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Who's who in Heritage

The good news for Heritage is that there are a wide range of role players who are active in attending to the diverse Heritage related matters in the Metro. There is an ever-increasing interest in heritage matters by the public, property owners, Voluntary Associations (V.A.'s) and the authorities. This is good for the Metro in many ways and the Mandela Bay Heritage Trust (MBHT), as a Voluntary Association, is proud to play its small part in this.

How is our Heritage managed in the Metro?

At the macro level, Heritage in the metro is governed by the South African Heritage Resource Agency, (SAHRA) and the Provincial Heritage Resource Authority, (PHRA). The Mandate of PHRA is to enforce the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999. In doing this it deals with many matters – one of these is enforcing item 34:

“No person may alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years without a permit issued by the relevant Provincial Heritage Resources Authority.”

A local permit committee that sits monthly in the Metro to discuss and issue permits administers this. The committee consists of local experts in Heritage, Town planning and Architecture.

There are other interesting and important highlights from the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999, such as, who is responsible for what, “provisional protection areas” and, where extreme action is required, compulsory repair orders and expropriation. To our knowledge, although a powerful tool to compel property owners to act responsibly, the last two items have not been used in the Eastern Cape to date. This is something that, we believe, could be used more forcefully by the relevant authorities.

The Municipality and its agencies are also included in Heritage Management. The exact structure that will enable them to take their rightful role in this is currently being defined. At the moment, their responsibilities are managed by several Departments/ Agencies:

1. The Department of Housing and Land deals with issues relating to the built Heritage of the Metro, such as demolition permits, (in conjunction with PHRA)
2. The Department of Arts, Culture and Recreation manage mostly the aspects relating to ‘intangible’ Heritage such as oral history and the performing arts.
3. The Mandela Bay Development Agency (MBDA), as an agent of Urban Renewal in the inner city of Port Elizabeth, is currently becoming active in several areas such as the production of an “asset register” and a “conservation plan” for the Metro. An asset register is required of the Heritage Act and is simply a register of various Heritage working items – buildings, streets, objects, archaeology

sites, shipwrecks etc. The conservation plan is a more detailed and possibly more important document. This is a plan for how the Metro is going to manage the items on the asset register and what is its vision for the Metro. This Metro is at the exciting stage where it is beginning to acknowledge its responsibilities in terms of the Heritage Act and is taking steps to become more compliant.

At the micro level of Heritage Management are the Voluntary Associations, property owners and the public. There are VAs in the Metro that range from place specific groups such as the Bethelsdorp Trust and South End trust to more topic specific groups such as the Historical Society or the Military History Society.

So where does the Mandela Bay Heritage Trust fit within this? We would like to believe that we span all these spheres- from the macro –big ideas-to the micro-more specific. In this way, we believe that we are in quite a unique position in the Metro. Further, we are not specifically aligned but rather aim towards the larger goal of greater Heritage awareness and management in the Metro.

Currently, some of the issues we look at on the macro scale are liaising with PHRA and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) with regard to general Heritage awareness, the asset register and current issues that are being discussed in the press such as preservation of the Red Location Houses and the revitalisation of Central.

On the scale of the more specific, we debate and liaise with the NMBM, other V.A.'s, Rate Payers organisations and councillors about issues such as specific demolitions, "buildings in danger" and crime.

We believe that all these issues relate directly to the higher idea of what do we want our Metro, particularly the other areas such as Central, Richmond Hill and Northend, to look and feel like, particularly with regard to its Heritage worthy buildings and streets.

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