live in gated communities.

Changes in attitude with regard to other races became visible in institutions where people usually meet. English and Afrikaans services are no longer the sole languages in which sermons are administered, as it was the case during the apartheid era. Most of the 28 churches in the area introduced Zulu sermons that alternated with English sermons on Sundays and Saturdays. People of different races began to mix and interact together before and after the church services. They began to invite each other to their homes and socialised with each other. This socialization process could be seen in banks, shopping malls as people of different races held friendly chats with each other.

Learners were integrated in many schools. According to the reports from their parents, they ate lunch together, enjoyed games and went to social gatherings jointly. However, some white parents preferred to send their children to expensive schools in Durban. These are schools that have enrolment that is dominated by the white pupils and white teachers. The parents justify their reasons from removing their children from Montclair schools to be based on lowered standards of education in Montclair. This took place after the intake of pupils in Montclair had increased subsequent to the arrival of learners from neighbouring townships of Chatsworth, Umlazi and other places. These parents defend their position by stating that racism is definitely not the motive for preferring Durban schools over those of their community.

Expensive houses are mostly found above the hill from this specific study site in Yellowwood Park. The type of living units that exist in Montclair are duplexes, complexes, flats and double-storied and three hostels. As a result of Montclair's planning history there were different town planning zones, with streets closer to the railway lines having smaller plots. In the area there are a number of houses that were built for the railway employees by South African Railways. They are primarily rented by young black people. Many home owners have converted their garages into rental rooms. Backyard rooms that used to be places of accommodation for the domestic workers are also used as rooms for rental. Some of these rooms are overcrowded by people who are looking for places to live in Montclair. Many

people are not happy with the presence of backyard shacks in Montclair because they lower the value of the houses in the neighbourhood.

There are few shacks that are monitored by the police so that their numbers cannot increase and are monitored for crime. The shack dwellers are being kept there until a suitable place can be found for them. About seven years ago there was an informal settlement that was located near the Umhlatuzana river. A fire engulfed the settlement in 2003. The ANC leaders stated that they arranged halls and churches as a temporary sanctuary for the shack dwellers. Many other residents of the area disliked this and feared disease as it was the rainy season. The municipality eventually removed the people and closed down the squatter camp.

Although there is a need for low-cost houses, none have been built in the area by the government for the unemployed and those who earn low income. Since much of the area is built up there is little land available. Attempts to get vacant land released have been met with much opposition. An ANC representative says that whites say: *'you can't build houses or schools here'* and *'they prefer cemeteries than houses for blacks'*.

There is a presence of foreign migrants who rent back yard rooms and flats. Most of them are involved in informal businesses. Most of them come from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. According to several people who were interviewed, most of the foreigners get along well with the people of Montclair.

Infrastructure and services

The modes of transport that the people regularly use are private cars, mini-bus taxis, and trains. There are no buses for the people of Montclair to ferry them to and from work, schools and other places. This results in difficulties for the unemployed people and those who earn low income because buses are cheaper than mini-bus taxis.

The standard of roads has deteriorated in the past five years according to some informants. The municipality has taken some measures to repair the tar roads in Montclair. This has created opportunities for short-term jobs for the members of the community. They are selected to work for the contractors on a temporary basis. Traffic congestion at certain hours has been a problem because there is one main entrance to the suburb across the railway. There is a problem of a parking area in some shopping malls. Montclair does not have a taxi rank where mini-bus taxis assemble and plan their routes.

The community can obtain water, sewerage and electricity. It has been detected that there are some people who make illegal connections of electricity to their backyard shacks. Some actions may take place to thwart these criminal activities.

The upgrading of the recreational facilities such as swimming pools and the sports parks by the municipality has taken place. Some sports clubs which had leased land from the

municipality have fallen into disuse. Others were considered to be exclusive and unavailable to black residents.

