

## Newsletter 2014 July

### WRRRA Purpose and objectives

From time to time we have queries regarding WRRRA as an organization: what is its purpose and what are its objectives. What things should we be involved in? What problems should we be addressing?

The WRRRA Constitution states that the Aims and Objects of the Association are:

- To protect and further the interests of the Ratepayers and Residents of the Wilderness
- The business of the Association shall be confined to the public affairs within the geographical area of the local council, as may be defined from time to time.

So the Association, through its duly elected Executive Committee, has a **reactive** responsibility ("to protect the interests") towards what we already have, in terms of services, infrastructure, facilities and rights) and a **proactive** responsibility ("to further the interests") by ensuring that opportunities are created and utilized where these are in the "interests of the Ratepayers and Residents"). ["Further" means: "promote", "broaden", "expand", "extend".]

An example of this dual function is in the area of safety and security. We seek "**to protect**" your interests by ensuring that the law enforcement agencies do their job well and that they are provided with adequate resources and personnel. We seek to "**further**" these interests by creating the Village Ambassador program, by providing an sms service to our members, etc.

### GIPTN

By now, the almost R3 million rand upgrade to the road and pedestrian infrastructure is nearly complete. A reminder to all members that this money did **not** come out of our local rates and utilities, it was a special infrastructure grant from Central Government. While probably not all of you will be 100% happy with the results, I think we will all agree that the Consultants and the Contractors have done their best to ensure that the work has been undertaken with the minimum of disruption. Throughout the project they have consulted with the businesses most affected and have tried to accommodate changes to the extent that these are possible within the constraints of road design and pedestrian safety concerns. Credit for the success of the Project must go to the Municipal Officials, particularly Rohan Meissenheimer, the representative of SMEC, William vd Poll, and Terry, Bruce and Andre, who supervised the project on behalf of the Contractors, HENRA.

During the course of the project a number of local residents, particularly from Wilderness Heights, have been employed, something that WRRRA asked the Municipality to include as an integral part of the contract.

Issues that have been addressed since the last newsletter include:

- Changing the proposed parallel parking on the north side of George Road into angled parking, thus gaining two additional bays. However, at this stage no walkway will be installed as negotiations still need to take place with Telkom regarding the exact boundary of their property.
- The creation of an entrance from Leila's Lane to the parking area behind the MiniMarket.
- The final approval of the use of the western half of the SANParks N2 parking area. The link between the lane from the corner of George Road and this parking area formed part of the GIPTN project, together with the installation of adequate lighting.
- The landscaping of key areas is complete.

Regarding the public transport system itself, it seems that most residents are in favour of the system, although they may not like the positioning of individual stops. The Municipality and SANParks have given written undertakings that the final position of the bus transit point in Wilderness will be at the N2 parking area - we have published their commitments in two of our

previous Newsletters. On the basis of our interaction with the various parties we are fully convinced that this is the intention, as it is in the interests of everyone concerned.

We want to reiterate that WRRRA has been working in the best interests of the residents in Wilderness and the business community. There have been numerous consultations with the business community, the Municipality, SANParks, the Consulting Engineers, the Contractors, the landscape designers, and we have received input from a number of individuals.

We want to draw your attention to the Municipal advertisement that appeared on page 30 of the George Herald of 26 June advising of the intention to turn Leila's Lane into a one-way street. Written, motivated objections have to be submitted by 25 July to the Planning Department of the Municipality. WRRRA will not be lodging an objection.

## **WRRRA Information meeting**

A number of our members suggested that a half-yearly information meeting might be beneficial, given the number of major projects with which WRRRA has been involved during the course of 2014. In response to this suggestion we have arranged a meeting to be held **at the Wilderness Resort Hotel on Monday 14 July at 17:00 ( 5 pm).**

At this meeting the WRRRA committee will provide brief updates on the role of the WRRRA, the George Integrated Public Transport Network Village upgrades, the Wilderness Improvement Program, and other initiatives. There will be ample opportunity for questions and discussion. The meeting proper will commence at 17:00 and coffee and wine will be available from 16:30. We look forward to a good turnout and an interesting discussion.

