



## **RTC MID-YEAR REPORT**

1 JULY 2024

The Rosendal-Mautse Town Committee (RTC) would like to keep residents informed about its activities. This mid-year report summarises our work so far this year.

The committee is made up of volunteers from our community who give time and energy for the benefit of the town. The RTC has a constitutional mandate to “coordinate and achieve social and economic potential through projects and initiatives, to promote community development, the appeal of Rosendal as a tourism destination and quality of life for all residents.” It seeks to “initiate, coordinate, plan and execute projects for the greater social upliftment of Rosendal and Mautse and its immediate surroundings. Further, the committee will coordinate discussions with Dihlabeng and Rosendal municipal authorities on matters of common interest, for service delivery and basic services according to the constitution of South Africa.” (*RTC terms of reference.*)

Included in this report are matters that the committee has been pursuing, which are by no means exhaustive. We encourage residents to engage with the RTC by bringing concerns and ideas that contribute to the positive development of the town. This can be done by attending monthly meetings or by emailing using the newly created town email address [rtc@rosendal-town.co.za](mailto:rtc@rosendal-town.co.za). Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of every month. Remaining meeting dates: 26 June, 24 July, 28 August, 25 September, 30 October and 27 November. The annual AGM is held around mid-December.

### **TOWN PROJECTS**

The committee has been actively pursuing town projects that serve several ends, from aesthetics to safety. Herewith a status report on these projects.

#### **Annual Auction**

This year’s annual auction on the Easter weekend was a great success. The RTC thanks all those who contributed with items. R64,000 was raised to add to the committee funds. A newly acquired Yoco facility proved invaluable as most monies were paid at the auction with few subsequent EFTs. All bids were secured as a result.

#### **Trees**

Indigenous Stinkwood trees have been planted in Van der Merwe Street from General Fick to Neethling streets with support from members of the community and Green Rosendal. For the first winters the trees need to be covered with freeze guard. Nevertheless, some do not survive the cold and need to be replaced. This was done with financial support from the town committee, and input of time and funds from volunteers. Proposals have been made for further tree planting on main avenues in Rosendal and Mautse, including fruit trees. This will be a topic of ongoing discussion and activity. Volunteer participation is most welcome.

### Street Lights

Eight solar street lights were installed in neglected areas to assist with safety and help tourists when there are power outs. We piloted this with four lights and expanded to eight when this proved very effective. This conforms to the SAPS mandate that light is a crime deterrent. Because they are relatively inexpensive, the committee has endorsed funding for more lights. Residents are urged to participate in this action by sending suggestions for locations for these lights. Please send street numbers and names, and/or suggested corners to [rtc@rosendaltown.co.za](mailto:rtc@rosendaltown.co.za)

### Heelbo Road Sign

A road sign was manufactured and installed at the southbound fork in the Heelbo gravel road near Paul Roux. This advises drivers to use the Heelbo gravel route if not driving a 4x4 vehicle. Tourists were taking the left fork and getting stuck. This has been very effective in re-directing road users.

### Town Internet

The committee investigated internet proposals for the broader community as an alternative to private and individual connections. A Starlink option was explored (prior to their withdrawal from the country) but is cost-prohibitive. An alternative to RTS was also investigated but there were doubts about reliability and capacity. The current challenge according to RTS is its signal relay. A solution being investigated is to raise the mountain antennae another 6m in order to be in line of sight of the Paul Roux link. The threat of lightning strikes remains and this chance will be greater with a higher tower. The option of fibre through Telkom has been mooted but is not feasible in a town with few residents, and in Mautse with few clients. This issue requires more thought.

### Illegal Hunting

There has been conflicting information from the SAPS and farmers about hunting permissions. Provisional legislation is clear about property rights and circumstances where hunting is allowed, likewise for the use of dogs during hunting. The RTC did not see how it could assist with this matter as it is up to land owners and residents to raise their concerns with relevant authorities. The committee also noted that hunting is a traditional practice and could also be motivated by poverty. It remains a sensitive subject.

### Heritage

The RTC supports the Rosendal Heritage Association (RHA), which is installing nine plaques on a number of old buildings with historical significance. This is intended to support architectural conservation and promote heritage-based tourism. A written narrative on heritage topics has been written for guided tours. The RTC supported the RHA to digitally scan the original Rosendal town survey map of 1911 - for high res download and printing - by matching funds from local donors. The map will be available free to anyone who wishes to have it. Branding and marketing opportunities that promote the town and its heritage are also under discussion. The rehabilitation of the town cemetery is a major new RTC project and will commence soon with a new fence, general maintenance and a new gate.