It is clear from the leaders of the community that the current police station is unable to adequately service the Montclair and Clairwood areas. The police station is small with few personnel in comparison to the area that is under its jurisdiction. There is an application for another police station that has been forwarded to the authorities. The police station had, in the past ten years, attracted media attention. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Montclair was rated as the number 2 capital of murders that are committed in South Africa (Mail and Guardian 3 September 2008). Almost all the murders occur in 3 hostels accommodating 30 000 people that are bordering Montclair. The hostels fall directly under the jurisdiction of Montclair police station and have been incorporated into the ward of Montclair.

Other violent police related incidents emerged. One policeman shot himself with a shot gun. It was believed that the man had accidentally shot himself. Another policeman shot his wife dead and committed suicide thereafter. On the 16 April 2009 a police shot dead three of the five robbers who held up Shoprite supermarket and killed the manager, Mr Krish Pillay. The criminals had thereafter started to shoot at the police when they arrived to protect the lives of the customers.

The issue of race has also emerged in relation to the police. Newspapers reported that an Indian police man, accused three white colleagues of racism for calling him a 'coolie'.

The Community Policing Forum (CPF) is functioning well and the community appreciates its work, despite some differences that sometimes crop up among the political parties. Sector policing, which directly involves members of the community, has been launched in three areas of Montclair. There are neighbourhood watches, with crime fighting men conducting patrols day and night in the community. Leaders in the community are positive that these efforts will decrease the level of crime in the community. However the CPF has at times been politicised between the local ANC and DA interests.

Most people who live in Montclair work for the government as clerks, teachers and nurses. There are also those who work for the private sector in Durban and others who work for industries in Prospecion and Jacobs. There is a growing level of unemployment especially among the youth. The reports of drug sale and abuse are a source of concern among the members of the community. Informal businesses such as spaza shops, hair salons, shoe repairs, dress makers, call centres and computer services are operated by people from their homes. Street trading is not allowed in Montclair, according to the metro municipality by-laws.

High rentals in the shopping retail sector have discouraged several shop keepers from continuing with the businesses. Many retail shops have closed down. There are shopping

malls that accommodate several types of businesses such as supermarkets, pharmacies, banks and clothing shops in Yellowwood Park and Montclair. Despite the presence of several facilities, there is the problem of the absence of a clinic. The mobile clinic that operated in the community arrived on certain days. Two nurses had to attend to eighty patients and this was considered to be too much work. The clinic was stopped from operating because of the shortage of staff. Patients have to be transported to Clairwood hospital or Wentworth hospital and clinic when they are ill or injured. However there are no direct taxis there and patients generally have to go into town and then travel back out to Wentworth to be treated.

Politics and relations with government

They supported the more liberal Democratic Alliance (DA) gained much support among whites and some Indians in the mid-1990s. The majority of African people supported the African National Congress. DA supporters feel threatened by ANC branch leaders at Montclair who they described as disruptive.

There are active Ratepayers Associations in the area. The Montwood Rate Payers Association (MWRPA) is an amalgamation of Montclair Rate Payers Association and Yellowwood Park Rate Payers Association. It is involved in civic matters. Some of those involved with the MWRPA, who are also associated with the DA, suggest that ANC leaders prevent black people from attending MWRPA meetings and to partake in its activities. The MWRPA executive runs one of the halls and they refuse the ANC activities to be held there.

Similar disputes emerge in relation to the ward committee. According to ANC representatives, the ward committee of Montclair was constitutionally elected, and all the guidelines of the metro municipality were followed down to letter. However DA supporters argue that the election meeting was stacked with ANC supporters in a way that loaded the outcome and therefore refuse to recognise it. The DA councillor is attempting to secure a re-election.

Broadly, ANC leaders in the area suggest that the DA refuses to include them in key local matters while DA leaders consider the ANC disruptive. However the DA insist they are willing to work with the ANC; the problem is that ANC members are not always available to be consulted.

Another source of tension at Montclair involves slaughtering of beasts. Zulus conduct traditional ceremonies that necessitate the slaughtering of goats or bulls. The sound of the roaring bulls and the blurring sound of the goats have prompted some whites to invite the SPCA which is the organisation responsible for the protection of animals. In many cases policemen are called to take action against the African people who are perceived to practise cruelty to animals. This situation has, at times, caused racial conflicts to flare up although one informant suggested it was now less common.