

## **Chairman's Report for the Period Jan 2014 – Jan 2015**

### **Background**

In reviewing and reporting on the affairs of WRRRA over the past 13 months, I firstly want to thank you all for allowing me to serve the interests, and hopefully the needs of the people of Wilderness over the past six years. This will be my last report as Chairman and it also brings to an end a very exciting and rewarding period of "Working for Wilderness". I was privileged to work with some wonderful and dedicated people who sacrificed their personal time, freedom, energy and health to help make Wilderness a better place for all. Sadly, some have now passed on to higher service and we remember in particular Hugh Pharaoh and Bob McIntyre.

***"Did we make a difference, and is Wilderness a better place today?"***

I can assure you that the team that I worked with gave of themselves beyond what was expected, and I wish to remind all members that your committee gave of their time freely, without compensation and without complaint. They did this because they are passionate about where they live and want to contribute to a better Wilderness for all.

I believe that the dynamics of modern-day South Africa, the place where we live and where most of us will live out the rest of our lives, poses new challenges on a daily basis that threaten to break down the walls of our comfort zones as it pertains to person, place, property and prosperity. We are all subject to adverse circumstances on a daily basis that test our resolve to the point of yearning for "the good old days" and "the good old ways". Left unchecked, we become prophets of doom and darkness, overlooking the possibility of any possible good that exists and that can be achieved. There is a real danger that we do nothing, and spend the rest of our precious time and energy finding fault, nitpicking and unrealistically demanding the return of the good old days and good old ways. Instead, why don't we look for the good that exists and build on it, and at the same time ask ourselves what we can do to bring about "better days" and "better ways"?

It was against this background that we took a decision not to allow circumstances to write the chapters of a future Wilderness without our input and contribution towards a "better Wilderness for all". Armed with a vision and the pro bono help of urban planners, Peta Smith and Neil Frazer, a blueprint of a future Wilderness (Wilderness Improvement Program) was drawn up. With plot and plan in hand we consulted extensively with all interested and affected parties, including the local business community, provincial and local authorities, SANParks, SANRAL, Transnet and SAPS. Over the past two years, in addition to our normal portfolio duties, we focused our efforts on the implementation of the projects within the WIP, and on developing co-operative relationships with all stakeholders, including the ratepayers and residents of Wilderness. Our primary motivation was to improve matters, be they relationships, services, infrastructure, safety, parking, and general visitor perceptions. You may not agree with everything we did, or in the way we did it, but in the final analysis we ask you to judge us on our delivery. Risk is the price you pay for seizing an opportunity, and if we took no risks and did nothing to address the problems and opportunities we encountered, we would be no closer to finding adequate answers and solutions, as imperfect as it may have seemed at the time.

### **Report Back**

I will only cover the main issues and projects of 2014 and the early part of 2015 in my report. In an attempt to keep members up to date, we have communicated regularly and extensively throughout the year by way of monthly newsletters, and special newsletters. I therefore do not intend to go in to the detail of the activities and outcomes that constitute the year in review. All our newsletters are archived and can be accessed by going into our website [www.wrra.co.za](http://www.wrra.co.za).

For the sake of convenience, I have listed below the previous 5 Newsletters in case you did not receive them or read them.

[201502 WRRRA Newsletter February](#)

[201501 WRRRA Newsletter January](#)

[201412 WRRRA Newsletter December](#)

[201411 WRRRA Newsletter November](#)

[201410 WRRRA Newsletter October](#)

*(To access and open these archived newsletters you must be connected to the Internet, then hover your cursor over the highlighted newsletter you want to open, a "hand" will appear, now double click on the newsletter of the month you want to open and the newsletter will open on your screen. If you have difficulty in opening the link, please copy and paste the link directly into your browser.)*

## **Relationships & Communications**

### **George Municipality.**

Without doubt, our endeavor to build new relationships with all stakeholders and in particular with our biggest and most important external stakeholder - George Municipality, was one of the most controversial, challenging and rewarding exercises we undertook. Some members were highly critical, skeptical and accused us of selling-out to the enemy with our "toenaderings" approach, and in particular our decision to work with the Municipality and their consulting engineers (SMEC) on the introduction of the GIPTIN project to Wilderness.

