

Wilderness Ratepayers and Residents Association - WRRRA

Annual report 2013

Overview

2013 has been a busy year, with a number of major projects undertaken and some significant issues affecting all residents requiring attention. I want to thank all the members of the Committee for their commitment and enthusiasm. It has been a pleasure to work with them, and they have made my job easier by taking much of the heavy load from my shoulders.

We will be saying a temporary farewell to one of our committee members, Trevor White, who has so enthusiastically and successfully managed a number of projects on behalf of WRRRA, most notably the Town of the Year. Trevor is taking a year off and relocating to Langebaan to be near his family. We wish him well and look forward to his return to WRRRA duty in 2015. The other members of the committee are all available for re-election.

Council matters (Pieter Naude, Phillip Parsons and Neville Ewing)

We have held regular meetings with our Ward Councilor, Leon van Wyk, who also attends Committee meetings when he is able. Councilor van Wyk is also the chairperson of the Council Finance Committee, which means that a lot of his time is taken up by the demands of that position. Nevertheless we have developed a good working relationship and he has been instrumental in assisting us to obtain proportional Municipal funding for the Monitor project, as well as arranging meetings with the various consultants involved in the GIPTN project and the N2 road works.

The Valuation Appeals Board finally met in May and residents had the opportunity to voice their concerns in person. The compilation of the new Valuation Roll was a process that we believe was flawed from the start, and we will try to ensure that when this is done again in a few years time that WRRRA will play a more proactive role to see that it is done fairly and accurately.

During the course of the year we held a working breakfast and a working brunch with the heads of the various Municipal Departments. This has provided the officials with greater insight into the Wilderness Improvement Program, as well as other concerns that have been expressed by residents. We believe that this cooperative approach has been beneficial and we now have a very good working relationship with all Municipal Departments.

Phillip Parsons represents WRRRA on the Ward 4 Committee, which meets approximately once every quarter. Through this forum we have managed to secure some funding from the Ward allocation (which was R100 000 for 2013) for the Village Monitor project, and we have applied for further funding for 2014 for the installation of lighting in the lane leading from George Road to the SANParks parking area. This we believe will be benefit residents and visitors alike, and will form part of the infrastructure required when the GIPTN transit point is relocated.

Town Planning (John Callanan assisted by Marie Callanan and Phillip Parsons)

John and Marie both felt the need to stand down in the course of the year, but their contribution over the time they have served has been significant. With their resignation the portfolio has been taken over by Phillip Parsons until such time as a suitable replacement can be found.

Town Planning is a difficult portfolio, requiring a balance between approving what is reasonable and objecting to building departure requests that will have a detrimental effect on the area in general. The Municipality is not bound by our objections and in some instances will take a different view on the application. Nevertheless we are continuing to work with the officials concerned in an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual understanding, even where we do not agree.

Economic development and Wilderness Improvement Program (Pieter Naude, Trevor White and Phillip Parsons)

It is most encouraging to see that the Wilderness Improvement Program is slowly being transformed into a shared vision of a future Wilderness. We want to thank you all for your support and defense of the WIP – your participation and contribution has given it the legitimacy and momentum that raised it to a new level of awareness among a much broader spectrum of interested and affected parties. The real value of the WIP lies in the fact that it is a dynamic framework for improvement that identifies the issues and points the way. The various projects tackled and completed to date have confirmed that as long as we can divide the collective vision for a better Wilderness into many smaller and manageable projects, we will succeed. There have been a number of very successful small projects, which taken together have made a marked difference to the Village. These include:

- The ongoing Village Monitor project
- Obtaining permission to use the vacant site in the Village for parking
- Completing the History Panels on the N2 wall
- Installing solar lighting to illuminate the History Panels
- Replanting the concrete planters on the N2 island in the Village
- Paving the lane behind the Caltex Garage
- Extending the paved side walk on both sides of the entrance road to Milkwood Village
- Installing street lighting opposite the Hotel
- Providing a number of wooden waste bins in the Village
- Project Dolphin, which included paving a side walk up Leila's lane, planting the verge adjacent to this new pavement, clearing the parking area and covering with a layer of wood chips and raising the walls of the bridge into Milkwood Village and decorating these with planters.

Project Dolphin was achieved through the newfound spirit of co-operation between the WRRRA, the George Municipal officials and those community members who willingly pitched in to improve the general appearance of our village.

Some of the other projects were completed with the help of the Municipality and some with funds obtained from advertising on the N2 Wall and donations from business and private residents. In addition it has been heartening to see other improvements undertaken by residents on their own initiative.

