

MAGALIESSIG ACTION FORUM (NPC)

Chairman's Report on Activities 2013/14

Magaliessig Action Forum (MAF) initially came into being due to the threat of a Makro in Magaliessig but there are many other important aspects in the area that require attention.

MAF has had an extremely busy year and is playing a valuable part in maintaining and improving our suburb of Magaliessig. The work undertaken is divided into specific portfolios and we thank all responsible for their sterling efforts on behalf of the Magaliessig community. In order to maintain the significance of this report it covers the period from AGM to AGM i.e. November 2013 to November 2014 and does not follow the financial year - 1 March to 28 February

MAKRO: Mary Hanna

MAF has been fighting the proposed development of a Makro super store in Magaliessig for almost 5 years - it has been a long and arduous battle.

Following the refusal of the Makro application by the Mayoral Committee of City of Johannesburg in August 2013, Makro lodged an appeal, in September 2013, against the decision to the Townships Board, a section of the Gauteng Provincial Department of Economic Development

In Feb 2014 registered letters from Dept Economic Development were posted to all residents who originally objected to the Makro proposal in 2010 notifying them of the Makro appeal and giving details of how to object to the appeal, before 31 March 2014. Following legal advice, MAF submitted a combined objection on behalf of all registered objectors and 3 MAF members registered as objectors in their own right. A supplementary list on behalf of objectors who had moved into Magaliessig post Feb/March 2010 was also compiled.

Notice was received in August that the appeal hearing would be held for 3 days - 17, 18, 19 September. This proved to be inadequate and finally the appeal hearing took 5 days, the additional days being 22 October and 18 November.

A huge amount of work went into MAF preparations for the appeal hearing and we are greatly indebted to our professional advisers who have assisted us so generously. All our experts – legal, road engineer, town planner and market research professionals have worked tirelessly on our behalf and all have charged greatly reduced fees. Indeed, Patrick Mundell has advised us on all legal aspects on a pro bono basis for 2 years since the Planning Committee hearing in Oct 2012. Naturally charges have now been levied for all the preparation work and time spent at the appeal hearing.

We now wait to receive the decision of the MEC of Economic Development, following the recommendation of the Townships Board, either to uphold the judgement of the Mayoral Committee of CoJ or to overrule the Mayoral Committee.

ROADS and SIGNAGE: Mike Hogan

The repair of potholes in Magaliessig is an ongoing task and potholes are reported to JRA as and when they arise. In the course of the year, we have managed to have Troupant Avenue extensively resurfaced in sections as well as numerous potholes repaired. The total resurfacing of Troupant is now in the CoJ budget and will be tackled in the next two years.

Speed humps along Troupant are a possibility in the next 4 years or so as no budget currently exists – they could be installed by JRA now, if paid for privately by residents at R23000 per hump but this is out of the question at present.

Sangster Road was similarly repaired after extensive rain damage and a drainage ditch was dug alongside to divert water from the road surface itself. This road was a low budget quick fix job when built and the quality is not of the highest standard - aggravated by a very high water table which lies just under the surface. The downside of the ditch is that we have had three vehicles stranded in the ditch after late night patronage of the drinking holes in the area.

A "yellow block intersection" was painted at the junction of Troupant Avenue and Hiskett Avenue to allow access by cars from Hiskett into Troupant in morning peak hours - residents are reminded that it is illegal to block such an intersection and the intersection should be kept clear at all times.

The left turning lane from Main into Sangster was the result of MAF intervention although the lane could have been much longer - we are investigating whether this is possible.

We have addressed complaints about the congestion along Leslie at peak hours, as a resident felt that if the timing of the traffic lights at the freeway off-ramp/William Nicol and at William Nicol/Leslie were changed, traffic buildup would be eased. This is not so, however, as William Nicol itself is a busy arterial and any changes to traffic light frequencies involve numerous intersections for several kilometers in each direction - from Republic Road in Hurlingham along William Nicol as far as Diepsloot. Traffic engineers are looking at the situation but no immediate action is expected.

A longer term plan is apparently to build a new off ramp from the freeway into Main Road to alleviate congestion at the William Nicol off ramp and this is a distinct possibility within the next few years.

