

## MAKANA'S FESTIVAL MONTH

### A Report from the Grahamstown Resident's Association

**Well Done Makana:** Understandably, “normal” Grahamstown life goes into suspension before and over the Festival period, and this (mercifully?) meant that not much happened this last month in the City Council. However, accolades are in order to the Municipality (and primarily its officials) for again doing a good job of managing the Festival City. We all heaved a sigh of relief at no power outages; and water, refuse removal and other services proceeded seamlessly despite the huge pressures placed upon them.

**Harassment:** Back in the protected corridors of the City Hall, committees persevered in their often pulverising routines. Two of our GRA Rapporteurs were separately moved to comment on an unfortunate trend of harassment of Officials by a few Councillors, who no doubt feel that they are doing their political duty by throwing their weights around. In that most depressing of Committees, Economic Development and Tourism, GRA found it disturbing “that two Councillors were constantly attacking the hapless local Economic Development Officer. This Committee remains problematic and little is ever decided or finalised.” We do see that Cllr. Masoma is the new chairperson, and we hope that she has the broad shoulders and Solomonic insight to make a difference here. Then, in a report on a marathon 3 ½ hour Land, Housing and Infrastructure Committee GRA decried Councillors becoming embroiled in personal issues, and harassing Officials who were described as “underpaid, (except for the Director), understaffed, underequipped, underbudgetted. And all they get is to be bombed-on.” Given staff turnover among Officials, this is serious. It is unfortunate that power is easily abused by those unused to it, and new and inexperienced councillors can be the worst offenders.

**The Green Agenda:** This remains a refreshing part of the ruling ANC's priorities, and we applaud continuing attention to the Vukani Greenbelt, to ameliorate some of the bleak uniformity of the low-cost housing scheme there. This is a part of a Makana-wide greening project, now to be funded by National Treasury. A Project Manager is to be employed to coordinate all the current environmental projects, and we look forward to this happening.

**Electricity Losses:** Losses in distribution were reported at a staggering 58% in 2006, up from 38% in 2005. Mr. Dredge clucked reassurance that it was due to faulty bulk meters, and was probably nearer 13%. It is known that it is difficult to check on the bypassing of prepaid domestic meters, as there is no ongoing record of consumption at user points. Poor infrastructure maintenance, including the bulk meters, is another contributor, and clearly all this should be addressed urgently.

**Infrastructure Memorandum:** Following our meeting with the Mayor last month, GRA has been advised by the Municipal Manager that municipal infrastructure, and retention of skilled and experienced staff is high on their agenda. A “Comprehensive Municipal Infrastructure Audit” will be commissioned in the new financial year. GRA's input was welcomed as constructive. Our efforts in coordinating responses from major stakeholders to the serious failures of December 2006 appear to have been successful, and we hope they will bear further fruit. Our thanks to all who participated by submitting views and comments in writing.

**Liquor Trading By-law:** 27 July is the cutoff date for comments and recommendations. The delayed date was requested by the Rhodes SRC, who we trust will now apply their minds to the matter.

For more details on Portfolio Meetings and the Quarterly “Full Council”, see the GRA Website at [www.smarthost.co.za/gra](http://www.smarthost.co.za/gra).

Submitted by Roux van der Merwe, Hon. Secretary, GRA, 8 Durban St., Grahamstown. 17<sup>th</sup>. July 2007.