

OVERVIEW OF PIMVILLE ZONE 4

History of Pimville zone 4.

The area known as Pimville was first settled over 100 years ago, and is part of the part of the wider Soweto Township. It is named after James Howard Pim, a Johannesburg city councilor (1903 – 07). Generally, the history of Pimville zone 4 is inextricably linked with that of the larger Pimville (comprising of 9 zones and two separate wards) and Soweto by extension and it is difficult to talk of Pimville zone 4 or even just Pimville as a separate location away from Soweto. Zone 4 shares borders with Pimville zones 5, 7, 9, Kliptown zones 2 and 3.

Physical attributes:

The area (zone 4) is made up of mainly old council single-family, four roomed houses in a small compound. When originally built, there were neither toilets nor running water in the houses. This has since changed as many of the houses have been reconfigured and have a toilet, a kitchen and piped water inside. Many backyard shacks dot the entire zone. Some areas, especially towards its Kliptown boundary, seem to have a greater concentration of backyard shacks. According to residents, the number of backyard shacks has been increasing, especially since 1994. These shacks are mainly built of corrugated iron sheets. On average, every second compound seems to have a backyard shack.

The area is generally overcrowded with many informal housing structures. Overcrowding in Pimville began prior to the introduction of formal apartheid. By 1948, the situation had gotten out of hand and the government intervened and built

the first council houses. The area is mainly occupied by working class families living in the old 4 roomed council houses with garages. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the socioeconomic demography has somewhat changed as there is a middle class living in better spaced modern houses with slightly larger compounds than in the working class areas. There are distinct divisions between the areas where the working class and the middle class live. The working class lives primarily in what they call old council houses with few renovations and modifications to the houses, as evidenced by the fact that many of these old houses are not plastered nor painted or tiled. They are like 'transit houses' and sometimes have as many as five families living in a house meant for one family. Many of these homes have backyard shacks where relatives live. In contrast, the middle class sections have more spacious houses.

Some of the houses in zone 4 do not have perimeter fences. A majority of the houses in zone 4 are single family houses made of brick walls and iron roofing. However, some houses have tile roofing (the middle class areas) or asbestos (the old town houses that have not been changed).

The area appears to be generally well serviced in terms of litter collection, water and electricity supply. However, during summer (in February 2009), some areas (next to Paul Mosaka Primary school) had overgrown bushes. Burst sewers were also evident in some parts of the community. The roads are named and are paved but some areas have many pot holes (e.g. next to Paul Mosaka primary

school). The school buildings are old and made of wooden/timber walls. There are many outdoor/informal businesses such as vehicle panel beaters, open air vehicle garages, hair salons, hawking, and car washing. Besides these, there are also shebeens, spaza shops and taverns on literally all the streets. These are usually run from containers or in extensions of the main houses that have been reconfigured to serve as shops. The area is well served with taxis and they seem to run the entire day. There were many idle people (mainly youth) in the area, likely an indication of high unemployment in the area.

Ethnic Composition: Zoned as an African area under apartheid, residents of Pimville Zone 4 are to this day almost exclusively black African. However, since the beginning of the community, residents have come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. During apartheid, when people of different ethnic groups were separated, the area became the abode for people mainly from Limpopo (Shangaans, Veda, Tshonga, Phedi) as well as from across borders (especially Mozambique, and Basotho, Zimbabwe and Malawi).

Anti-apartheid history: Pimville zone 4, like Soweto in general, has a rich history of anti-apartheid struggle. Several important figures in the current and previous post-apartheid governments were mentioned as having been born and received their struggle credentials in Pimville. They include Jabu Moleketi (former finance deputy minister who together with his wife, Geraldine Fraser Moleketi, started the first South African Communist Party (SACP) branch in Pimville after they came

from exile in the early 1990s), Mzwake Mbuli (the people's poet), Mbuli Khauli (musician), Don Luck (a leading South African pianist), Sticks Murewa (former SAFA president), the current housing MEC, and the late MEC for transport Joyce Khwandi.

Economic Changes: Economic change has been slow and limited in zone 4 and it is still a relatively poor area. Moreover, as zone 4 lacks any public open spaces, all new development has in reality been taking place outside of zone 4. Residents argued that while there have been infrastructural developments at the Pimville Square since 1994 as well as building of storm water drains, paving of side walks along houses, and putting up of street lights that have had a positive spin on economic developments, these improvements have been outpaced by further degradation. Many residents attributed this degeneration to the mushrooming of spaza shops that are open until around 11 o'clock at night while main shops at the square close by 6 o'clock. This proliferation of spaza shops can be seen as a testimony to entrepreneurial spirit but also denotes a survivalist culture for the unemployed. Unemployment is very high and has been getting worse every year. Some respondents argued that it is worse than during apartheid.

