

CHAIRMANS REPORT 2008

Membership for 2008 ended with 257 fully paid up members who received our regular newsletters. Paid up membership for 2009 presently stands at 187 and these are the members who will have voting rights at this AGM. **The Executive Committee** met on a monthly basis throughout the year, with various officials from the City council and our local councillors attending when they could. It has been mentioned at previous AGM's that paid up members of the Association are able to attend any of these meetings as observers.

The Ward Committee meets quarterly, but has not, to my mind, achieved its aims and objectives. As the chairman of WRRRA, I am a member of the Ward Committee representing ratepayers. All too often we find that most of the Ward Committee members have their own agendas, and meetings consist of long discussions about matters that we at WRRRA are already handling. This duplication, I believe, provides the council with the opportunity to ignore us all. I also believe that we are disadvantaged, as our Ward Councillor seems to have lost a great deal of his initial enthusiasm, and the City Council have not been very sympathetic to our problems, but this is changing! **Budget, Rates and Taxes:** Subcommittee: Al Colesky, Graham Sell, Pierre Bovet, Chris Francis.

Implementation of property revaluations in accordance with the Municipal Property Rates Act of 2004 has been fraught with errors and omissions, obfuscation and intransigence by municipal officials. We proved to the Municipality that the original revaluation roll was incorrect, which resulted in them issuing the 1st Interim Roll, which we believe to be equally flawed. We have a significant number of properties that are undervalued with the result that these properties generate around R700.000 less in rates than the previous year. The municipality requires R900.000 in additional revenues for the current year, so a total of R1,6m has to be found from the remaining ratepayers in Wilderness, translating to an average 26% increase over last year. Our case is that all properties should be valued correctly, in accordance with the Act, and that the municipality must then apply a 15% rebate, instead of the current 5%, to compensate us for the reduced public service infrastructure in comparison to George proper. Our contention is that we must ensure that the burden is shouldered fairly and equitably, and the present inequities in valuations, where one group of residents profits to the detriment of others, must be eliminated. We will continue to pursue the matter until a satisfactory resolution is reached.

Town Planning: Subcommittee: Graham Sell, Chris Francis, Ed Goetsch.

It is clear from our dealings with the Planning & Housing department that they have a severe shortage of personnel with the skills required to properly fulfil their functions. We have seen very little consistency in their decisions to approve, or contest planning applications, and in many cases their responses to our enquiries have been contradictory. On a positive note, we have formed beneficial alliances with the environmental group, Waleaf, and we have an open channel of communication with the Hoekwil Ratepayers Association to address town planning matters that are of mutual concern. Success came from our alliance with Waleaf, when we were recently influential in halting, or preventing, controversial or illegal developments. We will continue to encourage the municipality to upgrade personnel numbers and skills sets in the Planning & Housing department. At the same time we will increase our pressure on them to adopt stricter policies regarding developments that are completely out of context with the "sense of place" that the majority of our members wish to maintain.

Services:

Electricity, Water & Sewerage

Subcommittee: Pearce Johnston & Eckhard Muller On the electrical side, our good relations with Kevin Groenewald, Head of Municipal Electrical Services, resulted in our being able to successfully pass on load shedding notices to our members. Street lighting remained an emotive subject, although there seems to be general agreement that the N2 lighting is excessive. Our first approach in this regard resulted in SANRAL replacing the fittings, thereby reducing the overall ambient light emissions. Our second approach, to reduce the overall number of lights, was less successful as SANRAL are of the opinion that safety on the N2 will be compromised. On the local front, street lighting was installed in Serpentine Road, and 1st Avenue in Wilderness East, but at the request of the majority of homeowners, was resisted in Lake and Whites Roads. Energy saving remains a hot topic, we are currently at 5% saving against the ESKOM requirement of 10%, and we therefore encourage our members to make efforts to further reduce consumption. Power saving hints and suggestions can be found on our website. The municipality are actively engaged in eliminating overhead power lines, and replacing them with an underground alternative. This work is intended to reduce the number of "nuisance" power-outs that have plagued Wilderness over time. We are also actively engaged with the public participation process for a proposed Biomass to Energy power station to be constructed near the Tamsui Substation.

As far as water and sewerage is concerned, we have been active with the Hoekwil Ratepayers Association in meetings with George & Eden Municipalities, Sanparks and the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF), concerning pollution of a tributary of the Touw River catchment area. Water analysis reports received from George Municipality regarding the quality of drinking water confirm that the quality is of a high standard. Water analysis

of the raw Touw River water has been requested and a pollution report from DWAF is expected soon. A spillage of raw sewage at the Kleinkrantz Waste Water Treatment Works was reported, with the resulting investigation revealing that the cause was a broken main that has subsequently been repaired. The possible pollution of Island Lake as a result of the spillage will be addressed by WNP, and Municipal Civil & Technical Department to alleviate the possible contamination of the lake. The next phase of the water borne sewerage system in Sands Road is imminent.

