

WILDERNESS RESIDENTS AND RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION CHAIRMANS REPORT FOR 2018

AS I said in my report last year, the evidence of your dedicated and efficient **voluntary** WRRRA committee can be found by simply reviewing the past 12 months Newsletters at <http://wrra.co.za/index.php/2015-07-18-10-22-03/newsletters-archive> .

Please come along to the AGM, your committee would appreciate your support and feedback at the meeting.

Over the last couple of months, I have been asking for volunteers to step up and fill various vacancies that will come up at our AGM and I am delighted to say that we have had a couple of folk step forward and have offered to stand for election at the AGM. But there are more of you out there, passionate about Wilderness, with different ideas and perspectives, who need to join the committee with fresh new ideas and different perspectives on what your Ratepayers Association can and should be doing for us all. People who want positive change.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time.
We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

— Barack Obama

“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Here is a brief overview of our activities over the last year.

Treasurer, Neville Ewing

Subscription income for the year amounted to R44 630 (R 43 710) reflecting the almost level overall membership from year to year. Sundry donations amounted to R905 and interest was R8 615 (R7247).

By managing expenses without decreasing the level of service to members, total expenses decreased to just R17 538 (R36 879). The major areas of savings were in communications and meeting expenses. Of particular importance is the financial assistance give to the establishment of the Wilderness Fire Management Unit.

The Association ended the year with a surplus of income over expenditure of R40 362 (R14 078).

The Wilderness Improvement Program continued to consume a huge amount of time and resources. The monitors and festive season security increased substantially to R199 105 (R162 866) and the income supporting this dropped to R175 750 (R191 670) largely due to one contributor discontinuing their support.

The shortfall in the funding of the parking area increased along with the annual increase of leasing the property. I am pleased to report that this has now been taken over by the Milkwood Village Body Corporate who are the major beneficiaries of the parking area.

Keeping the village and surrounds clean and the gardens well maintained remained a key focus area costing R39 756.

After the devastating fires in the area in November, donations for fire relief received from our members amounted R69 850 of which R 52 901 was used to provide a hot meal every day for 100 people for a month. The balance will be used for similar such disasters that will no doubt arise in the future.

Funding for the Wilderness Improvement Program had a net deficit of R41 091 (deficit R21 899) which is a cause for concern.

Overall, the year ended with a deficit of R729 (deficit 7 821).

Accumulated funds at year end amounted to R 180 652.

Development Diligence, John Miller:

While Wilderness is undeniably growing and changing, the WRRRA would like to help maintain its unique character that we all appreciate and cherish. When we see an obvious issue – such as parking, or non-compliance with set conditions – we bring it to the attention of the municipal authorities and persist and persist. When unannounced construction is brought to our attention, we seek explanations from the Municipality, and persist and persist. Meanwhile, we respond to the applications that the George Town Planning office sends for our review. Many applications request building line relaxations. Others seek approval for buildings already built, the applicant not so much asking for permission, but rather asking for forgiveness for what's already done. In 2018, we reviewed 22 applications, the same number as the previous year.

Public Lecture Series, John Miller:

The WRRRA hosted five speakers during the year, offering not only an entertaining opportunity to hear from residents about local topics, but as well to provide a social evening for members and non-members, all the while raising funds for some special projects. Just to remind you just how good our speakers were if you were present, or what you missed if you were absent:

Will Food become as Scarce as Water? Kobus Pienaar, Farming for the Future, Woolworths

Antarctica Travels and Shackleton Expedition. Joan Louwrens, Medical Doctor on Board

Life and Death of Stars. Case Rijdsdijk, Astronomer/Physicist

Ghost Fishing. Mark Dixon, Marine Biologist/Garden Route Trails

Fossil Trackways of the Cape South Coast. Charles Helm, Amateur Experienced Trackway Specialist

Wilderness Heights, John Miller:

The situation of Erf 329, as the informal settlement is generally referred to, remains unresolved. The WRRRA is committed to getting this resolved as soon as possible but politicians apparently don't share our commitment. The October 2018 draft Municipal Spatial Development Framework document unfortunately reflects the disagreement between the Western Cape Government and the George Municipality about the way forward. They will tell you that surveys are underway, or specialist consultants are busy, or details are being ironed out, but alas ... if there is any progress at all, it has come without any engagement with the WRRRA (as they had committed) or even with the very residents of the settlement. Shame on the authorities.

(Chairman's comment: John has been a tremendous support to the WRRRA Committee in that he has:

- *Assisted in the compiling and especially proofreading of our monthly newsletter.*
- *Worked with the committee member responsible for membership to successfully cross reference and rationalise membership and SMS databases.*
- *corresponded with members in a timely manner and ensured issues were directed to the appropriate committee members.*
- *contributed to committee and committee sub-group discussions aimed at improving WRRRA community profile and communications.)*

Services, Shiralee Moore

A newcomer to the Committee, Shiralee efficiently filled the Services position this year. She managed to sort out several issues that arose in a relatively quick manner which was due to the great cooperation from the municipal officials.

