

The Saxonwold and Parkwood Residents Association ("SAPRA")

Annual General Meeting - 10 November 2021

Chairman's Report

Once again, I must report that it has been an "interesting" year and the circumstances on which I reported last year have not changed much. COVID19, Lockdowns, Service Delivery failures - as we are wont to say in South Africa - it's been challenging. However, SAPRA continues to operate, so let me share a few positives that we had during the year under review. I believe it is important to emphasise the positives.

Membership

	June 2020	June 2021	Increase	Latest (Oct 2021)
Members	204	279	36,8%	273
Pensioners	35	50	42,9%	48
Corporates	2	3	50,0%	4
Family Members	22	29	31,8%	26
Total Subscription Payers	241	332	37,8%	325

Total levies received during the financial year amount to R207 195 (2020: R139 789) which represented an increase of 48,2%.

There were 2 310 visits to the SAPRA website during the year which was an increase of 34% over the previous year.

This big improvement in membership and interest in SAPRA was due partly to a membership drive which took place during the year and a decision to actively market the SAPRA brand. There is a lot that SAPRA does that wasn't well known in the past. In addition, the new policy of restricting some services only to fully paid up members has, we believe, been successful.

Town Planning

We are beginning to understand the full ghastly implications of the Nodal Review as proposed new developments are being revealed. Unfortunately, the Nodal Review is seriously deficient in its consideration of its wider impact on service delivery, bulk services and people orientated requirements such as schools and open spaces.

In particular we were during the year, given notice that a residential development of six storeys and 132 residential units, on the corner of Oxford and Worcester Road was passed by the City, notwithstanding an objection lodged by SAPRA. After representations by SAPRA the City agreed to reinstate our objection and to hold a tribunal meeting. Local residents were particularly concerned about this as it is very different to the character of the buildings and community surrounding it. SAPRA held a public meeting for the community to voice their concerns, which it did. Partly as a consequence, our town planning consultant resigned his position as he felt he was unable to represent the interests of the community as expressed by SAPRA. A new consultant, Mr Steve Bayliss, has been appointed as the new town planning consultant and we welcome that appointment.

The tribunal meeting for this development was duly held and we are awaiting its decision. We are unhappy about the constitution of this tribunal and it is our intention to pursue this matter if our concerns and objection are set aside.

It is of great concern to SAPRA that the City has elected to approve applications for development, such as the above, notwithstanding its admitted acceptance that the capacity of bulk engineering services is not able to cope with the existing demands, let alone new extensive developments. SAPRA will continue to argue that all bulk services must be improved to meet the needs of proposed developments in advance of the commencement of any developments and if that cannot be made, no developments should be approved. The City currently imposes a duty of R70 000 per new residential unit on the developer to pay for the upgrade of bulk services. It is SAPRA's contention that this money must be earmarked specifically to upgrade the services for the relevant area concerned and we will continue to argue the case accordingly.

Heritage

Mila Ravid is our 'go-to' heritage architect who provides services to the community on a pro bono basis in giving advice to residents on the way to be compliant with the heritage legislation. Mila is hugely supportive of our community and has been very helpful in discussions about town planning issues.

Security

The initiation of lock-down in March last year was very beneficial for the Rosebank Police precinct as there was a very significant reduction in crime. However, since about July 2021 we have started seeing a resumption of a more normal crime pattern off a very low base. As winter ends and leading up to Christmas there is typically a cyclical upswing in crime and we are seeing this again this year.

The specific crimes concerning residents are residential crimes and of most concern, contact crimes. (House robbery/invasion, hijacking and street robbery). Statistics for burglary of residential premises (no contact with the criminals) are low but have increased over the last month. There has been a disturbing increase in home invasions and a number of these have occurred in the SAPRA area.

Violent criminals who commit contact crimes tend to be prolific and will generally continue until they are caught often after committing dozens of crimes. The number of these types of criminals is quite low

and it is important to apprehend or disrupt the criminal gangs operating in our area. The CPF takes a specific interest in these crimes as they are very destructive to our community.

