

Meeting with Mayor, Clr Charles Standers

We are pleased to report on a very successful meeting with our Mayor, Clr Charles Standers, which took place on 4 July in Wilderness. A number of issues were discussed, including the situation at Wilderness Heights, the lack of progress on the tourism front, and the Municipality's commitment to the Wilderness Improvement Program. It was agreed that:

- The Mayoral Committee would meet with the WRRRA Committee during the first week of August to discuss further outstanding issues (see report below).
- Representatives of the Municipality will visit the Wilderness Heights informal community shortly to establish lines of communication and assess the situation. This visit has already taken place.
- The Mayor will investigate further financial support for the Ambassador Project for the new financial year. A new Provincial Initiative involving the setting up of "safety kiosks" would be considered for Wilderness, to integrate with the current Ambassador Project.

WRRRA would submit a memorandum on the parking situation in the Village to the Mayor, outlining what had been done and what was still required. This has been done and we await further discussions in this regard.

- The Wilderness Improvement Program would be submitted to the Ward Committee for acceptance and subsequent incorporation into the overall plan for George.

The anticipated meeting with members of the Mayoral Committee took place on 4 August at the Wilderness Resort Hotel. Eighteen members of MAYCO attended the meeting at which Pieter Naude outlined the vision that WRRRA has for the Wilderness Improvement Program and highlighted a number of successful projects that have been undertaken with the support of the Mayor and the Municipality. This presentation was followed by a tour of the Village to view the effect of these projects. We believe that the personal contact established and the visible evidence of the constructive engagement policy of WRRRA has laid a firm foundation for further cooperation in the areas of Wilderness Heights, tourism, GIPTN and the Ambassador Project.

GIPTN

Now that the pedestrian and road infrastructure upgrade has largely been completed, we want to make a special appeal to all residents. We are all aware that there has been some loss of parking in George Road. However, additional parking has been created in the lane leading to the Hardware store, which includes two bays reserved for the disabled.

Please use the **free parking areas** provided in the Village, and don't necessarily park directly outside the place to which you are going.

There is the large parking area behind the Mini Market, which is rented and maintained by WRRRA via contributions from the business community. This can be accessed from the Milkwood Village entrance road and from the new entrance in Leila's Lane.

There is also another new free parking area just off George Road – take the lane on the corner down to the Western half of the SANParks parking area, for which consent use has been granted to WRRRA. This area contains 55 parking bays.

We would especially appeal to business owners to encourage their staff not to park directly outside their establishment – leave those parking bays for patrons and visitors to the Village. A short walk on the new pedestrian walkways provides an opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the Village and take in the ambiance

that makes Wilderness special.

The finalization of the pedestrian and road infrastructure upgrade project was discussed with all parties on 16 July. Everyone was very cooperative, and Jacques Quinot and Rowan Meissenheimer undertook that all road markings, signage and correctional work would be undertaken over the ensuing few weeks. Attention would also be paid to storm water issues and additional work would take place in Leila's Lane once the decision about a possible one-way system had been finalized. *Please be patient* – concerns have been noted and outstanding items will be attended to.

Go George bus service: The mayor has promised that the bus service between Wilderness and George will receive a high priority in the roll-out of the public transport network, *Go George*. The tragic murder of one of the chief taxi operator representatives has put back the proposed introduction of the service, and April 2015 is now the likely implementation date, although buses may be seen on the roads earlier as part of the driver-training program. This is a disappointing setback, although the benefits of the infrastructure upgrade are already evident.

Permanent bus terminus: Jacques Quinot has given us the assurance that SANParks have already appointed a project manager and a project team to oversee the process of moving the permanent bus terminus to the SANParks parking area at the N2. The George Municipality has also voted funds for the study phase of this project. So at this stage everything is looking very positive. However, we need to understand that this is an extended and complicated process, requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment and a possible land swap, with SANParks, the Municipality, Transnet and SANRAL all involved.

Wilderness Improvement Program

Some of you may have seen the stickers in the windows of many restaurants and businesses in the Village, announcing that these enterprises are **Proud Partners** in the WIP. This sign indicates that they are contributing financially to the costs of the WIP: most notably the Ambassadors Project, the rental and maintenance of the parking area behind the Mini Market, and the maintenance of the common garden areas.

We would encourage WRRRA members to support these enterprises – they are helping WRRRA to make Wilderness a cleaner, safer, friendlier and more attractive Village. If you are not sure if the particular establishment is a **Partner**, please enquire either from the establishment itself, or from WRRRA.

Our new MP, **Jaco Londt**, has managed to secure sponsorship for a bicycle for the Ambassador project. This will actually be a tricycle with a large carrier to allow the Ambassadors to collect the black bags from the various bins in the Village and to patrol the Village more effectively.

WRRRA Information meeting

On 7 July we had a mid-year Information meeting at the Wilderness Resort Hotel on Monday 7 July. There were approximately 50 members present and the evening was spent getting the latest information on the George Integrated Public Transport Network Village upgrades, the informal settlement dilemma at Wilderness Heights, the Wilderness Improvement Program, and other initiatives. The committee noted the comments made and suggestions put forward and will take the appropriate action.