Our regular working breakfasts with department heads have enabled us to better understand the inner workings of the Municipality, including the financial and political constraints under which they deliver services for which we can justly be proud of. We were able to share our plans and concerns with officials, at the highest level, resulting in a more empathetic understanding by both parties of the constraints which each has.

On the local political front, in addition to our regular meetings and consultations with our Ward Councilor Leon van Wyk, we engaged with Mayor Charles Standers and Deputy Mayor Daniel Maritz on several occasions to primarily discuss the historical non-existence of a tourism strategy for Wilderness within George, and the lack of progress in addressing the problems with Erf 329 (Wilderness Heights Squatter Community).

After more than 6 months of negotiations with the mayor's office and ably assisted by support from Province, we were able to welcome the Mayor and his Committee (Mayco) to an introductory presentation and walking tour of Wilderness Village. The significance of this visit must not be underestimated. It was historic in a sense that it was the first (ever?) visit to Wilderness by the political decision making body of George. Secondly, it afforded us the opportunity to informally engage with them and address some of the unfair perceptions about Wilderness and its residents.

### **Province.**

The decisions made at national and provincial level have a direct bearing on George and indirectly on Wilderness. This became very apparent in our frustrating endeavors to obtain clarity and commitment on two issues that directly affect Wilderness. Firstly, the lack of a tourism strategy and plan for Wilderness that has robbed Wilderness's tourism-dependent economy of millions over the past 10 years. Secondly, the absence of ownership and responsibility of, and commitment to resolve the Erf 329 problem. This has robbed the squatters of a chance of a better life on the one hand and caused major value destruct of surrounding properties on the other. Both these issues are being addressed in a far more structured and inclusive way, than before.

During several visits to Wilderness by Allan Winde (WC Minister of Economic Opportunity), Jaco Londt (MP for George), Helen Zille (WC Premier) we were afforded the unique opportunity to introduce them to a Wilderness that they may have heard of, but did not really know. They were each given a copy of the WIP as an introduction to our vision, plans and supporting projects. In addition to the ongoing and future value of these face-to-face meetings, the significance of these meetings can best be summarized as follows.

1. Wilderness was placed on the political map at the highest level within Province, resulting in the following outcomes:
  1. Wilderness is directly represented through Paul Nicholas and Chris Boshoff of WRRRA at Province's Tourism Strategy sessions.
  2. WRRRA was accepted as an interested and affected party in the resolution to the Wilderness Heights Informal Settlement (Erf 329) issue. More about this further in this report.
  3. I was told that Wilderness is regarded at both local and provincial levels as a fine example of what a small community can achieve with a common vision, supporting plan and a desire to build mutually beneficial relationships - for the greater good.
2. We have established and will continue to maintain high-level contact with all parties at provincial and local levels to help us in our endeavors to best serve the interests of our members.

## Members

As diverse as our membership is, so are the perceived needs of our membership. The challenge we as a committee constantly face is how to best address, let alone resolve these diverse and dynamic needs. A further problem that we have to deal with is that what is important to one, may not be important to another. The limited resources within the municipality and the competing demands of a greater George, adds to the complexity of satisfactory service delivery.

To better address these dynamic and diverse needs, we encourage our members to help themselves as far as possible. This is of particular relevance for enquiries, fault reporting and emergencies, as it pertains to basic services such as water, electricity, sewerage, roads and vegetation. Contact numbers and names for the relevant departments within the Municipality were obtained, tested and distributed to members via email and placed on our website. This will enable us to concentrate and focus our efforts on the “bigger” problems of a common nature.