Traffic Lights

The traffic lights at the intersection of Leslie East and Troupant/Petroy have been monitored and adjusted several times in order to achieve as optimum a setting as possible. A green flashing arrow has been activated to operate during the morning peak period to allow traffic from Petroy to turn right into Leslie East and hopefully this has alleviated the frustration for Petroy traffic.

Signage

We continue to take down illegal signs as a matter of course. A particular problem is Estate Agency boards illegally left in situ after weekend show houses and erected for general advertising purposes. Informal tradesmen are equally frequent offenders.

PARKS: Mary Hanna

We continue to have a good working relationship with City Parks. The Merrow Down Park in Troupant Ave is generally being kept clean and mown and it is pleasing to see children playing there again. Dogs on leads are also a welcome sight.

There is still an issue with "vagrants" overnighing in the park. As there are no ablution facilities this is undesirable, but it is a humanitarian problem which is city wide. City Parks is aware of the situation and extensive negotiations have been taking place in an effort to have the park fenced.

COMMUNICATIONS: Tamara Oberholster

In terms of MAF communications activity over the last year, the biggest happening was the complete overhaul of our website. We moved from the complex Joomla platform to the more user friendly WordPress, which meant that I was able to take over management of the back-end from Ray Moore. We owe him a great debt of gratitude for looking after the site for so long, paying Web hosting fees and continuing to upload our content even once he had moved away from Magaliessig.

Now that the website is easier to update, we have refreshed all the information and removed old content that was no longer relevant. We have de-cluttered and streamlined it, and added new functionalities.

We have also continued to grow our social media presence through our Facebook page and Twitter profile. We have increased our audience and reach on both, and enjoyed a surge in conversations with residents, business people, media and others, boosting our influence on these channels. From helping people to spread the word about a lost pet to breaking news, such as the descent of the Monte Casino Hyundai balloon in Mulberry Lane last week, we have been a part of creating online community dialogue.

We have continued to grow and manage our mailing list through our mass email platform, MailChimp, sending out notifications of important events, news, security warnings, and other updates of interest to those living and working in Magaliessig and surrounds. While our newsletter "open rates" are higher than the average MailChimp list, we would like to see them increase further and I believe this will happen as people begin to realise the value of MAF as an active residents' association.

We have also enjoyed regular coverage in the Fourways Review regarding MAF activity, and the occasional mention in other news media. I have fielded media enquiries as they crop up although I have not had the time to work on the PR aspect as much as I would have liked.

When necessary, such as in the lead up to the Makro appeal hearing, MAF has also distributed information in the suburb on a door to door basis or via the handing out of leaflets at the traffic lights.

As well as the website, Facebook page, Twitter profile and MailChimp account, I also look after the magaliessig@gmail.com email account and field all incoming mails to the various MAF committee members.

While all our communications platforms are now functioning relatively well and we are communicating on an ongoing basis, there is of course room for improvement. In particular, we need to build MAF's reputation as an active residents' association, apart from just the Makro issue, and demonstrate the value of membership to the community.

Sadly, I have not been able to give this much attention this year due to other commitments. The time it takes to create, collate and share useful local content on each platform, as well managing the administration of reach, could easily develop into a full-time job.

I am unable to continue to manage the communications portfolio all alone and request assistance from other community members. I am happy to offer training where necessary (for example, on the MailChimp system), but need some assistance to keep everything going and growing.

We are also currently in a precarious position in that if anything happens to me, nobody else can access our various platforms to take over.

Ideally, we should form a small communications subcommittee, dividing up the responsibilities according to skill, interest and availability.

SECURITY: Steve G Appleton

The author of this report is MAF's nominee on the Douglasdale Community Policing Forum's Sector 4 committee. At the monthly meetings, a crime overview briefing is provided by SAPS, indicating the levels and identifying the types of crimes reported in the various areas that make up the sector. Until earlier this year, Magaliessig as a suburb had been fortunate and had endured relatively low levels of crime compared with some other suburbs in the Douglasdale SAPS precinct.

During this year, that has changed. Crime has certainly increased in the suburb, particularly the types of crime that have the greatest impact on our lives and that we most fear: car hijackings, robbery with firearms and house burglary. Attacks at complex entrances and burglary at free-standing houses seem to be the main targets.

