



Hermanus Ratepayers Association Annual Report for 2022

First and foremost, we believe in good governance and clean administration — Brian Wridgway

In preparing my thoughts for this report I was reminded of the song by Frank Sinatra which begins with the words “When I was seventeen it was a very good year...” and continued to chronicle the significant events in his life. I can still hear the haunting refrain in my head.

I wish I could say, like Frank, that 2022 was a very good year but that would not be entirely true. It was in fact a very challenging year. It was a year in which the HRA had to come to terms with a new way of interacting with the Overstrand Municipality. I anticipate that 2023 will be no less challenging and we are going to need your continued support.

Yet it was not all doom and gloom. The new members of the EXCO brought with them with them sorely needed skills and

enthusiasm and we learned new ways of getting the message about issues in Hermanus across to you and the wider community.



Brian Wridgway, HRA Chair

We will continue with these efforts in making the interaction with us more user friendly and seamless. Here then a reflection on 2022.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

The EXCO

At last year's AGM I spoke about the need for more support in managing the day to day affairs of the HRA and called for volunteers within our membership to come on board. Though that call went unanswered at first, help did come when we were fortunate to welcome Anne Stern and Catherine Bruce as new members. Both Anne and Catherine have made valuable contributions in their respective capacities of legal advisor and secretary, and we look forward to working with them in the year ahead.

Fernkloof Nature Reserve

We are delighted that at last a co-management agreement has been signed between Hermanus Botanical Society and the OM. Many of you are members of both our organisations and we are proud of the co-operation and mutual support which we enjoy. The decision to move the staff of the Environmental Department out of the HBS buildings along with their vehicles and other paraphernalia is also welcomed.

Finances

Our financial standing is healthy, and although Expenses exceeded Income for the year there was sound decision making, as well as a few once off items unlikely to be repeated in the current year. Please see the Annual Financial Statements in the accompanying report.

Our tax affairs are up to date courtesy of Cypress Consulting, who have also conducted the independent review of our financial position and arrangements. As part of our review of the HRA Constitution we have defined a set of requirements regarding financial control which provide safeguards to both the HRA and the custodian/s of the bank accounts.

The HRA Constitution

With the assistance of Michael Bourne and Bob Stanway, Anne Stern has undertaken a thorough review of the Constitution. The amendments bring it into line with requirements stipulated by legislation as well as providing indemnities for EXCO members in a variety of contexts. I am pleased to be able to present it to you for your consideration and approval at the AGM. The copy is available on the Ratepayers website

Communication

With the expert and enthusiastic support of Anna Weideman our website (<https://www.ratepayers.co.za/>) was given an overhaul and is now more accessible and up to date. Gone are the days of handwritten forms and laborious data capture: new members can now join online. In the next few months we will be making more improvements as we move to an even more user-friendly platform. We have also added WhatsApp as one of the channels of communication. I have made a promise not to bombard you with WhatsApp messages and have stuck to that. It will be used sparingly and only when there are urgent matters of which to inform you.

THE LOWLIGHTS

Ward Committees (WC)

I have written in the quarterly reports about the dysfunctional WC system, so I do not need to go into minute detail about it now. The problem is that the intention of the legislation is for the WC to function as the primary vehicle through which the public interact with the municipality. The Municipal Systems Act defines a Municipality as consisting of three components namely Council, Administration and Public Representatives (read Ward Committees). Since the WC has largely been rendered ineffective by executive action the public component is compromised.

During the term of the previous Council I enjoyed a relationship with the Mayor and the Municipal Manager based on pragmatism and mutual self-interest. If there was a hot button which needed to be pushed both individuals were accessible. I was careful not to abuse the relative ease with which I could get to see them to deal with topical issues. This is no longer the case.

The mantra coming from the OM is that if there are issues which need attention then call your Ward Councillor, log a call with the call centre or speak to your WC representative. The problem is that for the greater part of the year neither the WC nor the system for reporting problems has been working. To her credit, though, our Ward Councillor does attempt to deal with the many issues referred to her. Strong words have been spoken by the Municipal Manager regarding the fact that neither our Ward Councillor nor members of the public may direct a request or an instruction to a member of the administration. One understands that there has to be an administrative chain of command and a sequence of logical steps which ensure service delivery. These are designed to streamline the functioning of the Municipality. However, when links in the chain are broken. the

whole system collapses. For this reason I have referred the issue of Ward Committees to the Western Cape Provincial Department of Local Government for assistance.