### **CRIME AND SECURITY**

This is currently a huge concern for the community and has been discussed at each committee meeting to date. The recent uptick in break-ins is extremely worrying and requires urgent attention as well as solutions from all town stakeholders and the authorities. The RTC will endorse any programme or project that seeks to address crime. We understand there are also other interest groups like the Tourism Group that has prioritised tackling this problem. The SAPS is treating this as a priority and believe that the road detour is a possible vector for increased crime.

### Incidents vs Crimes

In April, Warrant Officer Jacob Malane (then acting commander) was invited to discuss the interaction between residents and the SAPS. The committee explained that some residents do not feel comfortable reporting crime and have not found the attitude of the station to be conducive or respectful of complainants. WO Malane expressed his deep concern. He stated that all residents should know that police officers are to support citizens and that the charge office is bound by law to take statements about incidents or crimes. Cpt Lombard, in a recent address to the committee, explained reporting choices. An incident can be reported in cases where something is witnessed but is not a crime (fighting, suspicious behaviour, noise). This gets an Incident Report Number and is recorded on the system. A crime that is reported (burglary, assault, sexual abuse) gets a Case Number. Residents should report crimes by giving a statement and filling out three forms. Complainants must insist on signing these documents and getting a case number, said Cpt Lombard. Both officers stated that residents are welcome to call them directly with serious matters.

### Crime Scene Protocols

WA Malane noted that, in some cases, residents register a case after a crime has taken place and have already fixed the damage - for example a broken window. This means the crime cannot be investigated because there is no untampered evidence. There is a detective team available from Bethlehem to do the investigation and this should be requested at the station. Cpt Lombard noted that residents can make a citizen's arrest in the case of a break-in but that this is a dangerous tactic, especially when alone because it gives a criminal an opportunity to lay (false) assault charges. SAPS legal services advises that if residents make a video of a burglar, they must ensure that their voice is clearly heard, saying, "I am taking a video of you", and that this media cannot be forwarded to anyone due to the POPIA Act. In a court case, this video can be part of evidence presented to a judge.

### Community Policing Forum (CPF)

The CPF has a new chair, Telekoa Mofokeng, who is devoting energy to making the institution function as it should, something that has long been a challenge for the community. Currently this includes the establishment of a Youth Desk involving local youth leaders in Mautse as a crime prevention measure. The RTC supported this and supplied branded T-shirts for the team. A public meeting to establish the Youth Desk was held at Mautse Stadium in January. An RTC representative was present along with the SAPS station commander, the Bethlehem CPF chair (Lefu Mofokeng) and local dignitaries (Counsellor Sempe). The CPF is currently engaging the SAPS station and enabling public input on the current wave of burglaries. CPFs are mandated under the South African Constitution to enable public input. To work effectively they require input and support from volunteers. Rosendal needs more of this.

### Patrols

SAPS via the CPF has requested the community consider restarting nighttime security patrols. Visible policing works as a deterrent for crime. The initiative is currently under discussion.

### **R70 REHABILITATION**

In 2023, the RTC undertook lobbying the Free State provincial authorities about the state of the R70. We engaged the services of a pro bono attorney and sent letters to several government departments to protest the unacceptable condition of the road, which has been negatively affecting livelihoods, tourism and the safety of users. Some of these actions were successful and included social media and press coverage. A petition raised over 1000 signatures as evidence of the town's frustration and determination. The RTC also lobbied the mayor's office.

Tenders were awarded in October 2023 and officially announced by the Mayor at a public meeting in the town hall. RTC representatives reiterated community concerns at that forum, asking for clarity on the rehabilitation plan, the contracted companies and the work schedule.

R70 roadworks started in earnest in February of this year. Two contractors were appointed: TauPele (Rosendal-Ficksburg) and Actophambili (Rosendal-Senekal). By April it became apparent that communication from the contractors was poor and residents were confused by comparative progress by the two contractors. While the Ficksburg section seems to be proceeding well, Actophambili has been beset with delays, mostly due to a scope change and subcontractor issues.

The RTC therefore undertook to challenge both contractors to recognise it as a stakeholder, as required by their contract terms, and to be included on the Project Steering Committees. The purpose of a steering committee is to facilitate representation of interested parties and provide a channel of communication with stakeholders. The committee started at local level and encountered resistance. We are now in communication with senior management and continue to pressurise both contractors for answers to pressing questions. The RTC has also asked for urgent attention to the new road into town that was non-consultative, as well as poor signage for the town detour. The RTC will continue in its attempts to speak up for residents and understand construction progress.