Home Ownership: The majority of the main house occupants own the houses that they live in and they construct shacks in the backyard to let out. This ownership came after the fall of apartheid, when the ANC government decided to grant housing deeds to the people who lived in them. There is natural succession of

ownership in the family. The prices of houses have gone up almost tenfold. Before the government gave titles the houses cost about R30,000 but today they average R250,000 in old Pimville zone 4. After the Maponya Mall was built, prices have gone up further and now cost up to R500,000. There are no RDP houses in zone 4 but rather in the neighbouring zone 9.

Services and infrastructure: Pimville Zone 4 has lit, paved roads, although potholes are a problem. Space is a big problem in zone 4. Therefore, many of the post 1994 developments are strictly speaking outside of the physical borders of zone 4 except for the Community Centre. As such, all the schools in zone 4 are from the apartheid-era. The area does not have a church within its borders, however there are churches in neighbouring zones with the Catholic Church being the closest (in zone 5 and separated from the community centre by a road).

The main infrastructural problems relate to sewer blockages in the area. This is largely a case of population pressure resulting from the many backyard shacks which have put a strain on the sewer system. The same applies to electricity supply, especially during winter when there are massive blackouts as the system is strained and collapses because of the many backyard shacks in the area that have been added to a system meant to serve only the main houses. Lack of access to electricity is frequently dealt with through illegal connections by residents as well as through a protest movement known as Operation Khanyisa and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee.

Crime: Crime is a serious issue in this community. There is not a single police station in the entirety of Pimville. The area is instead served by the Kliptown police station whose resources were said to be strained and insufficient.

Clinics: There is only one clinic (expanded 6 years ago) for all of the Pimville zones and Klipspruit in zone 1. Staffing and medicine are major concerns and the clinic lacks the capacity to cope with the high volume of patients in the area. There are many doctors in private practice in the area but none with the public clinic. To get attention at the clinic, patients need to arrive by 6 o'clock in the morning.

Schools: There is one high school (Progress High) in zone 4. There are three primary schools as well: Paul Mosaka – which under apartheid taught Zulus and Sothos, Fresaan for Shaagan and Veda, and Progress. Given the apartheid legacy, a majority of the pupils in these respective schools, are still from these ethnic groups.

Recreational facilities: There are no sufficient spaces in zone 4 for recreational facilities. Residents of zone 4 have to go to soccer fields in zone 3 and zone 8, and a park in zone 3. These are all new developments since 1994.

Public transport: Pimville residents have many choices in relation to means of transport. There is a train station in Kliptown as well as buses and taxis serving the area.

Retail Facilities: Apart from the spazas and taverns, there are no other retail facilities in zone 4. Residents of zone 4 can however access more retail facilities from Kliptown at the taxi rank (1.5 kilometers away), the Pimville square (0.5kms away) or the Maponya Mall (0.5 kms away).

Interactions with the Government: Counter to Pimville's reputation as a site of mobilization against the apartheid regime, more recent levels of public participation among residents in Pimville Zone 4 are reported to be relatively low. Many people do not attend public meetings. This has an impact on the quality and comprehensiveness of feedback the community leadership is getting from the residents as it is relatively limited and may not represent the interests of the broader community. The councilor is the first contact point with the government and works closely with the ward committee which has representatives serving ten different sectors such as housing, environment, transport, infrastructure development, community development, education, finance, empowerment etc. Selection to the ward committee is open and is a political process where different sectors forward names of nominees who are then voted onto the committee in a democratic way. However, some residents reported that there are irregularities in the way ward committee members are selected. Doubts were also raised over the efficacy of the ward committee despite the fact that they meet once every month. There is also a decline in community participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process and as such, the community has not been very effective in having its demands met through this process. Some residents described the entire IDP process

as a stage show where genuine consultation in the planning process does not occur. This is a reason for the disillusionment of the population and dissatisfaction with the councilor and the government, leading in turn to development of protest movements. A concrete example of this is cited as the introduction of pre-paid electricity meters without any real consultation with the people.

Besides the ward committee, other government structures for community engagement include the Community Policing Forum (CPF), the youth forum, the women's forum and the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO). Participation in these forums is also low. There are also a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) engaged mainly in humanitarian assistance work such as the distribution of food parcels and clothes to poor families, or working on issues of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and distributing blankets and clothes as well as providing HIV/AIDS education. Similarly, churches are working with the community to reduce crime and drug use, especially for the youth.

Politics: It is interesting to note that while political mobilization remains high, and reaches its peak during elections, it was also expressed that there is growing resentment, despite the fact that the ANC has dominated politics in the area since 1994. This is evidenced in the fact that a by-election two years ago saw less than a quarter of registered voters participating. This resentment is being channeled through local protests and social movements like Operation Khanyisa, which is

actively involved in pressure politics and are advocating for access to water and electricity as rights.

Photos of Pimville Zone 4





Backyard shacks



Pimville Square Shopping Centre just outside Zone 4





