

## **Chairperson's report: GRA AGM 24 April 2018**

### **Philip Machanick**

Over the last year, the plan Tim Bull presented to GRA in May 2015 to grow membership and build the organization's capacity has continued. Tim (our Secretary) has subsequently put enormous effort into growing membership and community projects, aided by the rest of the Committee and membership, who have taken up diverse roles as the need arose. Some of these roles include recruitment drives, reporting on council meetings, collaboration with other organizations and writing proposals to government.

I would like to thank all the volunteers and those who are putting in monthly financial contributions. Without you we could not have developed the organization to where it is now. To move to the next level, we can use even more support. If you can afford a regular monthly contribution, that would help us to fulfil out our mission of making Grahamstown a better place for all. We are considering fundraising events like a golf day or bowls night; if you have experience in organization such events your help will be most welcome. Costs we have to cover include our office, our part-time Administrator and SMS messaging, essential to reach our growing number of lower-income supporters.

Membership has grown to about 1500 at time of writing. That compares with 35 paid-up members at our March 2015 AGM and about 500 by the date of the 2016 AGM, and 1000 about a year ago. We had a very constructive and well-attended meeting on 27 March in Noluthando Hall in Joza, indicating our growing reach to parts of the community who have not traditionally been members.

Over the last year we have set up an office in what was GADRA space in the Day Hospital Grounds, Cobden Street and hired a part-time administrator, Ntuthu Blow. We are working on registering as an NPO, which will become necessary when our funding position becomes more complex. We are also investigating registering as a PBO, a different process.

Last year, we amended our constitution to give us more flexibility in timing of membership renewals and added inclusive language to the Objects of the association.

Over the course of 2017, we became increasingly concerned that municipal finances were not being brought under control and joined with the Concerned Citizens Committee to Save Makana (CCCSM) coalition initiated by Ron Weissenberg to pressure Province to deploy a turnaround specialist manager. This was partially successful with the deployment of Ted Pillay from Sarah Baartman District Municipality as Acting Municipal Manager for an initial period of 3 months as of February 2018 that we understand is likely to extend to July 2018. In our view a period of 18 months to 2 years would be more appropriate. This intervention has resulted in some improvements – with further civil society pressure helping to create a sense of urgency. Ron Weissenberg organized pothole fixing that started the day Ted Pillay arrived in town. GRA during 2016 and 2017 developed a proposal to Province to repair provincial roads that go through town. We have had no response to this proposal but we have started seeing work on Beaufort Street; we have no evidence that we directly caused this outcome.

In general terms, private initiatives to fix things that municipality should be doing is a concept that we endorse if there is a strategic benefit, such as a proof-of-concept – or because it is essential and there is no other alternative. We have encouraged the community to take on things they can easily do themselves, then present municipality with a list of things for which they need help. This puts municipality under pressure to deliver.

Over the last year, we have not focused as much on clean-ups, but rather on pushing for resolution of the bigger problems. We have workshopped possible legal strategies including pushing for full administration (Section 139(1)c of the Constitution) and other options to enforce better financial management of the municipality. For now, we are happy with the Ted Pillay intervention but are concerned that he cannot take the long-term view needed to address critical problems like the excessive staff component of the municipal budget (national guidelines stipulate 35% of budget; the actual figure is 50%). Deploying a good person is not enough – he needs a support team and commitment from political leadership. A holding action until we stop complaining is not going to do it.

Our concern about going the legal route is that it is a slow process and you need to be very sure what you want. For example, legal action to enforce proper management of the landfill site, after 2 years, was in effect abandoned because it was too difficult to enforce.

While we have been focusing on the bigger picture, we have also had a number of campaigns to encourage better enforcement of by-laws including some successful round-ups of stray livestock, in cooperation with SAPS and the municipality.

We have facilitated improvement in communication of service delivery problems to the municipality through the work of our Administrator. Ms Blow liaises with municipal officials on complaints we receive. We have also been working with the MobiSAM project to attempt to make their system more effective and to encourage the municipality to use it.

Some municipal workers work extremely hard and long hours. It is unfortunate that other employees who do not share their values undermine their good work. As with much of government, HR is a major weakness in the municipality, limiting consequences of commitment.

Looking forward, we are developing a more diverse member base and management committee so we can link up with others working on constructive community activism in the townships and generally build a culture of ownership of our city. We are also pleased to see growth in other active citizenship initiatives including Grahamstown Business Forum's meetings with the provincial premier.

In conclusion I would like to thank the outgoing Committee, including those who dropped out earlier in the year. All have made valuable contributions. And finally: I would like to thank all our members including the large number of new members. Let us sustain the growth and justify it by constructive action.