Shiralee dealt with some sewerage spills on Waterside Road, leaking water pipe on Kaaiman's River, general streetlights throughout village including a long-awaited problem on Sanctuary Lane, a very huge issue of the "overgrown" rubble at the bottom of Heights Road next to Constantia Kloof turn off. Broken down wall at Leentjiesklip Beach had been repaired before Season started.

Gardens, Cornell Barnardt

Due to lack of funds we could only afford a gardener twice a week during 2018. Fortunately, our new man, Henry Luiters, could keep the village neat despite the limited time at his disposal. Our garden service, Grass Cutters, once again showed how reliable they are by keeping the village lawns trimmed throughout the entire year. They are a pleasure to work with!

As seen on the photos some signs were put up before the holiday season at spots where we had problems before. Bollards were also erected at the traffic circle to prevent parking on the pavement.

Environmental, Caroline Hall

Thanks to George Municipality, George Tourism, George Rotary Club, SANParks, Garden Route Municipality, We Are George, The Garden Route Botanical Gardens, WESSA, Touw River Conservancy, Paradise Ridge Conservancy and Constantia Kloof Conservancy, Two Oceans Conservation, our local Fire Management Units, Cllr, Marlene Barnardt, and local Greater Wilderness Area Residents and Ratepayers for their continued collaboration with regards the following below - to name but a few, and to everyone else who has contributed in their own special way to protect our precious forest, coast and lakes area.

Touw River Estuary water level management.

Recycling collection despite the lapse of the independent contract.

Invitation for stakeholders to partake in the 2018/2019 Garden Route National Park Management Plan, Buffer Zone Clearing Project and the forthcoming SANParks Land Stewardship opportunities.

Awareness and protection of our Kleinkrantz Beach Dune Vegetation, Wilderness Dune Vegetation and Touw River Estuary Vegetation.

Tips on how to save stranded Turtles.

Madeira vine spotting.

Community 'Conversations in Conservation'.

Restricted dog walking areas resulting in the most successful African Black Oyster breeding season to date.

Collection of mature galls from Black Wattle trees for annual biological battle against these aliens.

Sands Road Clean Up along the railway line as coordinated by Mikaila.

NMU Baboon Research.

Water quality concerns in the Touw River.

Blue Flag Status again in 2019 for Wilderness Beach.

The prohibition of the discharging of any fireworks or emergency flares for celebratory purposes.

The 'Take Five Beach' initiative to collect waste.

Communication, Chris Burlock and Doug Wilcox

The WRRRA have successfully kept our residents and ratepayers up to date on Wilderness matters through our monthly Newsletters, emailed notifications of Wilderness events, facebook, SMS notification and our WRRRA website. Thanks to Chris Burlock's hard work and enthusiasm, our newsletters are informative, well written, topical and informative. Chris has decided to take a rest from WRRRA work and we are left with a challenge to find a passionate Wilderness person to fill these giant shoes that Chris has left behind.

Doug Wilcox has kept our website relevant and interesting with many Wilderness pertinent articles and useful information. The thousands of monthly hits our website receives is an indication of the usefulness of this website.

During 2019 we will be looking at replacing the costly SMS system with a WhatsApp communication system and also investigating an alternative way of accessing the monthly Newsletter.

Roads, Doug Wilcox

The roads in Wilderness fall under three authorities, SANRAL for the N2, George Municipality, and the Garden Route District Municipality (GRDM).

The proposed N2 upgrade will probably start in the last quarter of 2019. SANRAL is waiting for the final environmental sign off and will then go through the tender and contract procedures. The first phase will cover the route from the circle at the SASOL garage through to the Touw River.

Most of the roads maintained by the George Municipality are tarred and are generally in good condition. There is a program of tarring those gravel roads carrying heavier traffic but funds are very limited and have to be spread over the whole of George so we see very little change year on year.

We have been fortunate in the last few years to have most of the tar roads falling under the GRDM upgraded. Heights, Whites and the Wilderness to George section of the Seven Passes was extensively upgraded and now the Hoekwil road is in the final months of work. Inevitably this brings concerns of more speeding.

We have many gravel roads maintained by the GRDM. The WRRRA website contains details of the policy concerning the grading of these roads. As can be expected this is not to the liking of many residents who believe they are a special case. As a body representing the interests of all residents across the greater Wilderness area this can lead to some unpleasant situations.

Councillor, Marlene Barnardt

Another term of office for the WRRRA committee has come and gone. I honestly believe that this ward & particularly Wilderness would be much poorer if it was not for this Association. Sometimes, I think that residents do not really know or appreciate what they are actually doing for the community.

I need to comment on the excellent working relationship between myself as ward councillor and the Committee. I am invited to attend monthly meetings and here relevant issues are discussed and solutions are sought. It is refreshing to work with people who want to contribute and are not always just trying to run done the councillor and the municipality.