In regard to free-standing houses, Petroy and particularly Troupant and Avalon have been hardest hit. In Troupant almost every second or third house has been hit. We believe that this is because of the easy and quick access and an ability to melt away quickly into the high volumes of traffic. In addition, as other suburbs improve security, crime is displaced to areas identified as less secure.

Most burglaries have occurred in broad daylight usually when the occupants are out. This suggests that look-outs are posted and intelligence is gathered. Criminals have been using serious force to break through driveway and door security gates to gain access. In one particularly nasty incident a woman, who was unfortunately at home, was attacked and very seriously injured after such access was gained. This has made us take the issue of rising crime in the area seriously. In a direct similarity to houses, many smaller complexes also have no on-site security personnel. They rely on remotely-controlled gates and electric fences which makes them just as vulnerable as a free-standing house.

MAF realises that security in the area needs improving and during this year researched ways in which this can be achieved. We identified that reactive security (a patrol vehicle arrives in response to an alarm) is inefficient. The criminals know where the patrol vehicles are and by the time the vehicle arrives, they have left the scene. We have also identified that the dilution in patrol and monitoring service (there are no dedicated patrol vehicles continuously present in the suburb) caused by the large number of different security companies operating in the area is a problem. Lastly we have identified that where a crime has been committed there is no recorded evidence, such a vehicle type or its number-plate, that can be used to assist in the detection process and the identification of the criminals.

Based upon advice from SAPS, the CPF, security companies and interviews with residents' associations in successful implementations, we believe that the most practical solution and best deterrent to crime in the suburb is a professionally monitored suburb-wide CCTV system linked to dedicated response vehicles. MAF will present its proposal to member residents at the MAF AGM and in more detail at subsequent wider residents' meetings.

In conjunction with the DD CPF and security companies, the SAPS has responded with a number of random "stop and searches" (visible police checks) in the area. At these checks, which are usually also attended by the CPF, crime awareness brochures have been handed out to motorists. The CPF has also held a number of awareness days, both in the suburb and at shopping centres. The aim of these is to try to bridge the communications gap between the residents and the police and in so doing to try to reduce the animosity so often shown to the SAPS whilst at the same time trying to induce people to provide tip-offs and crime intelligence information to the SAPS.

Routinely the biggest amount of crime is, believe it or not, theft out of motor vehicles, comprising 50% or more of all crimes reported. Much of this happens due to carelessness on the part of motorists at shopping centres as result of vehicles left unlocked (accidentally or deliberately due to jamming, etc.) and with valuables as bait in plain sight. "Smash and grabs" taking place at intersections (such as Main/Sangster) are also a big problem. The thieves strike quickly and disappear equally as fast. They are rarely caught. SAPS and security companies have tried to understand where these criminals come from and where they go to. They have conducted a number of sting operations to try to catch or deter these people but with little success because they are quickly recognised and the criminals depart the area for the duration only to reappear later.

Overall, the Douglasdale SAPS has been particularly successful in reducing crime in its precinct which in some instances is up to 30% lower in this precinct than in other surrounding stations. No small achievement for a small, under-resourced police station with a large and diverse area to cover. Our sincere and grateful thanks and congratulations must go to the whole team at Douglasdale SAPS, ably led by Brigadier Kruger. I would also like to thank our sector 4 commander, Constable Maq Dlodlo, whose innovative ideas and quick, positive action have helped to keep us as safe as is presently possible.

Whilst on the subject of thanks, the Douglasdale main CPF in general, together with our Sector 4 members do an amazing job of supporting the local SAPS and JMPD, raising funds, sourcing donations and providing backup and monitoring services during policing activities, such as road-blocks, illegal signage clearing, etc. Often these activities take place at the instigation and insistence of the CPF on behalf of residents. Furthermore the CPF has provided a surprising number of volunteers who work at the Douglasdale SAPS client services desk. This releases valuable police personnel from the office to go into the field to fight crime. Without the dedication of the CPF this would not happen. A big thank you is due to all my fellow CPF members.

Douglasdale SAPS has, with the assistance of the CPF and donors, implemented a 24-hour manned "control room" with dedicated phone lines and radio links, a first within the SAPS we believe. To speed up incident reporting and SAPS's reaction times, residents are urged to call this control room first for all incidents that occur within the Douglasdale SAPS area. This control room is also directly linked to some of the major security companies further improving the service that can be offered.