I have attempted to understand this new arrangement, but it does mean that communication is more challenging. We need to resolve the situation, where inflexibility denies access — some issues demand speedy attention, as well as urgent correction. Measured against the criteria of accessibility and transparency, not to speak of accountability, upon which modern societies are meant to operate, the HRA EXCO believes that the current arrangement must change.

Our constitution speaks to the imperative that the HRA should work in cooperation with the Municipality and that we are a body which represents the interests of our members. Based on the fact that I have challenged decisions made and actions taken there is currently an adversarial relationship between me, the Mayor and Municipal Manager. This is not in the interest of any of the parties and some serious work will have to be done to fix it. The video recoding of the meeting about the future of the Hermanus Country Market held on 6 February is emblematic of the challenges we face.

Fernkloof Nature Reserve (FNR)

Although mentioned in the 'Highlights' the situation at FNR is actually quite dire. After more than a decade of effort there is still no Management Plan for FNR. The Fernkloof Advisory Board is reported to be dysfunctional, and a walk on some of the paths in the reserve will illustrate the fact that maintenance and upkeep can improve. The team of experts promised by the Mayor in her Inauguration speech is yet to materialise, and FNR is the worse off for it.

A further unwelcome phenomenon has been the number of attacks on visitors to the reserve. I wish that I could tell you that the measures taken by the OM have been effective in preventing further occurrences, but I can't. A request from the Ward 3 committee for an emergency meeting after the first incident was flatly refused. The reputation and considerable tourism value of FNR are at risk unless effective measures are taken to guarantee that visitors are safe.

Hermanus Country Market

Like many issues in Hermanus the history of the Market is an interesting one going back more than ten years. It is the chronicle of an individual with a vision persevering against many obstacles to achieve it. It began under a Gazebo at Fernkloof Nature Reserve and has morphed into the biggest weekend attraction in town. No wonder then that more

than 600 people turned up at a meeting at the Municipal Auditorium on the 6th February to discuss its future. Following an opening by Municipal Manager Dean O'Neill, a statement from Mayor Rabie and a comprehensive timeline delivered by Anja Fourie the meeting got down to business. You can view the entire proceedings via a link on the Hermanus Country Market FaceBook page.

The good news is that good sense has prevailed. The Market will remain open for the time being and the three protagonists have agreed on an urgent programme of consultation and negotiation to agree on the terms of a lease.

Inevitably the question of the route of the planned bypass was raised as an existential threat to the Market. On behalf of the HRA, I once again requested the Mayor to rescind the 2019 letter from the OM giving its support.

Although good sense appears to have won the day it is sad that this issue has dragged on for so many years when it could have been resolved a long time ago.

IN CONCLUSION

I have been asked by colleagues to list the HRA's achievements over the last number of years to encourage you to retain your membership and recruit new members to the association. I'm reluctant to do that somehow. I have never been a marketeer or a pushy promoter because I've always believed in the "soft sell". Nonetheless, I do wish to remind you what I believe the HRA stands for and what is worth fighting for. As I said at the beginning, it may be an increasingly challenging one, but it is a worthwhile engagement.

Our values

- First and foremost, we believe in good governance and clean administration.
- We value transparency and accountability and sensible stewardship of the town's resources.
- We value the essential historical character of HERMANUS and will defend its preservation.
- We value the Fernkloof Nature Reserve and what it represents as an essential part of Hermanus.
- We oppose rampant development and the over-densification of our suburbs.
- We subscribe to openness and transparency in representing the interests of our members.

Our track record

- ✓ We have a track record of involvement in current affairs in Hermanus often leading to interventions promoting the interests of our members:
 - Preservation of and support for Fernkloof Nature Reserve
 - Opposition to the planned Bypass
 - Participation in developing a Social Compact for housing in Zwelihle
- ✓ We routinely examine and comment on Town Planning issues which may impact on the preservation of the character of the town.
- ✓ Through the Ward Committee system we are responsible for identifying issues for inclusion on the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and motivating their inclusion and execution.
- ✓ We do an analysis of the annual budget and make comments and recommendations to Council.
- ✓ We are consulted and give comment on proposed municipal legislation such as by-laws.
- ✓ We attend Council meetings from time to time and comment on the substance and process.
- ✓ When necessary (frequently) we correspond with members of Council and Administration on a range of issues which affect the quality of life of the people of Hermanus.
- ✓ We refer issues brought to us by members regarding service delivery to relevant authorities.

What we ask in return is your continued support.



Brian Wridgway and the EXCO