The Rosebank precinct is fortunate to have a strong presence of well-resourced patrolling security companies (CAP, Beagle, ADT and 24/7). There is very good and constructive collaboration between the police, the CPF and the security companies. These security companies also have their own investigative capabilities and assist the police to track down criminals. The arrest and initiation of the prosecution of criminals remains the responsibility of the police.

Over the last couple of years Vumatel has been installing a high-definition fibre backbone closed circuit television (CCTV) infrastructure into our suburbs and neighbouring suburbs. This is still an ongoing exercise. The security companies have access to this footage, and this is supplemented by extremely sophisticated and developing artificial intelligence (AI) software to analyse this data. The software supports number plate recognition and facial recognition as well as analysing behaviour and is increasingly becoming a very powerful tool in crime prevention and investigation. Although there are some civil liberties concerns about this powerful technology it has enormous potential for crime prevention and its reduction.

Parks - Zoo Lake

Erosion project

During the year SAPRA helped The Zoo Lake Users Committee with a financial contribution toward the Erosion project. We are very grateful to Fran Haslam and her ZLUC team for all the work that is being done to rehabilitate our very special Zoo Lake Park.

Eco-fencing on the East side of the lake was completed and planting on the North and West Sides commenced. The North side has been completed and the planting of the West side of the lake is now nearly complete. This, with the help of the litter pickers and donations of plants from the community has enabled the ZLUC to achieve its goal. The only section that still needs to be planted is where the selfie frame and recycled furniture have been installed. The necessary paving on the West side has recently been completed.

The ZLUC is waiting for a quote for the eco-fencing on the West side. The amount needed to complete this is approximately R80,000.

Zoo Lake Play Park

The New Dawn Rotary Club have agreed to give the ZLUC a donation of R10 000 to assist with renewing the matting and cleaning up around the jungle gym and swings. The larger Play Park project will have to wait until further funding can be generated.

Flood protection

The ZLUC met with Maccaferri Engineering to discuss the proposal to complete the eroded area on the South East side of the lake. It was agreed that the area will be divided into three phases which will

incorporate a product called Geocell. This is a type of plastic hessian with holes for planting plants and to hold the soil. Soil, compost, sand, stones and gabion baskets will be necessary to help build up the area.

The ZLUC also met with SRK Engineering to discuss their proposal for the West side of the lake. Their proposal is to build berms at the Ennis and Roscommon Road entrances to the park. That should help slow down the high volume of water coming down from Parkview after a flash flood. Linda Spies, an engineer from SRK engineering and a resident in SAPRA land has offered to project manage the digging and placing of the berms. ZLUC are very grateful for the support and help of David (“Woody”) Widdop who, as a civil engineer, is able to provide very valuable guidance to the team.

Recycling Project

The ZLUC has agreed with the City to introduce a waste recycling and anti-litter project called “Polyco Million+” and has contracted with a company called [dot]GOOD to run it. In terms of this agreement, [dot]GOOD have created a recycling system for Zoo Lake. Central to this is a waste sorter, a depot and two sets of locked recycling bins. Messaging on the depot and the bins explain that recycling is the equivalent of a donation - encouraging park users to both support Zoo Lake and to deal responsibly with their litter.

The plan is for the City’s contacted litter-pickers to collect and deliver the waste to the depot (as in the past). This waste will then be sorted to extract recyclables which will then be purchased from ZLUC. The proceeds will go towards park upgrades.

- To kick-start the programme, [dot]GOOD have provided:
- 10 benches made from recycled plastic.
- 10 picnic sets made from recycled plastic.
- Zoo Lake attraction photo frame (situated on the West side of the Lake).
- The repair of five existing benches.

This company will also deploy promoters on key days to encourage users of the park to recycle their waste in a responsible manner. This they will do by providing a refuse bag and a leaflet with information on recyclables and Million +, and prizes to be won. We all hope that this initiative will help change habits and customs of the users of the park to deal responsibly with their litter.

Parks - Fearnhead Park

This park has been kept closed for most of the year, due to the lockdown and the fact that it was not regarded as an exercise park. Notwithstanding this, the park has continued to be cleaned and mowed on a regular basis. Our thanks to Tracy Davies for her constant monitoring and motivating the work that is necessary.

