

'Bumbling' over empty school

Staff Reporter

CAPE TOWN City Council officials were yesterday accused by a councillor, Mr Frank van der Velde, of dealing with the future of the empty Observatory Junior School buildings in a "bumbling bureaucratic" manner.

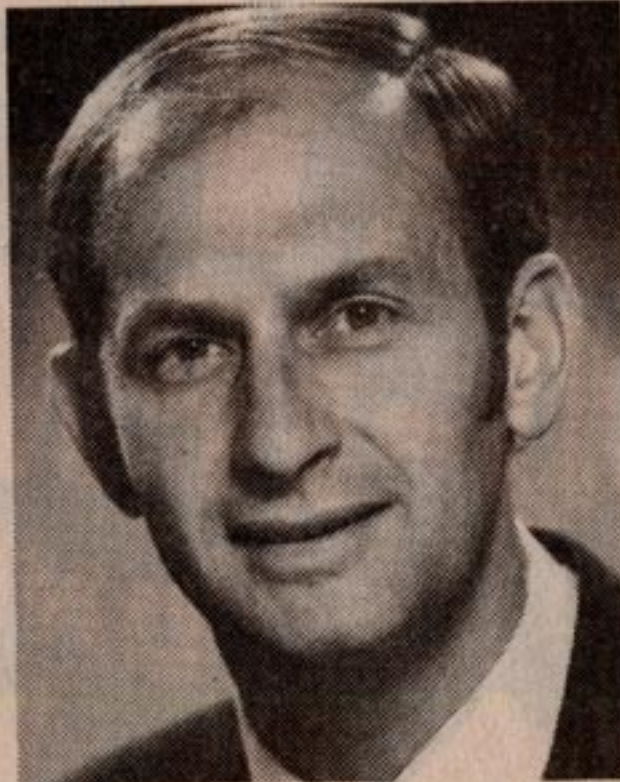
After two years of negotiations for the use of part of the empty school, the all-race Community Arts Project has been told by council officials that the building has now been allocated "for another purpose".

The "flat no" to the organization goes against a decision taken at a meeting of the full council that the school should be leased to community organizations.

An angry and "embarrassed" Mr Van der Velde, who has asked for an interview with the Executive Committee next week, told the Cape Times: "The school was handed over to the City Council some years ago by the Provincial Administration in exchange for land.

"For the past two years, the Community Arts Project people and other organizations have been strung along." (More than R96 000 had already been raised to finance the move to the school.)

After the council decided that the school should be used as a community centre, a committee was established to investigate and recommend how the premises should be allocated.



Mr Frank van der Velde

Mr Van der Velde, who served on the committee, said Exco then came up with a plan calling for "astronomical rents". The plan was withdrawn after objections.

The next suggestion was to lease the building to the University of Cape Town dental school. "I blew my top and it was withdrawn.

"Now, as I was told last week, Province wants a part of the school back again. And the plan for the rest is

to house Mr David Bloomberg's municipal police force.

"The council certainly hasn't decided on that," he said.

Meanwhile, the organizer of the Community Arts Project, Mr Derek Joubert, said this week that the present premises which they rented in Mowbray had been sold.

"We had hoped to be able to move into the school. But in a meeting with the Mayor and Town Clerk last week, we were told 'No'. Now we have about three months to find a new home."

The courses ranging from drama to music at the centre have been attended by more than 2 000 people since it was founded five years ago as "a powerhouse of creativity to enrich the community life of Cape Town".

Mr Joubert said permanent premises were needed for a craft section "to generate our own income". He appealed to anyone who was willing to rent a warehouse to the centre to telephone him at 66 3815 between 10.30 am and 10.30 pm.