

AGM 22 November 2023 – Chair’s Report

We’re looking at the period from **19 April to 22 November**. 5 months short of a year! But the reason is that our constitution says we need to hold an AGM within three months of the end of our financial year, which happens to be 31 August. So here we are!

What have we done in the seven months since April? Not much, really, in terms of what’s been completed, but we’ve started quite a lot of things.

In July we had a Special General Meeting, aimed at making a few changes to our constitution. This went smoothly, and the amended constitution has now been filed with CIPC. The key issues are that the committee, not the membership, sets the membership fee – currently R150 a year, per individual. And, secondly, that juristic as well as natural persons may be members. The constitution, along with minutes of meetings, is filed on the website – www.brra.org.za.

We’re very happy with our website which has been set up by **Maya Stricker**. It is running sweetly as a general source of information about affairs Bathurstian. Maya is also the first of our co-options onto the committee.

In September we held a community meeting to discuss the future of the burnt-out hall. This did not go as planned because it turned out that some Bathurstians were too unhappy about some of the happenings last year to be able to focus on the future. As a result, we put in a PAIA request to the municipality for documentation relating to the investigation of the fire, subsequent actions taken, and also the matter of the valuation of the building and the amount of insurance paid, etc. All this information is available on request, via the contact option on the website. The Ward Councillor has meanwhile made a formal request for a Public Participation Process, which is required before the municipality can commit to any action regarding the future of the hall or its site.

Mauneen Charter, our second co-option, was invited to join the committee primarily to support the chair’s efforts to make contact with a host of municipal officials and others, and to add her expertise in the publicity and communications fields. She has subsequently had to resign because of family commitments which arose unexpectedly.

More recently, we’ve co-opted Monty Roodt to lead discussions on the complex issue of the commonage. The aim, as you can see if you consult the website, is to achieve balanced and sustainable use of the land, as well as conservation of the pristine areas. The commonage is an important resource and could provide a number of jobs in a job-hungry community, apart from giving Bathurst much of its rural-village character. We have submitted a PAIA application for information relating to any and all plans the municipality may have for the commonage, and await response.

On commonage land, but posing problems of its own, is the municipal dump. We’ve been looking at what has happened with other Ndlambe dumps and also at solutions such as Pringle Bay in the Western Cape, as well as some overseas examples. **We’ve co-opted Richard Alexander** to drive the project of getting the municipality to do something really constructive with our rubbish.

We have made a PAIA application for information i.r.o. the terms of its license, and also the contract with the firm who is supposed to manage it.

The last addition to BR&RA's statutory three-person committee (chair, treasurer and secretary) is **Siphokazi Mkrakra**. She is our link to the future, taking on the job of making BR&RA relevant to our young people. She is also our formal link with the Councillor's Ward 5 Committee, of which she is a member. Communication and collaboration between the BR&RA and the Ward Committee is important in developing a united front for Bathurst in dealing with municipal officials.

Our focus has been to try to build relationships with service providers to Bathurst, starting with the municipality. To this end, we've now set up a monthly meeting with Siphobabama, Deputy Dir. of Infrastructure, who oversees all municipal services in Bathurst. Foreman Siyabonga Budaza oversees the practical application, including refuse collection, water provision, repairing water leaks, sewerage, minor road repairs, and anything else urgent. This arrangement is very new here, but is working well in other areas of Ndlambe, such as Kleinemonde.

Our gravel roads feature as a discussion point on the monthly agenda. Plans are in hand for improving drainage where necessary, and also seeing that roads are passable in wet weather. No instant miracles are promised!

Electricity in Bathurst is not a municipal function, but is a problem to a lot of people. Very fortunately for the rest of us, Patrick Grafton has taken it upon himself, with the support of the Bathurst Development Trust, to deal with some of the main causes of electrical problems, and to fix our street lights. Patrick has also done some great work with the municipality in terms of making our water supply more reliable.

Safety and Security, a major community concern, involves SAPS as well as the municipality's by-law officers. As regards SAPS, we have a hiatus between station commanders. Capt Mhlauli has been promoted and transferred. His permanent replacement is not expected to take up the position until the new year. Meanwhile, we are working with the acting station commander, Warrant Abrahams, to infuse some energy into the CPF and the farm security network.

On the by-law side, we had a major problem with escaping dogs that killed 27 goats between June and September on the ARC farm adjacent to the Village. And there is, of course, the recurring risk of cattle on the R67. We are in conversation with the municipality and some of the cattle owners in search of solutions to these problems. Meanwhile, we appeal to all dog owners to ensure that their animals cannot escape from their yards!

What else are we planning or hoping for? Amongst others:-

- A good outcome for the **burnt-out hall**. Be sure you come to the Community Participation meeting!
- Refurbishment of the **Big Pineapple**. We're hoping to revive the annual pineapple festival to raise funds to help PGA with this.
- Establishment or rehabilitation of **walkways and trails** in various areas of the commonage.
- **Rebirth of civic pride**, for example to mow road verges on the R67 through town.