Thanks too to Tracy, ably supported by Ilan Sparrius, for the organisation and work involved in holding regular blood donation events at the next-door Tennis Club - an important initiative to give back to the greater community whilst at the same time bringing our community together.

Displaced People

Unfortunately, the incidence of displaced people has increased substantially during lockdown and also as a consequence of our poor economic circumstances with increased joblessness. The evidence of this is clear in our parks and shopping precincts, such as the Parkwood Strip. We are constantly faced with the challenge of moving these displaced people whilst trying to be as sensitive to peoples rights as is possible. This is a problem that is common throughout South Africa, and indeed, the world, and there are no easy solutions. We have been involved in discussion to clarify the rights and obligations that our laws provide and it is clear that the City has not accepted its full responsibility to provide shelter in accordance with those laws. A number of civil society organisations are attempting to find acceptable solutions and we will be involved as much as we can, in those solutions. By employing staff for our Green Team does helps in its small way.

Special Projects

After the year end we had a very successful programme to repaint all the street names in the suburbs and we have had some very pleasing feedback on that programme from our residents. This project involved 703 signs on 53 streets and 131 intersections. Our thanks to Ilan who managed this whole project and was outstanding in her ability to get it done, in just over a month and under budget. Ilan was helped by six volunteers from the community and we received a number of donations from residents to help with the finances. To all of those involved, we express our thanks.

I will put Ilan's final detailed report onto the website for members to view.

I am sure you will all agree that the new names look professional and add to the SAPRA land experience.

Committee

During the year our previous secretary, Caryn, resigned due to the demands of her growing family. Thank you, Caryn, for all your hard work and dedication that you have given to our community over the past five years. I am glad to say that Caryn has elected to remain on our Committee and contributes to its institutional memory.

We are, however, very fortunate in having been able to appoint Marcelle Ravid as Caryn's replacement. For those of you who do not know, Marcelle was our former Ward Councillor and accordingly has great institutional knowledge of both the City and SAPRA land. We wish her well.

Costa Qually, our SAPRA Security Committee member for a number of years and Rosebank Police CPF chairman, resigned when he moved from the area. He also resigned as the Rosebank CPF chairman.

Costa was always available to help with matters such as SAPRA's constitution and our regulatory and legal obligations. Thanks Costa, we will miss you.

Costa has been replaced both on our committee and as chairman of the Rosebank CPF, by Dr. Bruce Young. Bruce is both an academic and a practicing Chemical Engineer and his knowledge, wisdom and enthusiasm is very welcome, representing our community both at SAPRA and the Community Policing Forum. I can attest to Bruce's amazing enthusiasm having witnessed him in action - he is a veritable dynamo!

I have also to report that Kelly Redman resigned during the year due to pressures from work. Thank you, Kelly, for your all your support of SAPRA.

Lloyd de Bruin who was a Committee member involved in promoting the SAPRA brand and also was an important conduit between SAPRA and CAP private security company, also tended his resignation due to work demands. Thank you, Lloyd, for your contribution to our community. I am pleased to mention that Lloyd has joined the Rosebank Police CPF to help Bruce with his work at the CPF and to provide his valuable connection with the private security companies.

I am also very pleased to also welcome Ilan Sparrius to our committee. Ilan is an Industrial Engineer and has great experience in project management, management consulting and technology implementation. As mentioned previously, Ilan managed and ran our street name painting project.

I would specifically also like to thank Malcolm Jewell for running and protecting our finances. Money is the important oil that lubricates the workings of our Association and allows us to make a meaningful contribution to our community. His care and careful husbanding of our resources ensures that we can continue to provide that contribution. Thanks too to his wife, Tamsin for arranging and supervising the audit of our books.

Contributions

The Annual General Meeting is the time to review the subscription that are paid by members. Our Committee has discussed this in some detail and one argument is that as we have huge demands on our finances, we should make sure our subs are increased at least in line with inflation.

However, the Committee decided that, given the seriously difficult times that we have all encountered in the past nineteen months and to recognise that some of our members are really battling to stay afloat, now is not the time to increase anything if at all possible. We argued that it is probably better for us to increase our membership penetration within the two suburbs than to increase the burden that is carried by the few. After all, our membership is only at about 13% of the possible membership within the suburbs, and an increase in that percentage would be a far more effective way of increasing our income.

