

MAY 2014

GIPTN UPDATE

You will have seen that construction work on the new road and pedestrian infrastructure in the Village is forging ahead. WRRRA has an excellent relationship with the Consulting Engineer, William van der Poll (SMEC), the Municipal representative in charge of the project, Lionel Daniels, and the appointed Contractors (HENRA).

We attended their site meeting on 24 April and are pleased to report that the following was agreed:

- A local landscaper, Corrine Roff (The Chelsea Gardener), has submitted proposals for the landscaping for this project. Corrine has assisted WRRRA on various projects in the past, and we are very encouraged that local talent and local labour might be used for this important project.
- The new island will be planted out with indigenous plants in order to make it an attractive feature.
- The dilapidated post-and-rail fence will be repaired as part of the project.
- A number of indigenous trees will be planted on the south side of George Road as well as in front of the Telkom facility next to the Old Post Office building.
- The area adjacent to the pedestrian walkways will be landscaped and planted and existing vegetation trimmed.
- An adjustment to the storm water drainage in the lane leading to the Hardware Store will give **an additional four much-needed parking bays**.
- A commitment was given to finalizing access to the N2 SANParks parking area, subject to the agreement of SANParks (see article below). The cost of this would be covered by the GIPTN project.

As part of the road and pedestrian upgrades it is proposed that Leila's Lane will become a one-way street, up from the intersection as far as the rear entrance to the Hotel. The process so far in this regard has been as follows. The addition of a pavement outside Pomodoro's (to make this area safer for pedestrians) and the realignment of the kerb around the historic milkwood on the corner meant that the Engineers approached WRRRA and said that the road width would now be insufficient for two-way traffic. Did we in principle oppose one-way traffic? WRRRA's response was that the "master plan" for Wilderness Village, drawn up some years back by Peta Taljaard, suggested this change, so in principle we were not opposed to this change.

The Municipality indicated that they would need to advertise this change for comment, and this will take place shortly. If you want to comment, please use this process **but also copy WRRRA** so that we have an idea of the number of comments and the issues raised.

Working together achieves more

In addition to meetings with the GIPTN Contractors and the Municipality, we had two very constructive meetings with SANParks representatives on 24 and 25 April at which the use of the SANParks N2 parking area was discussed. It has been agreed in principle that George Municipality will take over the western half of the parking area as an interim measure, and that a short section of road will be constructed to link the existing paved roadway from George Road to the parking area.

The letter of authorization from SANParks should be received by the middle of May. This will provide **an additional 55 parking bays** within easy walking distance of the Village and allow the construction of the link road to proceed.

We also discussed the creation of the permanent bus terminus on the same site. Jill Bunding-Venter, the General Manager of the Garden Route National Park (Wilderness, Knysna and Tsitsikamma), made it clear that this is something that SANParks fully supports as it is included in their recent strategic planning document for the Park. This area will become the Western Gateway to the Park and they are therefore fully committed to implementing the bus terminus. It was understood by all parties (SANParks, George Municipality, WRRRA) that a final legal agreement (which might involve land swap, changes to the Park boundary, or consent use) may

take years, but it is anticipated that a Memorandum of Understanding may be signed much sooner, allowing the necessary planning process to start and developments to go ahead.

It was encouraging to be informed that SANRAL have agreed to upgrade the entrance and exit point on the N2, similar to the upgrade undertaken at the Wilderness entrance, subject to the project for the new terminus going ahead.

SANParks have also agreed to continue with their sponsorship of the Ambassador uniforms, and they have offered to include the Ambassadors in any future security guard training that SANParks undertakes in the area.

We believe that the progress made on this project, and the spirit in which discussions have taken place, proves once again the value of working together via constructive engagement.

Wilderness Heights

Most of you will be aware of the ongoing problem with informal settlement on erf 329 at Wilderness Heights. Apart from the social problems within this community, which affects neighbouring communities, the conditions under which these folk live are appalling. There has also been a serious devaluation of the adjacent properties, to the extent that the owners are unable to sell or even to utilize these for tourism purposes.

We have taken up this complex issue with Leon van Wyk. He has pointed out that the Western Cape Government Department of Public Works own erf 329, and “the present Government inherited an informal settlement that was allowed to develop in the 1990s.” He further indicated that the WCPG has given an undertaking to the George Municipality that they will conduct a feasibility study on the site’s viability. “Only once this study is completed can the options be considered.”

Pieter Naude responded: “The Heights issue is beyond being a political irritation at national, provincial and local government level, due to the negative and damning effect it has on the area and its people. The problem will have to be tackled with the political will that will demand a satisfactory outcome within 12 months, not years.” He expressed concern about the “human degradation and value destruction in Heights that is there for all to see.” On behalf of WRRRA he appealed to the Municipality to “take the problem in hand and run with it until it is resolved.”

You can be assured that WRRRA will not let this issue rest, and we will continue to press for a reasonable solution which takes account of the needs of **all** residents.

Meeting with MEC Alan Winde

Pieter Naude, Paul Nicholas and Phillip Parsons had a meeting with the MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Alan Winde, on 1 May. At this meeting Pieter emphasized the need for a coordinated tourism strategy that takes into account the unique environment of Wilderness. Minister Winde was also shown the progress made in terms of the Wilderness Improvement Program and the positive impact that the Ambassador project had made.

Mr Winde invited WRRRA to participate in the discussions taking place between the Municipalities in the region to develop a coordinated economic and tourism strategy for the region as a whole. We indicated that Paul Nicholas would represent WRRRA on this forum. In addition to this Minister Winde indicated that he would give serious consideration to assisting WRRRA to research the current state of tourism in Wilderness and the development of local tourism strategy for Wilderness itself. WRRRA has submitted two proposals in this regard, and we now await feedback from the Minister’s office.

Other news

- It was encouraging to see a report in the George Herald of 1 May that Transnet were busy clearing sections of the line in George. Neville Ewing reported that once this is completed they will be starting on the line through Wilderness. This should be early in June. This cleanup is much needed, as the rail reserve in Wilderness is totally neglected and in many areas overgrown with alien vegetation.
- WRRRA is looking at obtaining wi-fi coverage for the Village as well as installing a solar-powered cell-phone charging station. We are also investigating an interesting free social media platform (“MyHood”) that would enhance communication amongst residents.