

Friends of Muizenberg Park

Chairperson's Report 2014-15

Muizenberg Park has been a public amenity for nearly a century, but – like the rest of Muizenberg – it went into a decline in the late Seventies. While Muizenberg as a whole has made a steady comeback as a diverse, historic and beautifully situated village, the Park has lagged behind and is urgently in need of care and attention.

This situation prompted a number of local residents to get together a year ago and found the Friends of Muizenberg Park.

What has happened during this year?

On the face of it, the situation in the Park has deteriorated with increasing speed: a somewhat changing number of people are erecting shelters and structures, both in the open near the Main Road and in the vegetation in the upper section of the Park. This occupation is associated with prostitution, the consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs and cable-stealing and –stripping, in addition to by-law violations such lighting fires, dumping and littering, defecation, destruction of protected vegetation, fighting and anti-social behaviour.

This is, in my view, an example of how a situation (whether personal, local or world-wide) often has to reach a crisis point before it is taken seriously by the necessary actors, and I am now cautiously optimistic that we have indeed reached such a point. The key to a sustainable solution is cooperation and coordination, and there are signs that this is now more likely to happen:

- the extension of the MID to include the Park
- the appointment of new security providers by the MID
- a committed and thoughtful Chair of the Muizenberg CPF
- probable cooperation with the security providers of the Zandvlei Conservation Area.

FOMP will continue to play an advocacy and advisory role in the matter.

During this year we have been laying the foundation for the rehabilitation and peaceful use of the Park: holding public information meetings, networking with other Friends organisations, building relations with City departments (including, of course, City Parks) and debating the roles and priorities for further development when the security situation has been stabilised.

We will be investigating the possibility and usefulness of a MOA with City Parks, laying out at least the outlines of shared or complementary responsibilities relating to the Park.

Clearly, though, law-enforcement alone will not bring about the future that we would like to achieve, and the broad vision for the Park is as follows: the lower part of the Park, from the Main Road to the upper edge of the grassy slopes, to be restored as a family-friendly recreation and picknicking area, preferably with an imaginatively designed children's play area; the upper section, up to Boyes Drive, to be maintained as a conservation area, with access via the well-built zigzag path.

Paul Booth and Ancunel Steyn have put forward the concept of signage and a pedestrian route from the beachfront via York Road up through the park to Boyes Drive and the mountain. Work on the pathway from the Main Road up the slope to join the zigzag path will take place - carried out by the road contractors in cooperation with the City - soon after the rebuilding of the Muizenberg section of road is completed, together with the grassing of a large section of the parking area previously established for the road contract.

The Bowling Club area, despite being as much public property as the rest of the park, is at present lodged in the park like a foreign object, and needs to be brought into a closer and mutually beneficial relationship. We certainly have no wish to bring an end to bowls and croquet, but there needs to be better public use made of the clubhouse itself.

We have - thanks to Bronwyn Redding-Jones - an active Facebook presence, and will soon have our own website. We are building up a membership list and a modest fund for focused projects. I would like to thank the pioneering Committee for their commitment, thoughtfulness and friendly collegiality, and in particular to Frank Bokhorst for stepping in and taking the minutes. I would also like to pay tribute to Elizabeth Milne who, among her many other local engagements, was a very active founding member of the Committee. We wish her well in her new environment.

John Cartwright
Chair
Friends of Muizenberg Park
June 2015