

Newsletter 2009 August

We received a number of phone calls and emails regarding July rates accounts that show an increase in excess of 14% for Wilderness and 23% for Wilderness Heights. This is because the Municipality have withdrawn our additional 5% and 10% respective rebates, prior to adding an across-the-board 9% inflationary increase. We can assure members that we are continuing our efforts to have an additional rebate reinstated.

To this end the Executive Mayor, Flip De Swardt and DA Member of Parliament for George, Marius Swart, accepted our invitation to attend this month's committee meeting to discuss our growing concerns.

Most of the problems stem from last year's flawed revaluation process, where 250 homes were so significantly undervalued that the remainder of our community was saddled with an average 40% rates increase. The average for George last year was 7,5%. We also pointed out that their withdrawal, this year, of our additional 5% rebate was based on flawed legal opinion, given in response to an incorrectly phrased question posed by municipal officials. This error has resulted in a rates burden increase of over 14% for Wilderness in comparison to the 9% for George . They were made to understand that we do not believe that this is in any way a fair and equitable situation.

The Committee also stated that the increase in electricity tariffs should not have included a full 31.5% hike on the previous municipal consumer price, as this provides them with not only the Eskom transfer price increase of 31.5%, but also an increased profit of 31,5% for themselves. We believe that the municipal portion of electricity tariffs should only have increased by a normal inflationary rate, and not by the extortionate 31,5% required by Eskom.

It was also pointed out that, while we appreciate the need for water restrictions to be in place and strictly enforced, Wilderness should not also be subjected to proposed punitive water tariffs. These punitive tariffs are designed to deter water usage from the George Dam when the level falls below 25% capacity. As all our water at the moment is drawn from the Touw River, we have stressed that such punitive tariffs would not be a deterrent but merely another revenue collection exercise from Wilderness, as our consumption is only supplemented from the George Dam during peak holiday periods.

Capital contributions towards sewerage reticulation, and external loan applications relating to capital projects where private enterprise initiatives are offered, were also questioned. Such loans will incur interest of around 11.9% over 20 years – all repayments coming from taxpayers' money. Some of our funds also go towards a dysfunctional tourism department, where Wilderness has no representation, and does not appear to form part of any plans.

The Executive Mayor and his team of senior municipal officials will attend a further meeting with us shortly to provide answers to the issues raised.

Galvanised by a recent resurvey of land by the Department of Transport relating to the 1979 proclamation of an N2 bypass though the Island Lake vlei area, we have requested various Government departments to now de-proclaim such a bypass, citing the area as being a protected wetland under the international Ramsar agreement.

We will be keeping a close eye on this situation and will keep members updated.

As a result of last month's item on domestic recycling, Desiré Zwahlen of Pam Golding has arranged for blue bags to be distributed to all non-restaurant businesses in the village, so that office paper can be usefully recycled. Thanks Desiré. Southern Cape Recycling have an agent in Wilderness. If you have queries or need more blue bags, please contact Awie on 072 234 2953.

Residents are reminded that it is against a municipal by-law to garden, lay stones or plant poles or trees on pavements or in other areas where pedestrians will be impeded. A minimum of 1 metre along the street must be kept open as a walkway. Beautification is encouraged, but within legal limits.