Health & Refuse

Subcommittee: Al Colesky There has still been no decision on a garden refuse site for the Wilderness but garden rubbish is removed on normal rubbish removal days and I am in constant contact with the municipality about a site as well as illegal dumping and cleaning of streets. **Environmental. Sanparks, Beach, Lakes and Rivers**

Subcommittee: Ed Goetsch, Al Colesky & Peter Woodliffe The rainfall during the past year has been low so there has been no additional flooding or washaways. We still have problems outstanding from the last floods where debris continues to block the Touw river, especially under the various bridges. Members from Lakes Road Action Group and our committee persuaded the relevant powers to start cleaning up. We have been informed that an amount of R8 mil has been allocated to the Wilderness National Park (WNP) for flood repair, but this has not as yet been received. R3.2 mil has been set aside for the restoration of the Boardwalk, and R3m has been earmarked for updating the Operational Plan for managing the opening of estuaries. Problems with inadequate toilet facilities, and control over numbers of persons entering the Lagoon area is of concern, resulting in WNP agreeing to provide extra toilets, and to limit the number of persons entering the Park to the amount of parking capacity. 14 extra Rangers will be employed over the festive season to improve discipline. WNP is legally obliged to charge an entrance fee to its facilities, and is therefore compelled by the SA National Parks Board to fence, and charge, for entrance to the Wilderness lagoon area. The money charged for entrance to the Park is used to pay the workers who are employed to clean the lagoon area and beaches. The Neighbour Access card, which allows local access to the Parks facilities at a significant discount, was introduced on instigation from this committee. Unfortunately, the facility has not been exploited by local residents. **Weeds and Alien plants:**

Subcommittee: Kitty Burger & Sparkie van Rooyen

Much work has been put into identifying and trying to eradicate invasive alien vegetation in the Wilderness area by our committee members, as well as Yvonne Barnard and others. Wilderness residents are very conservation conscious, but this Association has an ongoing and uphill battle with developers who clear unnecessarily large areas of indigenous vegetation in order to build new houses. **Traffic, Roads and Pavements. Subcommittee: Sparkie van Rooyen & Kitty Burger.**

The general condition of our roads is deteriorating, with a number being left in a disgraceful state after last years flooding. We are in constant contact with both George and Eden Municipalities to rectify this situation, but continually face strong competition from conflicting demands on their budgets. The N2 remains problematic due to ineffective provincial and local policing. We are engaged with both these traffic authorities to achieve effective enforcement of the compulsory truck stop at the top of Kaimans Pass, and the enforcement of regulations regarding pedestrians on the highway between Garden Route Mall and airport turn-offs.

Public Safety

Security and Law enforcement. Subcommittee: Al Colesky & Pierre Bovet.

The Wilderness area is relatively safe with very good co-operation between the residents and the local Police force. Petty crime, especially during the holiday periods should be guarded against with all residents becoming more vigilant. Do not leave valuable items visible in locked or unlocked cars parked in the streets at any time. It should also be noted that there will be an increased Police, Parks board ranger and life guard presence in our area over the holiday period.

Emergency Services

Subcommittee: Graham Sell: Significant advances have been made through regular communications with Fire Chief Barend Nelson, and we thank him for taking the time to regularly attend our meetings to provide personal feedback. The George Fire department has been temporarily stationing a fire truck in Wilderness during peak holiday seasons. Over the coming Christmas holidays it will be stationed at the Caltex garage next to the Wilderness Beach Hotel. The search for a site for a permanent satellite fire station is ongoing, with a number of false starts being experienced. We are confident that Chief Nelson will resolve this issue early in the New Year. George Emergency Services introduced a new Disaster Management SMS system, so for a while we did not receive warning messages from them, but are now back on line.

Communications & Liaison

Subcommittee: Sylvia Sell; Graham Sell

We have again consistently issued a monthly electronic newsletter to members who have provided us with email addresses, a copy of which is also posted on our notice board located outside the Wilderness Mini Market. Our postal members have received a quarterly composite newsletter. Press releases are sent monthly to Wild News, and The Edge, and when appropriate to the George Herald. Our website proved to be most beneficial to registered members, particularly as we were able to post the Valuation Roll in our "Members

Only” area for on-line access that resulted in a significant number of “hits” during the objection period. We still need to load a final on-line version of the Valuation Rolls for Wilderness, Wilderness Heights and Kleinkrantz, but remain in the hands of the municipality regarding the issuance of finalised rolls. Our Disaster Management early warning SMS system was used extensively for electricity blackout warnings earlier in the year, and for a couple of notices regarding accidents in Kaaimans Pass. Much positive feedback was received from registered members regarding these services. **Wilderness Heights.** It is well known that Wilderness Heights merged with WRRRA last year and the emotive issue of Erf 329 remains our biggest problem. The committee is presently negotiating with the various authorities to resolve the squatter problem.