

News from your Trustees

November 2023



MUTUAL
HEIGHTS

Mutual Building
14 Darling Street
Cape Town

mutualheights.info

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Your trustees met last week, and an important decision was to re-institute a periodic newsletter for all those involved with the building: owners, tenants, agents, and others. In order to make sure that everybody actually in the building gets a copy, paper copies will be pushed under all doors - certainly as we build up communications as indicated in the notes below.

However, we must first thank Peter Raimondo for his work as chair of trustees since 2020. In his time, we have seen the new lifts installed (after years of struggling to get the project started), and significant investment in access control systems. There has been endless management of the finances, and let's not forget COVID-19; that affected all of us in so many different ways.

In the notes that follow we report on just some of the many things that we are managing. You may have your own concerns about things that need to be given consideration, so please do not hesitate to get in touch with us as indicated at the end of this newsletter. There are lots of questions directed at you, the reader, why don't you get back to us with some answers?

Communications

You now see the first of what we hope will be many useful and relevant newsletters. Some of us watch the activity on the WhatsApp residents messaging group and it is clear that, as time passes, new residents take up occupation, new problems arise, and the circumstances of living in the city centre bring new challenges. The newsletter will try and address the most important things from time to time, not less than four times each year.

In history, Mutual Heights has undertaken surveys to see where the management team should be focusing its attention. We will not do that immediately, there are many other things that we want to do that are not at issue, but an idea that has already been discussed and agreed is to have an open online session from time to time, to provide anyone involved with the building a chance to talk with others, hear some of the details of what is going on, and air their concerns. We will schedule such a meeting – shall we call it a “town hall” meeting? - before the end of the year.

Some of you will have had experience of other sectional title schemes, if there are any ideas that we should know about, that might improve communications, then do tell us.

Major Projects

Previously the Mutual Heights AGM has passed a resolution requiring trustees to report on major projects, costing more than R200,000 in total. The lift project is essentially complete (although there are still some snagging jobs to do, so you may see Kone around in the building again) and so we need to refocus on the next project. There are two that we want to bring to your attention: the replacement of the fire doors, and the refurbishment of the water coolers on the roof.

Fire doors: trustees have a report that indicates almost all the fire doors in the building must be replaced. This will not happen quickly, but the expense means that there will be consequences to the balancing of our finances (see the next section).

Water coolers: You may be aware that every section of the building has facilities for connecting a heat pump for the purpose of air conditioning or heating. There is a very long history going right back to the beginning of the project that converted the building (2002, but as the cost of running the pumps constantly is affecting our electricity bill, we must consider whether we are getting value for money. At the heart of it, we need to know which sections are using the cooled water and

what the level of actual demand is. We will be asking all owners to tell us (if they know) whether they have a heat pump installed, and how critical it is for them to actually have air conditioning throughout the year. It may be necessary to undertake a physical inspection, so you have been warned that there may be a request for access to all sections of the building.

Finances

Let's talk about finances, first a quick question: it is normal for major projects to be funded by means of a "special levy", which would be an addition to the regular levies for the period of a project. You may recall that there was a special levy for the lift project, but on the way through it was decided to draw on reserves; that is one reason why the levies are high and the reserves available to the body corporate are less than we would wish.

Do you have an opinion about special levies? We believe it is important that the cost of ordinary levies is seen as separate from the cost of major projects, in that the ordinary levies go on forever but special projects have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has not been decided how future costs for major projects will be handled, it would help trustees to have your comments about this.

Visitor management

Concern about the number of short stay visitors, and the occasional bad behaviour of people who are only here for a short stay has been increasing. I'll keep this short (there's plenty of chat about the problems elsewhere) but for me the single most important factor in *successfully* hosting short stay visitors is to establish a close relationship with visitors, not to try and work by "remote control" with key boxes and so on. It is becoming clear that some platforms use quite well managed or reviewing mechanisms, where there are no reviews and bookings are open to all comers, perhaps that is the beginning of bad behaviour? What do you think? What experiences do you have of short stay visits and visitors in other schemes?

We have access control in the building, and we now have a visitor registration system that should be easing the problems at the same time that it saves everybody's effort in gathering the data that we need to properly understand who is occupying the building from time to time. Is it working for you? Have you successfully registered visitors? Has it actually improved the check-in experience at the security desk?

If you are wondering why there are not penalties for serious nuisances, please be assured that penalties are now being issued, to owners, on a sliding scale. However complicated the "arrangements" between a visitor and the owner (there can be multiple agencies involved", in Mutual Heights we are very clear: owners have an agreement with the body corporate, and within that agreement, owners must take responsibility for the use of their apartments and the behaviour of those occupying them, at all times.



*With warm wishes,
On behalf of all your Trustees,
Andy Bytheway*

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Check out "Mutual Building" on Wikipedia:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_Building