We also believe that the improved relationships with municipal officials within the relevant departments and a recognition and appreciation of the good work they do, has contributed to the improved service delivery and communication flows that we have experienced during the past year. As far as member communication is concerned, our objective is to inform, listen, respond and create an ongoing dialogue with members. From the positive feedback we have received from members during the year, it seems that our improved communication with members has gone a long way towards creating an informed and appreciative membership.

The channels of communication that we have employed during the year include:

- Monthly newsletters, published soon after our monthly committee meetings
- Special newsletters as and when the circumstances dictate us to inform members of issues that may have arisen
- Information sessions that can be called for by members or the committee to discuss and debate important issues
- Bulk SMS broadcast system to instantly inform members on issues of an emergency/important nature such as crime incidents, load shedding, scheduled and unscheduled breakdowns in the supply of basic services
- Web site with relevant information including the newsletters published during the year.

Coincidentally, as I was writing this report, I received the following two communications:

*Dear WRRRA Chairman,  
Sincere thanks for an absolutely delightful, informative and humorous newsletter – much appreciated and so too the early load-shedding warnings et al. It is great to keep in touch with a place that is embedded in my heart.  
Best of everything to you and the WRRRA committee.  
Kind regards  
Ena McIntyre*

## Other Stakeholders

Wilderness is surrounded by nature (SANParks), accessed by the N2 (SANRAL), dissected by a disused railway infrastructure (Transnet) and protected by the Wilderness Police Station (SAPS). We believe that one of our founding objectives – to build and improve relationships with all interested and affected parties - should also extend to these custodians of the non-municipal infrastructure that surround and affect us on a daily basis. Once again, the detail of our ongoing relationships and interactions with these stakeholders is a matter of record as published on a regular basis in our newsletters. For the sake of background, I will report on the current status of our relationships with these organisations.

### SANParks

We've enjoyed many years of co-operative engagement with the Wilderness Section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) under the dynamic leadership of Jill Gordon (Bunting-Venter). As of late it seems as if changes are being made that ride roughshod over local relationships and co-operative agreements. The cancellation of a long-standing agreement with one of our members, Eden Adventures, and the recent increase in activity tariffs in the GRNP, has forced us re-engage with them in an attempt to understand the sudden change in attitude. SANParks, Wilderness

Section, is a strategic and longstanding partner in the area and we therefore find it difficult to accept the unilateral increases of over 150% for boat, canoe and mountain bike licenses without the courtesy of being informed before implementation rather than being presented with a *fait accompli*. A case in point is the huge jump in mountain bike license fees. During the last Tourist Indaba a presentation given by Western Cape Tourism where cycling, in all its forms, was highlighted as being a huge growth area for the Western Cape and Garden Route in particular. To what extent do these parties communicate and co-operate towards achieving a common goal – an increased in tourism in the WC and Garden Route? This issue remains on the agenda and is receiving our attention.

### **SANRAL**

As one of the first partners to the WIP, SANRAL has become a much valued and strategic partner of WRRRA. Our co-operative agreement includes the following:

- We manage and maintain the “Wilderness Wall” area on behalf of SANRAL, and in exchange, received the commercial rights to the advertising space on the wall.
- We keep an eye on the condition of the access tunnels under the N2 and consult with SANRAL’s local representative, Johan Nel of Qunu Consulting, in this regard.
- We maintain the pot plants on the center island of the N2.
- We petitioned SANRAL in 2014 and they agreed to repair the “Wilderness Walk & Jog Way” from Salinas Beach Restaurant to Kleinkrantz. Phase 1, from Salinas to the Caltex Garage, was completed during the year at a cost of R500 000. We will encourage SANRAL to start with Phase 2 as soon as budget approval has been received.

### **Transnet**

Where we have succeeded to get SANRAL onboard the Wilderness Improvement wagon, we have failed to excite or convince Transnet of their role and responsibility towards maintaining their abandoned and decaying infrastructure. The ongoing on-off Tjoe-Choo saga has not helped as it has given Transnet a convenient excuse to do nothing. We recently made a mini breakthrough and were given the name of Alison Bhana, Property Operations Supervisor, Transnet Property, a PE based person to directly engage with. So far, the initial communications hold promise of an improved co-operative relationship.