Wilderness Heights update

Pieter Naude and Ronnie Board met with Shane Hindley (PGWC, on the right), Charles Lubbe (Acting Director - Human Settlements, George Municipality, on the left) and Thys de Beer (George Municipality) in order to get an update on the progress of the feasibility study into Erf 329 in Wilderness Heights. The WRRRA representatives expressed their desire to be part of the solution to a problem that is having a negative effect on all communities in the area. Further meetings are planned for early August once the feasibility study report has been received.

Working Breakfast with Municipal officials

The Wilderness Resort Hotel hosted a WRRRA working breakfast for invited Municipal officials on 5 August. These functions have been held at least once a year and have contributed significantly to the improved

relationships that WRRRA has built with the various Municipal Departments. It provided an opportunity for Harold Basson, the Director of Civil and Technical Services, to outline the Municipality's plans for Wilderness and the possible upgrade of Heights Road by Eden District Municipality – planned to commence in 2016. The Committee members were also able to engage with the various Department Heads regarding particular issues and concerns, and the officials were taken on a tour of the latest improvements that have been made to the Village.

- It was encouraging to hear that upgrading the electricity network is receiving attention, with work taking place in 7th and 8th Avenues, the installation of bundle conductors in areas where overhead lines are susceptible to damage by trees, the upgrading of the line along the N2, and the installation of closed fuses which are less affected by bird strikes. The theft of electrical cabling is an ongoing problem, and organized professional syndicates appear to be involved.
- It was brought to our attention that the Working for Water alien eradication program no longer falls under the George Municipality. The Municipality is busy with an information document on alien vegetation and the procedures that need to be followed to ensure their removal. In this regard the Constantia Kloof Conservancy was commended for the excellent work that they are doing to tackle the alien vegetation problem. If any organizations or members would like to the municipality to provide them with trees to plant on Arbour Day in September, please contact Radie Loubser at the Municipality (radie@george.org.za)
- Stiaan Carstens indicated that the much-awaited Spatial Development Plan for Wilderness has been prepared, but will only be released for public comment once the new National Regulations have been introduced, to ensure that the proposed SDP aligns with these.

Tourism

We received the following interesting comment from one of our members recently:

“It may be of benefit to us as ratepayers if you will publish in one of your newsletters the benefits that we as individual ratepayers receive from tourism.”

Wilderness has always been a premier tourist destination, although recent years have seen a steady decline as tourism promotion in the region has suffered serious neglect. WRRRA believes that tourism has at least the following benefits for the individual ratepayer/resident:

- Facilities and amenities (forests, lakes, beaches, National Parks, etc) are maintained to a higher standard and made more accessible to residents. Examples of this would be the Blue Flag beach, the boardwalk at the Pied Kingfisher Trail, the ablution facilities at Island Lake, the activities provided by Eden Adventures, etc.
- Small businesses, that provide services to residents, are sustainable because of the increased number of “feet” in the area. Examples would be The Spar, the numerous restaurants in the Village, DVD hire, professional services in the Village, etc.
- Various jobs are created through the tourism industry, which translates into a more stable, prosperous and positive community with fewer disruptions around issues of unemployment and service delivery, thus creating a safer environment for residents..
- Property prices are maintained because more people visit the area and are exposed to its beauty and attractions and see it as a desirable place in which to live or own a holiday property.

Paul Nicholas and Fran Anderson attended the provincial Stakeholder Engagement on Tourism and the Film Industry in George on 24 July. As a follow-up to this meeting the Municipality have agreed to get all the role-players together to look at a cooperative marketing strategy for George, and to meet with WRRRA representatives to look specifically at the needs of Wilderness.

Other news

- A while back WRRRA promoted the use of the crime-reporting web-site Turn-it-Around. It appears that this service is no longer operational.
- We would appeal to all our members not to put out black rubbish bags the night before the collection is due. This practice encourages vagrants to scavenge the bags and allows animals to open them and scatter their contents. Please try and impress this habit on your neighbours as well. Also ensure that

all wine boxes are cut open and the contents drained – otherwise these are targeted for their leftover contents.

- ❑ Please do not support or encourage vagrants or beggars in the Village. Rather contribute to local charitable organizations that seek to provide relief to those in genuine need.
- ❑ Following concerns from some of our members we contacted SANRAL regarding the need for additional signage on the N2 at the Wilderness East circle. We are pleased to report that new signs with greater visibility will be going up shortly.
- ❑ The refuse bins in the Village have now all been repaired and are working effectively.
- ❑ The N2 entrance to Ebb and Flow should be open by the time you receive this newsletter.
- ❑ A new SANParks Manager, Sandra Taljaard, has been appointed and starts on 1 September.

Welcome to all our new WRRRA members. Our membership currently stands at 323, the highest since 2011