The pilot Monitor project (now the Village Ambassadors) has received wide support and the Municipality has provided funds to enable this project to become more sustainable in the longer term. We have written extensively about this project during the course of the year, so you will be up-to-date with the latest developments. We need to stress that this project would not have reached this stage without the enthusiastic involvement of Hugh Pharaoh and Paul Nicholas, and more recently Gerf du Preez, who has taken over the supervision and management of this program.

This year Trevor White convinced WRRRA and the business community of Wilderness to enter the Town of the Year competition. Wilderness (population approximately 15 000) lost an extremely close fought battle against Paarl (population approximately 350 000) for the Western Cape regional finalist position. We believe that this was a worthwhile exercise as it built a renewed sense of camaraderie and pride in our town, brought together the community, business and the tourism authorities, and gained valuable experience for any subsequent entry into this competition. Trevor has drafted a strategic plan based on what we learned from this first attempt, should we enter the competition again some time in the future.

One of the major concerns this year has been the planning for the introduction of the George Integrated Public Transport Network (GIPTN) as it impacts Wilderness. This has not been an easy process as much of the planning had already been done by the time WRRRA was consulted. However, I am pleased to report that after a number of meetings with our local Councillor, Leon van Wyk, with the Head, Civil and Technical Services at the Municipality, Harold Basson and with representatives of the firm handling the first phase of the contract, we were able to arrive at a joint statement of intent, which was sent to all our members in November. While not everyone may be entirely satisfied with the outcome, we believe that the service,

once introduced, will be of significant benefit to Wilderness and its residents. Those aspects, which remain a concern, such as the temporary transit point outside the old Karos Hotel, will be closely monitored from our side. We will also be ensuring that progress is made towards finalizing the agreed location for the permanent transit point at the SANParks parking area adjacent to the N2.

Tourism and Business Signage (Paul Nicholas)

On the Tourism front nothing has happened except the Tourism office did move to a more visible position on George Rd. However Mr. Hendricks has intimated that Minister Alan Winde is going to send a task team to formulate a tourism strategy for our region.

The Wall project has been very successful and funds obtained from this have enabled us to take on other much-needed projects. We received 12 new double refuse bins, 4 donated by SANParks and the other 8 sponsored by the INTERWIL GROUP. They have been placed in the CBD and another 4 single bins have been placed on order.

Unfortunately the illegal brown signs in the CBD have not been removed despite repeated appeals to the Municipality. We are still awaiting the signs to be erected indicating no dogs on the beach along Sands Rd. The Blue Flag beach was officially opened on the 29th Nov and will extend from Dec to end Feb.

As part of the Town of the Year competition, we started on the establishment of a 'world class' web-site to promote tourism for Wilderness. To date this remains an ongoing project which needs to be expanded and "owned" by the Wilderness business and tourism community.

SANRAL, Transnet and Environment (Neville Ewing)

At the beginning of the year we were delighted to have Corrine Roff and her team take charge of the planters on the N2. Through several donations, plants that can survive the wind, salt air and lack of watering were planted. During the year the various plants have flowered at different times and added some colour to what otherwise was an eyesore.

Together with SANRAL a concerted effort has been made to clear the pathway and tunnel from the SANParks parking area under the N2. Barriers have been erected to contain the beach sand from clogging the entrance to the tunnel. Unfortunately, vandalism in the area is common and already some of the replaced lights have been broken and the light bulbs stolen. Maintaining the area is an on-going project and additional resources are needed to keep the area looking nice all through the year and not just in season.

The restoration and up-grading of the cycle and jogging path from the NSRI through to the Views Hotel has commenced but the contractor has yet to complete the work. Unfortunately, SANRAL has informed us that this will only be completed early next year. Further discussions are underway with SANRAL to refurbish the railings along the N2 as well as endeavours to alleviate, at least to some extent, the parking shortage in front of Milkwood Village.

Although there is no formal progress on the future use of the railway line, we have been in contact with Transnet to ensure that the rail reserve is kept reasonably clean. A letter has been written to Transnet requesting that urgent attention be given to the surface on the bridge over the Touw River that separates Ebb and Flow North Camp from South Camp.

SANParks has held two stakeholder feedback sessions during the year but these have been very poorly attended. The report on the fish population from Rondevlei through to the mouth of the Touw River is most encouraging as is the in-depth scientific projects that are on-going. Problem areas that have arisen during the year include the pollution of the Touw River and the lack of adherence to regulations by dog owners. These have both received the appropriate reaction from SANParks and further remedial action will be taken in future. Unfortunately, proper signage remains a problem as these are also vandalised or removed by the public who do not agree with them.

Municipal Services (Pearce Johnston)

We have continued to maintain a good relationship with all municipal departments during 2013. We have

had another good year and we should thank our service providers for all the attention they have given Wilderness this year.

Electricity

Warning of planned outages have been sent to us timeously and limited power supply has been provided by the municipality to the business area in the village during these periods. There have been a number of unplanned outages which have affected Wilderness in general and Wilderness East specifically.

