

2012 July Newsletter

After an upbeat committee meeting on Wednesday, we are pleased to report on good working relationships and close co-operation between WRRRA, our new Wilderness Business Chamber, and municipal officials with respect to the implementation of the Wilderness Improvement Program (WIP). The Tourism Office will be moved out of Milkwood Village to the building next to Cocomo's Restaurant. We would like to commend Frieda of Cocomo's for organizing and sponsoring the repainting of the pedestrian tunnel from the Caltex precinct to the railway line. Plans for additional parking facilities in the village are well under way, although we will require the continued co-operation of Sanral to ensure the most effective use of their road reserve. The only disappointing note is the tardy removal of illegal signage by the municipality, although we are still hoping to get buy-in from local businesses and accommodation establishments to adopt more rigorous standards for signage. The disastrous Saasveld Road saga also continues, as the extent of the subsidence is making it difficult to repair.

The Municipality is succeeding in creating uncertainty and despair around the recent general property revaluations, which conveniently deflects from the fact that the whole exercise is a disaster. To try to untangle the web of confusion, the process so far can be explained as follows: The revaluation roll, with values determined as at July 2011, was issued for public scrutiny and opened for the submission of objections. The Association undertook an overall analysis of the roll, and determined that it was generally flawed. The law does not permit an objection to the entire roll, so we undertook a further exercise to point out the most serious anomalies. When, in the same street, there is vacant land valued at R200k higher than the same sized erf with a house on it, and when prime beachfront properties are valued lower than equivalent properties with a view of the N2, it is quite easy to grasp the scale of the problem. Our analysis uncovered 813 obvious anomalies which were passed on to the Municipality. As a result of our work, and the general outcry across the whole of George, the Municipality undertook their own analysis of the entire roll, which resulted in them extracting all properties where the difference in valuation was 25% or more, up or down over 2007. From this exercise, the Municipality then submitted its own list for the valuers to review. As a result, residents have been receiving "Outcome of Objection" notices when they are not aware that an objection was lodged in the first place! Needless to say, WRRRA is the convenient scapegoat for the Municipality, telling callers that their property values have been increased because of our objections. The truth is that the number of anomalies pointed out by us should have resulted in the entire job being done again. As it stands, we are questioning the legality of these new notices as the Property Rates Act requires the valuer to obtain submissions from property owners, where the owner is **not** the objector. This they have not done. However, while we are fighting this battle, affected owners must also file their own appeal to the Valuations Appeal Board. The appeal form is much the same as the original objection form and is available for download from the George Municipal website www.george.org.za then follow the VALUATIONS link.

Further news is the publication of the draft updated Local Structure Plan and Zoning Scheme regulations for our area, which clearly defines rules and regulations for future zoning of Wilderness. The document appears to be well researched. If you are interested in looking at it, it can be downloaded from the Municipality's website using the following link: www.george.org.za/listing/planning.

WRRRA is sponsoring a skip to remove the debris cleared by local residents from the aloe beds along the railway line. We wish to thank the Touw River Conservancy, Hoekwil Ratepayers

Association and our own members who did such a sterling job in cleaning up this area. We also wish to thank Neville Ewing who has taken it upon himself to regularly clear our sponsored refuse bin, located at the fishing spot under the Hoekwil Road bridge. Sanparks and the Honorary Rangers are upgrading all trail signage and erecting stiles at the entrances to the trails to prevent motorcycles from accessing these areas – so it's all go in The Wilderness!

A very successful Neighbourhood Watch meeting was held at the Fairy Knowe Hotel last week, at which SAPS reported that one Landrover was stolen in Wilderness and there was one break-in along Whites Road. In addition, Anton Hoffman, a presentable white male, is wanted by the police in connection with drug trafficking in our area. The SAPS will welcome any information on his whereabouts.

In closing, attached is the list of member requests made at last year's AGM, noting progress made to-date.