

GRAHAMSTOWN RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in the Library Hall, Hill St., Grahamstown, on the 25th March, 2007, at 5.30 pm.

1. Welcome: The Chairperson, Prof. Thorburn, welcomed those present, a record 67 on the register.

Apologies: Sheila Hicks, Bet Handcock, Thelma Neville, Jane Osborne, Kit Pitman, Brian Stone, Mike Dacham, Paddy Tandy, Liz Reynolds, Peter Ellis, Ayanda Ranuga, Karen Cockburn, Angela Thomas, Pamela Paton, Colleen Emslie, Beth Dickerson, Bev Ramstad, Sheila Eichhoff.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the AGM held on the 28th March, 2006: Accepted, prop. M. Whisson, secd. J. van der Walt.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes:

3.1 Liquor Trading Hours: A new draft is expected shortly.

3.2 Superior Courts Bill: The Court remains in Grahamstown.

4. Chairperson's Report:

This was presented in the Chair's typical light-hearted style, cast in a circus theme with a Ringmaster, high wire artists, and other ept and inept performers. A copy of the report is in the Minute Book, and on the website, www.smarthost.co.za/gra

The Council term commenced with in-fighting and a six month paralysis, with no Council meetings. A well-supported GRA Rally on Church Square was held to protest this state of affairs.

Business resumed with the creation of more bureaucratic posts, while the needs of vital service delivery departments went un-answered. Democratic accountability and transparency suffered under new meeting arrangements by the Mayor, who also targeted a "hostile Press". The Chair thanked Grocotts for their continued critical community voice.

A selection of the events of the year were covered. These included the Municipal Debt, and imbalances in spending. 2000 houses have been built, but R16 million is to be spent on repairs due to shoddy workmanship. Routine Municipal Administration has improved, but continuing staff losses and rapid turnover of replacements became serious. Municipal infrastructure continued to deteriorate, resulting in serious electricity and water supply failures. GRA is keeping a watchful eye on the R11m. Goat Farming project.

The GRA memorandum to Council was outlined, and the positive responses thereto. There was concern about future investment and development if problems were not addressed. Prof. Thorburn thanked his Committee for their efforts, and reminded members that the monthly column in Grocotts was there to keep them up to date, as was the new website. Members were thanked for their support and interest.

5. Treasurer's Report:

Mr. Hodgson tabled the figures for the financial year. (Copy in the Minutes Book) Income over expenses was a positive R214.80 for the year, mainly due to increased collection of subscriptions.

Expenses were up to R1105 from R819 in 2006, due to increased activity, and advertising.

Subscriptions will remain at R10 per annum. Accepted, Prop. Miss Dalton, secd. Mr. Beer.

6. Election of Management Committee:

All the members of the present Committee had agreed to stand, and were re-elected as follows: Miss J. Dalton, Mr. R. Embling, Prof. D. Hendry, Mr. D. Hodgson, Mr. W. Makkink, Profs. D. Rivett, D. Thorburn, and R. van der Merwe, and Mr. J. van der Walt. Four new members had been proposed and seconded prior to the AGM, and were duly elected: Mr. D. Biermann, Mrs. R. Hobson, Mr. C. Pitman, and Mr. C. Whitford. The Hon. Secretary (R. van der Merwe) and the Hon Treasurer (D. Hodgson) were re-elected as part of the en bloc proposal by Mrs. R. van Wyk Smith, secd. by Mrs. A. Barberton.

7. Neighbourhood Deterioration in Grahamstown East:

Dr. Mary Knowling had provided a portfolio of photographs with commentary, and had asked the Secretary to present them. Two of the four folders showed rubbish in the streets and around the refuse skips – not dissimilar from conditions in Grahamstown West. It was noted that while politicians

repeatedly commit themselves to improving the lot of “the poor”, there was clearly no improvement visible here, only neglect of proper waste management, and a degraded urban environment. Two further folders showed standing water in and alongside the streets, broken fences and gates around public buildings, and impressive potholed roads. Also some scenes from a so-called “Coloured” area, with a range of housing from better to very bad. Litter and refuse was again widely-present. The presenter concluded that expenditure priorities did not reflect any concern over the issues shown, as service delivery staff was being further run down, to be replaced with higher-level bureaucratic posts. Dr. Knowling was thanked for her initiatives on behalf of Grahamstown East.

8. Public Discussion: Service Delivery Breakdowns and Poor Governance: The Secretary gave a lead-in to the Memorandum, arising out of the service failures in December 2006, and the threatened Court Order that finally produced a Municipal response. A very lively discussion followed, with participation across a wide spectrum of residents. Clearly, there was general concern over the serious shortcomings in the Municipality. Speaking to the Memorandum, Mr. Whitford agreed that infrastructure was aged and overloaded, and that the suggested Consultants’ role would be to quantify the shortfall and make recommendations for essential repairs and upgrades. Prof Beard said that the Vuna Awards gave a false impression, and the Herald should make a wider public more aware of the realities. Mrs. van Wyk Smith suggested some projects across East-West Wards, to promote contact and some Black involvement in GRA. Also businesses bringing in resources to help the Municipality. (See Rhodes and the Business Chamber as examples).

Cllrs. Whisson and Reynolds gave detailed inputs on vacancies and problems in Divisions. The Vuna Award was clarified: A precondition was that a municipality had to have an unqualified audit report from the Auditor General; only two met this condition; Makana was one!. An ongoing problem was that it was easier to get money for expensive and visible capital projects than for running and maintenance costs. Grand projects then stretched the baseline budget even further.

The meeting was unanimous that Council should be further pressed to do something positive about its many problems, and to cease the political pressures being placed on remaining, hard working officials. Mrs. Barberton complimented the deputy director, Health and Cleansing, on his continuing efforts to keep the streets clean in the CBD. She also asked for attention again to public toilets and a bus station. The discussion concluded on two positive notes: Cllr. Reynolds hoped that after the initial period of jockeying for positions, the new and inexperienced Councillors would settle down as their predecessors had done. He also applauded those officials who worked hard to keep our show on the road - mostly successfully. Secondly, Mr. Rob Beer outlined progress on a representative Chamber of Business. His own business Forum now had 70 members, and has been a driving force for the Chamber, which now has a delegated rather than an elected structure. There are two representatives each from the Business Forum, NAFCOC, Rhodes University, and the Game Farms Coordinating Body. Mr. Beer and Mr. Ellis will represent the Forum. It will be chaired by the Mayor, and will be a powerful avenue for negotiation and influence over the way Makana is managed, and its impact on Business. GRA appears to have a strong public mandate to continue to marshal public opinion and to pressure the Municipality in a constructive way.

The meeting concluded at 7.10 pm.

Roux van der Merwe, Hon. Secretary, 29th March, 2007.