Accordingly, we have agreed that the subscriptions be left unchanged for the year ahead.

However, to increase our penetration could I suggest to all, that you encourage your neighbours and residents, friends and relations to come on board and help the common good by subscribing to, and getting involved in SAPRA.

State of the Suburbs

Finally, I think it is important to discuss the serious state of service delivery in our City. Standards of service delivery have fallen dramatically over the past year, whilst the amount demanded by the City in rates and taxes has increased inexorably to be the highest in the country. This poor service delivery is partly due to Covid and the lockdown during which City employees were instructed to remain at home.

However, I believe that it is a much deeper problem than that. To a large extent, and possibly due to cadre deployment, we find that much of the problem is a direct result of a basic incompetence in the management of the City. People have been put in managerial positions with very little managerial competence or ability. That is not fair to them or to us. Furthermore, normal service delivery tasks are often outsourced to the private sector but to companies that appear to have little or no knowledge, skill or understanding of the work for which they are handsomely paid.

We are told repeatedly that the City doesn't have the money to fulfill its most basic duty of service delivery and that if the community requires clean streets and pavements, storm water drains that are not blocked, road repairs etc., the community must do this itself. For example, we have recently been requested to provide security services to Joburg Power to monitor and look after their assets, such as transformers, substations etc.. This must all be done at our expense.

Now SAPRA has a total budget of about R200 000 a year and one paid secretary - all other workers are volunteers and have to work off a very limited budget. In contrast, I have estimated that the total rates and taxes income that is paid to the City by our residents amounts to, about R200 million a year. That is, without doubt, unfair.

The question that I am often asked is what we can do about these appalling circumstances. A rates boycott is often suggested, but quite frankly this would not work. For one, it is simply against the law (which would mean that the City has all the might of the justice establishment to impose its will on its residents) but it also has the power to disconnect water and electricity supply from those in default. It is like taking a knife to a gunfight.

Instead, I have been involved in various discussions that have been taking place regarding the devolution of responsibilities to local communities, or enclaves, and ideas of how this could work. On the one hand this might result in the work actually being done, either by the residents themselves or by engaging contractors. In either case, who would take responsibility for the work that is done - what happens if it is done badly and creates further problems. Who would check the contractor and what guarantees would be provided? We would need to explore the legalities of all of this, especially if we consider that the work is probably being done on property owned by the City.

Furthermore, if a contractor is employed, who gets to pay the bill?. If it is to be an organisation, such as SAPRA, there would have to be some source of annuity income. An idea that is mooted, it to create a Special Rating Area (“SRA”) where the City would collect additional rates from a particular area and pass that money on to the organisation that has accepted some of the work responsibilities. I am a bit dubious about this as I am not sure that the residents have the capacity to pay such additional rates or even whether it is morally correct to asked them to do so. Any such solution would mean that we would need to negotiate with the City for some of the income that it receives from our residents.

If this were to happen, it would inevitably lead to a multiplicity of new structures each of which effectively mimic a small municipality. Perhaps this is an idea that could possibly work where service delivery is devolved to local communities Here we are talking about an area such as our Region B or even, perhaps, to the Ward level. All of which would be within the existing structures of the City. However, for this to work, such devolvement would need to accountable to its community and to be transparent For example, each would have to have its own budget with income from the community on the one hand, and expenditure incurred in service delivery, on the other. Clearly for this to be acceptable, the community would have to accept that part of its income would be used to subsidise poorer communities - I have no problem with that provided it is done in a transparent manner, so that at least we know that the local needs are being adequately met.

This is not so far fetched as one such idea has been mooted for an enclave in Eastern Pretoria. SAPRA will be watching these developments closely.

Whatever happens, local communities will have to become more involved in the delivery of urban services. If we want to have clean, well-maintained suburbs, we will have to get involved. For that reason, we would appeal to the SAPRA community to volunteer their services one way or another. There are many ways in which residents could do this.

Finally, I want to say that I have been working at SAPRA for eight years now, and Fran and I have got to the stage where we would like to retire to some haven away from it all. It is time to get some new blood into SAPRA and move us old fellows on.

W.J. Haslam
10 November 2021