Committee members communicate directly with the relevant officials and in some cases, I merely have to follow up. Usually, problems are tackled, solutions sought and more often than not addressed. However, it is not always possible to keep everybody happy.

The Municipality was and remains involved with the Village Monitor Programme via the EPWP. This now includes Sands Road. This is a flag-ship project and contributes to the attraction of our area. Together, we are working towards a clean and safe environment.

Wilderness is unique. Only by taking hands can we ensure that this remains the case. I trust that the good working relationship will continue in the years to come. My thanks to the Chair and Committee for their hard work over the last year.

Best wishes to the Chair and committee for 2019.

Kleinkrantz, Liz Gibson

Kleinkrantz has experienced substantial movement in the property sector over the past 12 months with buyers suddenly discovering this “hidden gem.” From just a handful of homes 15 years ago, Kleinkrantz is almost unrecognisable, with several new builds completed in the past 12 months and numerous renovations to existing properties undertaken. This bodes well for property values in the village.

Kleinkrantz beach continues to attract fishermen; however, many of these fishermen do not dispose of their fishing lines, hooks and bait in a responsible manner, posing a serious threat to the many dogs that are walked on the beach. Despite requesting fishing line tubes over a year ago, none have been forthcoming. This matter is to be addressed with Sanparks.

The new restaurant in Kleinkrantz appears to be well supported by locals and has created a hub for Kleinkrantz residents to meet one another. Kleinkrantz has had its fair share of issues, namely, regarding the illegal removal of dune vegetation by certain residents – some doing this for security reasons. The dense vegetation was being used by an unsavoury element to hide behind, watch houses and then break in; other residents were removing vegetation for self-serving reasons, namely, to create their own private pathway to the beach. Sanparks and the municipality have dealt with these residents accordingly.

The proliferation of Rooikrans remains a problem; the municipality has not dealt with this invasive alien as it said it would.

Hoekwil 2018, Chris Kritzinger

The resident’s association had another busy year.

The number of members increased substantially, perhaps due to awareness resulting from the municipal valuation and rates increase process.

The HRRRA continued its effort to bridge gaps between Hoekwil/Wilderness and Touwsranten. Chris Legatt from WRRRA arranged 9 bicycles from Quebeka for learners in Touwsranten. These were handed over at a ceremony at the school by Hellen Zille, Cape Premier. We also assisted in getting lawns and vegetable garden landscaping done at the primary school in Touwsranten.

The Hoekwil Road upgrade is in progress and is partially complete. Part of the pedestrian walkway between Touwsranten we fought for has been built, and preparations for the rest of it seem to be taking place. Accidents (some with fatalities) in the roadworks have been an ongoing problem.

The association hosted several social evenings for members to get acquainted.

The George municipal valuation roll update early in 2018 resulted in highly variable valuations on essentially similar properties in the Hoekwil area. Terry Smith of the HRRRA put in an outstanding effort to help homeowners in the area appeal against unfair valuations. He has done a huge amount of research on properties and improvements and has a model which provides much more accurate valuations than the municipal valuers. There was some success with the appeals with most valuations being adjusted downwards and a few large downward adjustments. This certainly made Hoekwil homeowners aware of the HRRRA and benefits of membership, and some new members joined.

The Fire Management effort has been taken up by Lynn Keith and as a result of the fires in November there is a lot of interest now. Hopefully we can make some progress while the enthusiasm lasts.

Security in the village was given also a boost. Johan Badenhost, a previous HRRRA committee member, managed to get enough members signed up to one security company, enabling them to have a 24-hour response vehicle in Hoekwil. With the delays due to the stop and go in the Hoekwil Road upgrade, this has proved to be crucial in maintaining adequate response times to criminal activity. Nonetheless crime in form of mostly small burglaries is an ongoing issue in Hoekwil, and the homeowners will have to adapt to changed circumstances by installing alarms and being vigilant.

Langvlei Dunes. Andre Hacquebord

Being representative for Langvlei Dunes (which is more an urban edge area) on WRRRA, our main thrust is the beautification of the Greater Wilderness area as a tourist destination and controlling illegal structures and developments, and maintaining the pristine area. During the year there have been a few buildings going up without proper planning approval and OSCA permits with people trying to short circuit the regulations.

The recent fires have shown the importance of communities working together as early warning and reaction from the community is vital, especially as some homes have single occupants.

Langvlei Dunes and surrounding area is a very high risk fire area and together with the formation of the Greater Wilderness Fire Forum we are planning on including all FMU's into a cohesive early backup system which does need funding and involvement from the community.

Rondevlei, Robin Emslie

Rondevlei residents have enjoyed their association with WRRRA for a second year and look forward to the relationship continuing. A perennial challenge in this rural area is the condition of their access road system consisting of DR1609 (Rondevlei to the N2 via Swartvlei) and DR1625 Rondevlei to Wilderness via Ebb & Flow. A major success was the re-gravelling of the latter which included the construction of 22 drainage under pipes, and the continuing frustration of the lack of repair of the former, which had its 2017 tarring project deferred till 2021 and is now almost unusable.