Residents should call 011-699-1333 in the first instance. Ensure that your call is logged and you receive a reference number. The control room will contact the sector patrol vehicles or despatch another vehicle as necessary.

LEGAL: Robin D'Arcy Donnelly

The following was done from a legal perspective:

- Vetting certain flyers and letters sent out;
- Advising on the documentation required in order to set up the proposed security system with RSS.
- In respect of the Makro legal proceedings, I confirm that this has been dealt with very well by Patrick Mundell.

FUND RAISING: Jane Hughes

I joined the Fund Raising Committee on 27th June 2014.

A Barnyard Evening "Thank You for the Music" was organised on 18th July which was well attended (99 tickets sold). This was a really fun evening. A raffle at the Barnyard raised additional funds with prizes sponsored by Monte Casino, Bootleggers, Society, Magic Spa and other MAF members. The Barnyard Evening will be an annual or bi-annual event depending on suitable shows available.

On 26th of October and 2nd November, we attended a Car Boot Sale at the Irish Club in Linden. Both days were successful and turned out to be an educational way to spend a Sunday morning!!!

We will be holding further Car Boot Sales in the coming months and appeal to everyone to donate items for sale, particularly clothing, shoes and handbags.

In the meantime the Fund Raising Committee continues to appeal for more members from the community to join MAF

This evening we have organised a raffle and all proceeds will go to MAF funds. The wine is kindly donated by Zevenwacht wines.

MEMBERSHIP: Irene Pellegrini

Membership is increasing slowly and there will be a concentrated drive to improve membership in 2015. We are working for the benefit of all residents and can only achieve significant improvements in Magaliessig with the committed support of all

PRECINCT PLAN: Gavin Atkins

Contact has been maintained with the Assistant-Director: Regional Planning Development Planning, City of Johannesburg, but little progress has been made with the development of a precinct plan. The Department has been delayed in reviewing the Spatial Development Framework and advised us not to start the precinct plan until they have completed their review. We are concerned about the increasing commercial creep into Magaliessig and aim to give this matter greater attention next year.

Membership of the Ward 106 Ward Committee has been maintained although there have not been many meetings this year. It is through this Committee that the re-tarring of Troupant has been given high priority.

ILLEGAL BUSINESSES ON CORNER WITKOPPEN and MAIN: Mary Hanna

There have been problems for years relating to illegal businesses on the remaining extent of Portion 173 and 174 of the Farm Rietfontein on the corner of Witkoppen and Main affecting the amenities of Thornfields residential development. Illegal, unlicensed bulk liquid petroleum gas storage tanks and 2 pumps inside shipping containers have now been added to the businesses. Thornfields HOA alerted Mary Hanna (who they have appointed as their representative in the matter) to the presence of the tanks; following a site inspection and Planning Committee hearing on 18 July an application for temporary business consent (to legalise the existing businesses) was refused and instructions given for the urgent removal of the LPG tanks – so far nothing appears to have happened, in spite of numerous phone calls and emails to CoJ officials and the business continues to grow. Thornfields residents are still in danger from the unlicensed gas tanks.

ABLAND DEVELOPMENT: MAF Directors

Several meetings have been held with Abland, who are part of the consortium that purchased the “Currie” land adjacent to Monte Casino Boulevard. The development currently taking place falls within the Fourways Business Node. A public meeting, facilitated by MAF, was held at Shingara Sands, to enable Abland to explain their plans to interested and concerned residents. In time there will be two new developments, Monte Circle, an office park, at the western end of the Boulevard and Signature Square, a mixed use business and residential park at the eastern end of the Boulevard. So far we have found that our dealings with Abland are business like and constructive and they are sensitive to the opinions of the community.

GENERAL: Alwyn Smith has carried out the secretarial duties of MAF with great diligence and enthusiasm and we thank her for her dedication.

We are extremely grateful to Merrow Down Country Club Body Corporate for their consideration in allowing MAF to hold our regular Committee meetings on the premises and making their facilities freely available to us. It would be difficult to find another venue as attractive and convenient as Merrow Down.

My personal thanks go to the MAF committee members for their assistance and commitment and for giving their time voluntarily throughout the year and together, with the support of the community, we look forward to a successful year ahead.