A runaway veld fire which threatened the wood pole power lines from Eskom to the Main Wilderness substation resulted in the power supply being interrupted to the whole of Wilderness for about 6 hours, during this time George Municipality provided a limited temporary power supply to the business area of Wilderness.

The 11kV power line running parallel to the N2 and supplying Wilderness East was damaged by lightning resulting a long unplanned outage to the area, repairs to this line subsequently resulted in a number of shorter interruptions to isolated areas in Wilderness East. The municipality performed well under the circumstances.

We started negotiating with the Electrotechnical Department to provide a power supply for events which could possibly be held on the village green in the future. However, due to problems associated with ownership of the metering and other difficulties, it was decided not to pursue this development. In any event we were informed that temporary supplies are covered by a Tariff Item in the Municipal Tariff Schedule. In view of this, a temporary power supply was requested from and provided by the Municipality for the SPCA Woof-a-thon on Saturday 16 November.

Civil & Technical

We have been kept informed on a regular basis of the quality of the drinking water from the Wilderness Water Treatment Works at Ebb & Flo and of the condition of the water in the lagoon.

The water reticulation in Wilderness is still a problem and water interruptions occurred on a number of occasions particularly in the area near Serendipity and Freesia Lane. This is as a result of the aging fibre cement piping breaking down. The association has been pressurising the municipality to include replacement of this piping in the budget

Overflow of sewage from the pumping station at Freesia Rock occurred a number of times and resulted in complaints from residents and businesses in the area. This problem appears to have been resolved and we have been informed that the problem was underground in the sewerage piping system.

Refuse Removal

This is a service on which we can rely.

Sewage Removal

Another service which requires mention for the efficient and prompt manner in which it is carried out and without fuss.

Traffic, Roads and Pavements. Safety and Security (Hugh Pharoah)

This year saw the successful introduction of our village Monitors. The program was not without hitches but these were sorted out to everyone's satisfaction in the end. The way forward is still in question, with the faltering of the Wilderness Business Initiative.

The N2 has taken up a large portion of the year with much negotiation as to what was most expedient for the village, including slipways in and out of isolated sections of the suburb, and ongoing maintenance of the back roads. We have had numerous meetings with the contractors and have issued various updates on the

situation with the N2. It must be said that all will sigh with relief when the N2 roadworks are completed as this has placed a great strain on our community!

Our liaison with the police in our area has improved greatly. The Neighbourhood Watch has strengthened and the resultant greater vigilance has brought about numerous tip offs for the police, which have resulted in successful arrests.

Communication and liaison (Phillip Parsons)

During the course of 2013 we have tried to communicate with our members on a regular basis by way of monthly electronic newsletters. We trust that our members have found these informative and beneficial, and are kept up-to-date with what is happening in the Village and the community. We have also endeavored to ensure that our newsletters and other important information appear on the WRRRA website, which, you will be pleased to know, has now been opened to all, which means that members no longer need to remember their password. We have also introduced an early-warning SMS system that enables us to instantly communicate matters of urgency to those members that have provided us with their cell phone numbers.

Community projects

For most of the year we lacked a regular representative for this portfolio. We intend to rectify this situation in 2014, as we are aware of the needs of the poorer communities residing in our area, as well as the good work done by a number of voluntary organizations with whom we would like to forge closer ties.

Secretarial (Vanessa Hau-Yoon)

The biggest project this year has been the updating of the database. This involved phoning every person on the list to check all their details and get cell numbers or e-mail addresses where necessary. We also used this opportunity to introduce the SMS system whereby we can send out urgent news to our members.

Finance (Niel Viljoen)

The WRRRA closed the financial year with funds totaling R96 954, an increase of R12 051 on the balance at the beginning of the year. Income from subscriptions was down from R33 225 to R27 880. The Management Committee is implementing strategies to reverse this trend. Included in the expenditure are donations of R11 790. There has been a significant increase in the net income from the Wall Advertising Project (R49 861) and in Donations Received (R55 864). This income formed part of the Wilderness Improvement Program and was allocated to various projects to further improve the quality of life of the Wilderness residents. The attached financial statement for more detailed information on the different projects and specific donations

In Closing

Much has been achieved and much still remains, but if we can apply the collective energies of all towards a shared vision of a "Better Wilderness for All" we will transform Wilderness into the place to be – for all. The challenge we face is in the "All" – how to make Wilderness a better place for all the peoples of Wilderness. Noble it may sound, but we will have to find ways and means to make it a sustainable reality.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to making our task as your committee a pleasant, pleasing and rewarding one. Your encouragement and goodwill has enabled us to look forward to the future with hope and purpose.

As Always
Pieter Naude
(Chairperson)