## **WEBSITE**

<https://rosendaltown.co.za>

The town website is an RTC flagship project. It became apparent late last year that the website required an upgrade based on negative user experience. Four quotes were received from potential suppliers. After debate the majority vote was for HNSA. The website design was overhauled and a new backend created to facilitate easier navigation and streamline operation. The designers worked with local stakeholders to improve content. The new website went live on 1 June 2024 and has been well received. It remains an exceptional resource for residents and visitors. The designers are on a maintenance retainer. In the short term, analytics will provide important information to understand how to maximise traffic and visibility. Anyone with suggestions or comments can email using the RTC email address.

## **SERVICES**

The town continues to suffer from water and power cuts. This is a major disruption not only to residents but also guest houses. The RTC has a good relationship with the municipality. However, inadequate budgets and lack of resources are the order of the day. It is a systemic issue and is unlikely to disappear until major restructuring happens at a higher level and political factionalism has been defused. That said, the RTC enjoys a good relationship with the municipal manager (MM), and dialogue is ongoing on the Service Delivery Group - if only to understand what has happened and how long it will take for power or water to be restored.

### **Power**

Rosendal receives its power from a sub-station managed by Dihlabeng municipality. The infrastructure has not been maintained for decades and repairs happen in a reactive way. Unlike Mautse, which is supplied directly by Eskom and does not suffer the same blackouts, Rosendal will continue to struggle unless the substation is refurbished. At a recent meeting with the new MM, the mayor's team said a position has been advertised for a permanent electrician to be based in town. This is what the RTC has been lobbying for years because it makes no sense for a team to be called from Bethlehem when outages are so frequent. A tender is also apparently out to overhaul the substation.

### Eskom vs Dihlabeng

The ongoing issues led to an RTC exploration of how we could change the town supply from municipal to Eskom direct. We engaged the Eskom Free State Director of Operations. Unfortunately, Eskom's position is that it does not have the funds to fix something that does not belong to it, nor start a process of application for handover with a town of our size – something that has happened successfully in Warden and other towns. Rosendal also cannot emulate the load reduction model of Clarens due to that town being supplied directly by Eskom. This remains a frustrating situation.

### Water

The town receives its water from three sources: a pipeline from Bethlehem (via Paul Roux), town boreholes, and the municipal dam. Currently, cuts in supply from Bethlehem mean that the town now gets water from the latter two sources. In addition, the supply from Katse dam into the South African river system (via the Ash River, Bethlehem and on to the Vaal Dam) will be stopped for six months, from October 2024. The RTC understands that additional boreholes will be sunk to assist in supply to the town and that a tender is out for this need.

### Rubbish dump

This is a serious challenge for the town. The mayor acknowledged that the current dump site was never meant to be in its current form but rather as a collection point for waste skips destined for Bethlehem. The mayor acknowledged unacceptable burning and pollution as a threat to the environment, as well as illegal dumping by the road contractor (since corrected).

### Town roads

The mayor's team mentioned a plan to place gravel on town roads, which is the only viable way forward because town roads cannot be further scraped.

## **FUNDING**

An RTC mandate is to disburse funds for community projects accrued from accommodation listings and the annual auction. These projects are varied and considered on merit and sustainability. So far this year the RTC has contributed to safety with a road sign on the Heelbo gravel road fork near Paul Roux that warns drivers not to take the direct route to town, unless in a 4x4. We funded solar-powered street lights for key intersections in town to improve safety and guide visitors, which was extremely successful and will be expanded. Regarding community development, we funded the Mautse CPF forum with meeting resources and youth desk T-shirts for public visibility, we sponsored a young adult learning soccer trip, shoes for the Mautse Ladies Football Club, and a local soccer tournament. The RTC is now a member of the Heritage Association and has approved funding for more historical plaques in town as well as the digitalisation of the first town map. A big project was just launched for the upgrade of the Rosendal cemetery that has fallen into a state of disrepair.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The 2024 committee comprises volunteers from the community. There are four office bearers: Eric Mohlolo Katsana (Chair), Lerato Mosala (Vice-Chair), Bonni Meyer (Treasurer), Anton Burggraaf (Secretary) and five exco members: Douglas Mason, Likeledi Morake, Marius Combrink, Marna van den Berg and Robin Moorby. The exco is supported by ex-officio members who are involved in general discussions and assist with specific projects: Wilbur Maseko, Jabu Perreira, Norman Botha, Klaus Staudt, Edgar Jellimann, Lemako Lemako, Hester Theron and Monica Mange.

Thank you for your attention! Please visit our new website and engage with the RTC using the links below.

Your sincerely,

**The Rosendal-Mautse Town Committee**