KNOW YOUR COUNCIL

The relationship between Council, the Municipal Administration and yourself

Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people. Many basic services are delivered by local municipalities and local ward councillors are the politicians closest to communities. Councillors are elected every five years during Local Government elections. Knysna currently has nineteen Councillors, of which ten are ward Councillors and the remainder are Proportional Representation Councillors. The number of Proportional Councillors is determined by the proportion of votes each party receives in an election. This means that all votes contribute to the resulting Council and not only the majority of the votes.

Two legs of local government are the Council and the municipal administration, which is made up of officials under the leadership of the Municipal Manager. But there is an important third leg: the community.

The Constitution and the South African government gives clear direction about how municipalities and councillors should be responsive to community views and to local issues. Partnerships should be built between the community, councillors and the administration to address local matters. A number of laws outline participation processes that Councillors and municipalities have to use to consult the community, most particularly the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act.

What is a Municipal Council?

The councillors you elect form a municipal council. This is the body that makes the by-laws and decisions the municipal area and oversees the administration.

A municipal council has a number of different responsibilities. These include making the laws and policies, providing financial oversight, planning the budget, and hiring the municipal manager. It is also responsible for ensuring that the municipal administration fulfills its duties to the community.

There are a number of ways that the community can interact with Council and the Administration. The most important is the Ward Committees.

What are Ward Committees?

Ward Committees should encourage and increase participation by the community – their job is to make municipal council aware of the needs and concerns of residents and keep people informed of the activities of municipal council.

Ward Committees are made up of a ward councillor, who is the Chairperson, and no more than ten people who are elected by the ward and who serve voluntarily for a five-year term. Council must make rules regarding how Ward Committees operate.

The Ward Committee is an advisory body, meaning that it can make recommendations to municipal council, but does not have the power to make decisions on its own. Your Ward Committee should be an effective way of spreading information concerning what your community wants from municipal council and what council is doing.

One of the most important tasks of the Ward Committees is engaging with the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and the Annual Budget. The Committees will assist the ward councillor to determine what are the priorities for the ward. But determining what needs to happen in your ward is not only the responsibility of the Councillor and the Ward Committees. Individuals are invited to attend the regular ward meetings and the meetings where the Council and the Administration will present the Budget and IDP. You are welcome to make inputs at these meetings and then put your proposals in writing for the Council to consider. For those who cannot write, there is ready assistance available.

Have your children's births been registered with the Department of Home Affairs?

The Late Registration of birth-process currently followed by the Department of Home Affairs will come to an end on 31 December 2015. Thereafter a new procedure to register late births on the National Population Register will be followed, with strict procedures and regulations to adhere to.

Knysna Executive Deputy Mayor Esmé Edge said that the South African government provides its residents many benefits. "These include access to a variety of grants, housing and social protection and apply for any of these benefits, you must be a registered South African citizen."

"According to legislation, all children born in South Africa must be registered within 30 days of their birth," said Edge. "The new requirements for registration that will come into effect from 1 January 2016 will be stringent, with requirements specific to children younger than 14 years, and those 15 and older."

"Various factors will determine registration requirements," she continued. "These include issues such as birth in and out of wedlock, as well as abandonment. Knysna Municipality will work closely with the Department of Home Affairs and our Community Workers to ensure that all of the greater Knysna area's children are correctly registered."

"As South Africans, we are extremely proud of our young democracy, where everyone has the right to vote. But our young people won't be able to vote if they are not registered at birth. We will do everything we can to make this new registration process as easy as possible for applicants and their guardians," she concluded. "That is really just another way in which we are creating a town where people and nature prosper."

For more information on the current and new requirements for the registration of a birth, please visit the Department of Home Affairs at www.dha.gov.za, or call them on 044 805 4103, or visit http://www.dha.gov.za/.

Celebrate your courage on Youth Day

South Africa celebrates Youth Day on 16 June. On this day we commemorate and celebrate the courage of our youth, and of ourselves as South Africans.

Our country has a rich history. A history filled with accounts and stories of how South Africans gathered their strength and faced their challenges, bringing about change for the better. And we will never forget the courageous protests launched by the students in 1976. Their demonstrations – and the reaction it evoked on a national and global scale – was one of the great strides our country took towards freedom and equality for all. And it is proof of our inherent courageous nature as South Africans.

Enjoy the public holiday, but remember those courageous young people who sacrificed their freedom and their lives so that we may enjoy and appreciate ours.

Georlene Wolmarans
Executive Mayor

From the Mayor’s Pen

Residents were shocked recently when the Boathouse on Thesen Island caused fire damage to one of South Africa’s favourite restaurants, Ile de Pain.

Offices were destroyed and it was fortunate that the Fire Department got the fire under control before more shops and the hotel nearby was damaged. At the same time a fire did extensive damage to a house in Campbell Drive, and a week before 17 houses burnt down in White Location. These instances and the devastating fires a few weeks back in Cape Town made me wonder what I will take with me if I have to evacuate my house on short notice.

It also leaves one with the obvious, what is left behind? And how much of what you leave do you really need, how much of that would you miss if you have lost it? In my case I came to the conclusion that I own quite a few things that I haven’t used in years and I’m really honest, that I do not really need. Do not get me wrong, most of the people affected by the fires above lost everything they own, and for most of them these were items of daily survival – a roof over their head, clothes, shoes and basket.

I read an interesting article recently on the “Collective Evolution” website about the Swedes and how efficient they are at recycling. The article calls it a “recycling revolution” that has been growing over the last few years and currently only 1% of their garbage ends up in landfills. There are positive and negative reviews about the ways they get rid of the garbage, but what stands out the most is that for the Swedes it is second nature to recycle – it’s a way of life. There are also interesting stories about people striving to produce 0% waste, and what I found inspiring was how doable it was. For example, a man in Germany that will produce 0% waste is due to open soon, and a restaurant in the US has been operating for the last two years, with the same accolade.

The municipality runs a recycling programme but we have seen over the last few years; there is still a long way to go, rather than increasing. The issue is Knysna has no landfill, and the waste we create, recycled or not, is being transported to alternative land sites, not only at tremendous financial cost, but also increasing our environmental footprint. For us, minimising waste is a necessity.

I have a challenge for the Knysna people – join us and let us create not only a recycling, but also a waste minimisation revolution in Knysna. I have requested the Community Services Director to investigate the setting up of depots like they have overseas, where people can get rid of unwanted items, and these items can be re-used by people in need. Such as when they have lost everything in a fire.

The municipality will draw up a list of handy tips on possible ways to minimise your waste – if you want to join the revolution, please contact my office and we will forward these to you.

Remember:

Wasting times are 6pm – 7pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for gardens on even street numbers and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays for gardens on odd street numbers. Water is precious, please use responsibly.