### **SAPS**

WRRRA has always had a very good relationship with our local police commander, Warrant Officer Bennie Boshoff and his staff. Most of the credit must go to Hugh Pharaoh who sadly passed away last year after serving as a WRRRA committee member for many years. His dedication and commitment to the strategic Safety and Security portfolio was evident by his passionate report-back sessions after attending the monthly police forum meetings in Wilderness and George. Ian van Rooyen has taken over the portfolio and continues to work closely with W/O Boshoff and his team. Ian has also motivated and initiated the refurbishment of the Wilderness Police Station (WPS) which serves an area that includes inter alia, Wilderness, Hoekwil, Vic Bay, Wilderness Heights and beyond. If we, as a community of residents and ratepayers can make a difference to the working conditions within our local police station, we indirectly invest in our own wellbeing and the future value of our properties.

The correlation between improved working conditions and improved productivity is a fact that we can use for our own community’s benefit.

### **Finance**

The financial report for 2014 is self-explanatory, but for the sake of completeness, it should be read in conjunction with the following supporting notes.

### **WRRRA**

1. At the onset of the WIP we adopted a policy that membership fees will not be used to finance projects within the WIP, notwithstanding the fact that everyone directly and indirectly benefits from the WIP.
2. For the sake of simplicity and sanity, we continue to maintain this policy.
3. The current shortfall of R 8515 on the WRRRA operations was funded out of reserves, which stand at R 92301 at the end of 2014
4. If we are to adopt a policy of maintaining our financial reserves as a percentage of annual contributions, we have to adopt a dual strategy of increasing membership and member’s fees.

5. We propose to increase membership fees to R150/year, or R12.20/month or 41c/day for 2015.
6. Donald Goldfain has been given the responsibility to implement and manage the membership drive initiative.

#### **WIP**

1. Each project within the WIP is self-funded by voluntary contributions, be they once-off or recurring.
2. George Municipality (through the EPWP), the Business Community within the Village (restaurants, hotel, garage, landlords, and retail sector) and the Accommodation Sector (B&B's) jointly fund the Village Ambassador Program.
3. The lease of the land next to Milkwood Village and behind the Mini-Mart is used for parking, and is funded by the Milkwood Village Body Corporate.
4. Seasonal projects, like extra staff for safety and security during holiday seasons, were funded by appreciative members to the tune of R 17 810.
5. Maintenance of common gardens within the Village, planters on the N2 and refuse bins in the Village are funded from the Wilderness Wall Project

<b>Wilderness Ratepayers and Residents Association</b>		
<b>Statement of funds for the 15 months ending 31 December 2014</b>		
	<b>2013-2014</b>	
<b>Funds at 1 October</b>		<b>96954</b>
FNB Current account	46144	
FNB term deposit	50810	
<b>Shortfall/Surplus</b>		<b>-4653</b>
<b>Funds at 31 Dec/30 September</b>		<b>92301</b>
FNB Current account	38134	
FNB term deposit	54167	

<b>Financial Statement for the 15 months ending 31 December 2014</b>		
<b>WRRRA Membership Fees - Receipts and Payments</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	
<b>Receipts</b>		<b>25475</b>
Interest 32 day extension a/c	3357	
Subscriptions	22118	
Donations		
<b>Payments</b>		<b>33990</b>
Attorney/Legal Costs	0	
Bank Charges	5001	
Communications ( Internet & Website )	7365	
Cost of Meetings (AGM, Committee, George Municipality	11114	
Donations	1790	
SPCA ( Audit )	600	
NSRI	1190	

Out of Pocket Expenses	2393	
Postage & PO Box Rental	452	
Printing	475	
Refuse Bin		
Secretarial fees and revision of members database	5400	
<b>Shortfall/Surplus</b>		<b>-8515</b>