## **Further feedback on the Budget**

“The Budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed, lest Rome will become bankrupt. People must again learn to work instead of living on public assistance.” - **Cicero , 55 BC**

Most of you will have read the article in the George Herald featuring past WRRRA Chairperson Graham Sell's queries on the budget, and the Municipality's response to some of these. WRRRA committee members had further discussions with Councillor Leon van Wyk to understand some of the other issues that had come to the fore. These discussions reinforced our firm belief that the Municipal officials generally act responsibly when it comes to financial matters. However, the same cannot be said of the political appointees – a case in point is the retention of the cost of a vehicle for the Speaker, an issue on which there was a public outcry and which the officials advised against. However the Executive Mayor was unwilling to reverse the decision.

Other issues were considerably more complex, for example involving adjustments to employee pension provisions resulting from changes to the pension fund conditions (which were negotiated at national, not local level) over which the Municipality has no control. Other budgeted amounts which appeared to be excessive, for example the amount for Legal Costs, are provisions to be used only if needed. Reasons for this provision include the increasing number of legal challenges to planning decisions taken by the Municipality, the cost of defending which may run into millions of rands in certain instances. While the cost of these legal actions is recoverable, provision nevertheless needs to be made in order to ensure that the actions can proceed.

## **WIP – Ambassador Project**

The Village Ambassador Project is the cornerstone of the Wilderness Improvement Program. It seeks to provide a clean, safe and attractive Village environment

through the visible deployment of trained Ambassadors. We believe that this objective has largely been achieved, although we acknowledge that this is still a work in progress, as the Ambassadors still require training and further personal development. In this regard please bear in mind that another objective of this Project is the provision of regular work opportunities for folk from Wilderness Heights and Touwsrante, thus assisting in the process of community upliftment.

Pieter Naude, in thanking Les and Veronica Stephens for their role in this Project, put it like this:

“Your pioneer work with the Village Monitors, starting in December 2012, has enabled us to tackle the so-called “Car Guard Problem” and transform it into an opportunity to uplift people from our informal communities with training and mentoring. The pilot phase of the project was one of the most challenging that we have tackled and it served as a valuable training ground for us all, in particular the management of expectations. Your experience and sensitive understanding of the human resources aspect of such a project has enabled unemployed young men from the local communities to gain dignity, self-confidence and respect as they became reintegrated with society under your guidance.

These young men and the project will continue to evolve and grow, because of what you both put into it. We will always refer to your efforts as pioneer work that transformed a liability into an asset. “

## **Wilderness Heights update**

In our last Newsletter we stressed that we would be taking the Wilderness Heights informal settlement issue very seriously, and pressing the authorities for some satisfactory resolution. We are pleased that Ronald Board has agreed to be seconded to the WRRRA Committee to represent the Heights’ residents and to assist us with this difficult issue.

We raised the issue with the Executive Mayor at our meeting earlier in the year, and he promised us a full report. To date we have not received anything from his office.

Pieter Naude has had extensive correspondence with residents and local and provincial officials, including our local Ward Councillor. He has sent off a Memorandum of Our Understanding to the local and provincial government departments concerned, specifically requesting information regarding the scope and time frame of the feasibility study that PGWC is currently undertaking. We stress again that this is a pressing social issue with profound consequences for ratepayers and the informal community members themselves.

We will leave no stone unturned in seeking a satisfactory resolution to this issue, particularly in the light of Premier Zille’s commitment to solve the housing crisis using “new and improved strategies”:

“The concept of the Open Society is raised in the first clause of its Founding Provisions, and the rest of our constitution sets out how each individual’s rights will be protected and their opportunities expanded, so that they can improve their lives. Progress is not assumed; it has to be achieved. And it is only possible if we work together. That is why we sum up our approach in two words: Better Together.

