

THE GRA MONTHLY MONITOR

The wheels of the Makana Municipality have started to grind into motion again after the festive season lay-off, with no routine portfolio meetings having been scheduled in January. Of note though is that an extraordinary Special Full Council Meeting was called urgently on 17 January to rubberstamp a 7.5% pay increase for councillors, backdated six months - with council declaring that the uppermost possible maximum remuneration scales be adopted! It is unfortunate that the only solitary 'gravy disdain' voices came from the DA benches.

Will the Municipal Manager please stand –up!

Makana is mum on the subject of who is the new replacement Municipal Manager, although we are told that the interviewing process has been completed. Answers to questions regarding the filling of this vital CEO position are not forthcoming. We understand though that the redundant MM is still in town, ensconced in his subsidised municipal residence, and still on exorbitant full pay while his appeal is pending... all this on our ratepayer's hard earned money. Sounds like yet another extended sabbatical to complete his second (third?) PhD!

Fanciful R400 000 fencing?

The local economic development of the new R1 Million Raglan Road car wash is still making waves – existing carwash entrepreneurs in the area have been sidelined, others engaged, and the development favoured with free water and power. On top of the initial cost it has now suddenly been realised that it needs an excessive R400 000 fence to secure the state of the art jet wash equipment – the cost of a small house. Surely steel expandable security gates would secure the wash bay at a fraction of this cost? Lets hope this is not another costly white elephant like the taxi rank which it replaces.

Development at what cost?

The City Engineers office still appears to be one of the most dysfunctional facets of the municipality, with the town planner being elusive and largely ineffectual. Developers complain of frustration and unreasonable delays in plans being passed and many appear to have become a law unto themselves, just moving right ahead with their developments, approval or not. A list of 10 items of critical concern were added by a civic committee member to the small agenda of the recent Aesthetics Meeting – these highlighted major developments, either underway or completed, that had not been seen or vetted by committee. Included in the listing are the new CPA car park on the corner of Hill and Luke Streets, the Frontier Hotel/Nedbank renovations, and the Market Square (square!) KFC extensions. Also expression of concern was made regarding the continued proliferation of illegal ad-hoc signage on premises like the Fat Cat Café and Pirate's Pizza, and large black and white promotional event posters wallpapered to CBD properties. The GRA again calls for the urgent and critical intervention of the relevant officials to ensure professional preservation and consistent monitoring of the cities built environment, imperative in maintaining the local economy through vital cultural and heritage tourism.

Immobile Clinics

Good and bad service delivery news from the Social Services portfolio. The good is that R295 000 has been allocated by Cacadu to build a community library in Fingo Village, and the bad is that the vital primary health care mobile clinic routes have been suspended, along with the resignation of two nurses supporting this service. Alarming only R17m of the promised R31m for the regions health care has been received.

Name change road show comes to town!

The 'name change road show' took place in the City Hall on Saturday 1 March with the launch of the municipal education program and DVD. While many were given the platform for questions, answers were not always lucid and a feeling prevailed at times that obfuscation ruled. The answer to a question regarding where the R100 000 was coming from for this 'educational program' was given that it was being diverted from the unspent salary budget for the Finance Division – the very area that the GRA has pinpointed as problematic in terms of lack of capacity due to vacant posts! Virtually in the next breath the audience were told that any name change it would not cost the ratepayer anything and not jeopardise service delivery as it came from a reconciliation budget – in reality all tax payers' money. Many believe that the mayor has jumped the gun and publically pronounced on the matter, and now needs his councillors to jump through the consultative hoops. A blatant oversight was the lack of an isiXhosa interpreter, and when one volunteered it transpired that she was the speaker of council - and speak she did, often adding here politically biased spin to things! Toward the end the meeting quickly deteriorated into a circus and emotions ran high – and even the concerned citizens of community wards 10 and 11, who had walked from the station to the City Hall to hand over a petition in opposition to changing the name, were reprimanded, censured and threatened with legal action. An educational experience indeed!

Finance Revelations

The Finance portfolio meeting had a number of surprises – most notably those coming out of the Price Waterhouse Internal Audit which included unexplained gross overspending by some departments, and exorbitant overtime being paid out without necessary checks and balances. The overtime could have employed 10 full time employees and furthermore there is no register kept by the payroll master of those authorised to approve overtime! Expenditure on the municipal transport fleet is nearly 100% over budget, and 10 times more than the book value of the vehicles. There is also no Fleet management Policy. The new CFO does seem to be addressing many of these inherited irregularities, but he certainly seems to have his job cut out for him.

The AGM – Naming, Shaming or Blaming?

All residents are invited to attend the GRA Annual General Meeting which takes place in the Town Library Hall at 17h30 on 03 April 2008. Councillor Julia Wells will make a short presentation on the name change process and procedure, followed by the screening of the recently commissioned educational DVD, and a question and answer session.