<b><u>Wilderness Improvement Program</u></b>		
<b>Income received</b>		<b>294457</b>
George Municipality ( Monitors )	23971	
Contributions towards Monitors	162985	
Contributions towards Security	17810	
Contributions towards Parking	42555	
Advertising income: Wall	47136	
<b>Payments towards WIP</b>		<b>290595</b>
Monitors	179205	

Security Guards: Holiday Season	10000
Additional monitors: Holiday Season	7810
Parking	52500
Various (Signage, waste bins, gardens etc )	41080
<b>Shortfall/Surplus</b>	<b>3862</b>
<b>Consolidated Shortfall/Surplus WRRRA and WIP</b>	<b>-4653</b>

## Major Project Review

### Village Ambassador Program

Wilderness experienced one of its most successful seasons, from a visitor perspective - be it bed nights, restaurant occupancy or retail trade. The good weather contributed to the popularity of the new "pavement dining experience" offered by the restaurants on the Main Street. Wilderness was transformed into a mecca of good food and casual dining in a safe, clean and friendly village environment.

The Village Ambassadors have become an ever-growing asset of our Village as is evidenced by a transformed village space. They have added character and colour to our Village that has set Wilderness apart from the rest.

Their duties and supporting tasks may seem simple and easy, but let me assure you that there is more to it than meets our critical eyes!

For the sake of clarity, just the following:

- They have come long way from being unemployed and without hope of being someone.
- They are trained, coached, encouraged and motivated to accept responsibility and accountability - an on-going process that challenges us on a daily basis.
- They are all contracted to deliver the following basic services that collectively deliver a safer, cleaner and friendlier Village environment.
  - Monitor Function - Maintain a visible uniformed presence as a deterrent against unwanted, unwelcome and potentially dangerous elements and behaviour.
  - Sanitation Function - Starting with the morning shift, collect all black bags from the refuse bins in the Village, replace and take to a central place for the Municipality to collect. Pick-up litter and sweep pavement and street areas to help maintain a sense of cleanliness and in doing so, encourage others to do the same.
  - Welcome Function - To be helpful and friendly at all times by assisting the public with information and directions.
  - Work Ethic and Behaviour - To conduct themselves in a way and manner that will reflect their status as proud ambassadors of Wilderness.
  - Meals - The Village ambassadors are provided with one meal per shift per day by courtesy of the SPAR in Milkwood Village.
  - Uniforms - Each one of them are provided with Wilderness branded uniforms, caps, reflective jackets, raincoats, courtesy of SANParks.
  - Productivity - From time to time we experiment and try-out donated or sponsored equipment such as the yellow and red tricycles to help with refuse collection and two mountain bikes used for patrolling their beats.

- Supervision & Management - The team is supervised and managed on a 7 day a week basis by a team consisting of
  - Program Director - Ian van Rooyen (WRRRA - Safety & Security)
  - Program Supervisor - Dawie Ackerman (Project Manager Wilderness Hotel)

A special thank you to our local business community, George Municipality, SANParks and the leisure industry for their support and contributions to the Village Ambassador Program. Without the program, we would drift back to a time and place we would all rather forget.

It will be a wonderful gesture of appreciation if the monitors can be made to feel at home and welcome when they are on duty. Next time you are in the Village and the opportunity arises, please introduce yourself to them and encourage them. Please be understanding and patient as they are very much work-in-progress.

We welcome comments and suggestion that will help them and us to deliver a "Better Wilderness for All, All the Time". Please talk to Dawie Ackerman or Ian van Rooyen.

