

GRAHAMSTOWN RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Secretary – 8 Durban Street, Grahamstown, 6140
Telephone: 046 622 5687

30th. May, 2007.

His Worship the Mayor,
Cllr. P. Kate,
Makana Municipality,
City Hall, Grahamstown.

Dear Mayor Kate,

Ratepayers' Meeting, 21 May, 2007.

Thank you for setting up and inviting us to the above meeting. We found the interactions interesting and useful, and were glad to be able to share our presentation with the four Councillors who attended. We appreciated your remark that you have found our comments to be balanced and fair in the past, and that you accept that part of our role is to be critical. But, as Prof. Hendry pointed out, we also try to act in an advisory and supportive role. As promised, I am following up with a written summary of the main points of our submission, which follows below.

The need to address infrastructural shortcomings: We reaffirm our support for preferential service delivery to the previously disadvantaged areas of Grahamstown East, and are happy to see the advances being made in housing, and especially in water, sewerage, and electrical infrastructure in these areas. However we are concerned that all this development is placing an increasing strain on existing old and deteriorating core infrastructure; i.e. that which has to carry the total load for all of Grahamstown. With the emphasis on new infrastructure in the areas that need it most, there has regrettably been a neglect of this core infrastructure, with insufficient ongoing maintenance expenditure, and little replacement capital expenditure. There is now an urgent need to address this, and to set priorities for infrastructural upgrading and replacement. When the core infrastructure fails – as it has done already – all suffer the consequences, including the new recipients.

Unfortunately, the Municipality's staffing situation has deteriorated, especially in the technical areas of service delivery, and it does not have the in-house expertise to survey the existing facilities and to determine immediate priorities. Hence the proposal in the GRA Memorandum to use suitably-experienced consultants, and any other persons who may be able to advise us, to do a survey and to make recommendations.

We noted your assurance that the Municipality is already aware of these problems, and that the Budget makes provision for some upgrades. But we do query what progress is being made on the assessment of present infrastructure, to determine which are the really urgent priorities. We did ask whether the Municipal Infrastructure Grant provision could assist in funding the sort of

infrastructural upgrading that would be required here. This would of course have to be specially applied for, as existing grants are “ring fenced”, as you pointed out.

The Role of Training and of Skilled, Experienced Staff:

As a one-time Training Professional myself, who was involved in much of the early discussions around Affirmative Action, I recall that the essential role of training in employment equity was clearly recognized. What was not prioritized, subsequently, was that off-the-job training needs to be supplemented by on-the-job learning and experience from persons who are skilled in that job in that organization. This has not happened, because in the urgency to address race and sex demographics in the workplace, key staff and vital skills and experience were lost. This has happened in our Municipality, and we now suffer a serious shortage of the sort of persons needed to manage this vital stage of on-the-job training. We have seen recently how we recruit people – good people – to fill vacancies, but they do not receive backup in new tasks, and leave soon after. Our Labour Turnover figures over the past year will attest to this, and we are faced with a vicious circle where essential skills continue to diminish. This must be arrested urgently, and if we look at Black staff especially, (where the equity challenge lies) they are not being given a fair and reasonable chance to succeed. We need to fill some key vacancies with persons who already have the basic skills and knowledge we have lost, and we have to consider – temporarily at least – suspending some of our affirmative action and equity targets to do this. It has also been proposed, at the highest Government levels, that we try to get back retirees, emigrants or those still in the economy but no longer in municipalities.

These are difficult political decisions, and they need to be openly argued and debated. In this, direction must come from the top to re-think and if necessary make unpopular decisions to take us over the present hump. We should note that where this has recently been done in Makana , an ailing department has quickly been stabilized and – what is more important – PDI staff members can now grow and develop in a sustainable environment. This is the one path to building an economy where skilled and experienced persons can be retained to build up the skills and experience of others, towards a sustainable management of present and future infrastructure.

We note, Mr. Mayor, your agreement with Rhodes University to be able to draw on their resources to assist you. This is a positive and encouraging path, given that there are experienced ex-municipal staff employed by them.

GRA hopes that we may remain a part of this dialogue, and look forward to our future contacts.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

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Roux van der Merwe, Hon. Secretary.