Our Provincial Development Plan (PDP) extending to 2030, will coordinate the plans and actions of all governmental role-players, and ensure that the budgets of all organs of state are aligned to achieve maximum socio-economic impact. In other words, what government does must change people’s lives.

The current housing challenges we face across the country must not be politicised, either in government or on the ground. The worst blockages to housing delivery are the fights over control of these projects within communities themselves. We cannot tackle any of our challenges without a “whole-of-society” approach in which everyone steps up to the plate and accepts their responsibilities.

Finally, I have left the biggest challenge we face for last, which is building integrated and sustainable human settlements in the province. This is essential for improving social cohesion and redressing the legacies of the past.

What this means is that we cannot continue with ‘business-as-usual’ – we need new and improved strategies that harness households, the private sector and NGOs to place the Western Cape on an different housing trajectory, one which offers an improved living environment for everyone.

More importantly, we need change the current perception shared by the majority of South Africans that government is solely responsible for providing free housing to everyone, because it is clear with the available resources and the escalating need, this will take centuries.”

[Premier Helen Zille in her recent “State of the Province” address.]

## Tourism

We have made disappointingly little progress on the tourism front. We had no response from George’s Executive Mayor following our request for a further meeting to discuss the way forward and we brought this to the attention of the Premier and the Minister for Economic Development and Tourism.

STOP PRESS. Mayor Charles Standers has responded to the request from the Premier’s office and will be meeting representative of the WRRRA Committee on Friday 4 July.

We were able to engage with Minister Winde during his recent visit to Wilderness and we approached him for funding to research a tourism strategy for Wilderness. We have just heard that this funding has not been approved. Minister Winde has, however, scheduled a number of Stakeholder Engagement on Tourism and the Film Industry in Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Caledon, Malmesbury and Laingsburg – nothing in the Southern Cape! However, thanks to the persistence of our Chairperson, an additional meeting has been arranged **in George on 24 July**. WRRRA will be represented by Paul Nicholas.

If you would like details and an invitation to attend this Engagement, please contact [TAE.Partnership@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:TAE.Partnership@westerncape.gov.za) or [Viola.May@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Viola.May@westerncape.gov.za) .

## Other news

- **William John Burchell commemoration.** William John Burchell, famous explorer and naturalist, encamped in the shadows of George Peak during his travels through the Cape Colony in the months of September and October of 1814. Four local historical and heritage societies of the Southern Cape will be hosting a very special event on **19 September 2014** to celebrate the bicentenary of Burchell’s visit. For details email [Burchell2014@gmail.com](mailto:Burchell2014@gmail.com).
- **Police station parking area.** At the initiative of the Wilderness Hydro, permission is being sought to pave the parking area outside the Wilderness Police Station. Some of the old brick paving that was not re-used for the GIPTN infrastructure has been offered by HENRA, free of charge, including delivery. If any of you have any suggestions or offers of assistance for this community project, would you please contact **Siska de Kock** [siska@rgfp.co.za](mailto:siska@rgfp.co.za) 0827178073.
- **Incidents of crime.** You are asked to report **all** incidents of crime to the Wilderness Police

Station so that there is an accurate record of all such incidents. The resources provided to the Police Station are directly related to the number of **reported** incidents of crime, so it is in our interests to report all **attempted** breakins, theft (even where the stolen property is recovered), vandalism, etc.

- **Parking in the Village.** We would ask all our members to refrain from parking on the new sidewalks in the Village, and to **discourage others** from doing the same. We want to try and maintain a pedestrian-friendly Village, as well as ensuring that the newly-installed infrastructure is not damaged by vehicles parking where they shouldn't.
- **The value of the sms early warning system.** Some of you may not consider this an important benefit of belonging to WRRRA? However its value was emphasized when one of our members attended a meeting in George and was able to inform the members present of an impending Eskom power outage (having been notified via the WRRRA sms service). Everyone else was taken by surprise and they were most impressed that our members are notified of things such as this as a result of their WRRRA membership.