### **GIPTN – George Integrated Public Transport Network - “Go George”**

The introduction of GIPTN to Wilderness was viewed by most of us with suspicion, trepidation and a large dose of “angst” concerning the routes, bus stops and terminus. Notwithstanding petitions and objections by WRRRA and our members, it soon dawned on us that the proposed bus service is a soon-to-be delivered reality and we’d better embrace it or forgo the opportunity to be part of the solution. A decision was taken, after much debate and soul-searching, to adopt a co-operative approach in the hope and belief that we could better shape things from inside the GIPTN camp than from the outside. This decision was a risk that we were prepared to take on the basis that if we did nothing, we would get what others planned for us without the opportunity to have a meaningful say in the matter.

We seconded Dr. Phillip Parsons, WRRRA Vice Chairman at the time, to the GIPTN project team, from where he was able to familiarize himself with the dynamics of this project and in particular, how it could or would affect Wilderness. As a result we came to the following conclusions.

- The introduction and roll-out of GIPTN will be of great benefit to the people of Wilderness and the Wilderness economy.
- The infrastructure upgrade within the Village to accommodate GIPTN is in line with the Wilderness Improvement Program, to the extent that it will enable us to leapfrog our program by two years and at no expense to us.
- We should continue to object to the planned bus terminus in front of the Wilderness Hotel and obtain guarantees from the authorities that it would be only a temporary terminus.
- We should investigate if any of the improvement projects that we have planned for the Village could piggyback on the GIPTN infrastructure upgrade.
- To work closely with the Municipality, Consulting Engineers (SMEC) and Contractor (Henra) to ensure that the interests of the ratepayers and residents of Wilderness are constantly on the table.

The infrastructure upgrade is complete and it is worth mentioning the current and future impact on Wilderness.

- More accessible – Wilderness will be more accessible, be it visitors or workers
- Additional parking - We have gained in excess of ten additional parking bays in the heart of Wilderness.
- The place to come and eat - Wilderness Village was transformed into a cosmopolitan gourmet destination with pavement “dining” along the main street.
- Safety - New and upgraded signage that contributed to improved pedestrian and traffic flows.
- Pedestrian walkways – The new and wider pavements have gone a long way towards our objective to pedestrianize the Village CBD.
- We have a written agreement with the George Municipality that the terminus in front of the hotel is only a temporary arrangement.
- Half of the SANParks parking area on the N2 has been demarcated for village parking – an additional 55 parking bays.

The revised date proposed to rollout of the service to Wilderness and surrounds is 3 August 2015. This includes George - Wilderness, Wilderness – Kleinkrantz, Wilderness – Heights, Wilderness - Hoekwil

### **Wilderness Heights**

After many months of consultations and meetings with Province and George, the Heights issue has reached a stage where we have to let the authorities deal with the political and financial complexity of this long outstanding issue. We are grateful for the insight given to us by Leon van Wyk – Ward Councilor, and Steven Erasmus - Director: Human Settlements, Land Affairs and Planning (George). The one significant thing that was achieved, as far as our interactions with the authorities were concerned, is that Wilderness Heights has emerged from the filing drawer and placed firmly on the political agenda. We have also received confirmation that Heights has been earmarked as a priority as far as housing is concerned. Ronald Board will continue to represent WRRRA in this regard.

### **Thank You and Goodbye**

I want to thank everyone who helped us to make Wilderness a better place for all. I thank every member of our committee for his or her support and commitment. It truly was a team effort underscored by a common passion to, not only serve our community, but to make a difference. To Phillip Parsons, our Vice Chair for most of the year, a special thank you for your sober and calming effect on troubled waters.

We also said goodbye to Hugh Pharoah who served the committee with distinction for many years. What a solid and dependable man to have on your team. To Anne a special thank you for allowing Hugh to part of our team.

Bob McIntyre, a past chairman of WRRRA also passed away in 2014. Although I did not know Bob well, we remain grateful to him and Ena giving of their time to serve the community of Wilderness. Let me repeat what I said before, it was an honour to serve the community of Wilderness and thank you for affording me that opportunity. To Charmaine my wife, thank you for putting up with me during these stressful and challenging times.

Pieter Naude

Chairman – WRRRA

2013 - 2014

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