

DRAFT POLICY FOR: CREATING AND MAINTAINING FIRE WISE VACANT ERVEN IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN AREAS OF THE OVERSTRAND MUNICIPALITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

We submit that “Firewise” is not the only wisdom presently required, and that the draft should go back to the drawing board. Although well-formulated legally, it does not recognise the core importance of retaining the natural fynbos and heritage important to both biodiversity and tourism in the Overstrand. The proposed plan appears to be too simplistic and ignores existing parameters, the role played in the eco-corridor between the KBR core and the sea, the existing Conservancies and existing circumstances.

We set out our concerns below.

1. EXISTING PARAMETERS.

1.1 It is generally accepted knowledge, as confirmed at the time by the head of fire prevention of CapeNature and City of Cape Town, and also easily accessible on worldwide internet, that the starting point for the control of vegetation fires should be the ratio of the height of abutting vegetation to the cleared area around a house or firebreak (a minimum ratio of one meter height of vegetation to each two-and-a-half meter distance from the residential unit).

1.2 It is also generally recognised that streets fulfil the function of firebreaks in areas where vegetation predominates.

1.3 The present draft policy ignores the above established knowledge and, instead, the draft proposes a 50% clearing of erven and a height restriction of 500mm.

1.4 The Overstrand Municipality will be able to show leadership as the world increasingly focuses on the importance of conserving biodiversity and encouraging indigenous plant communities. However this will mean efforts to ensure that the road reserves and open areas support indigenous plants. In Cape Town they have started to deliberately leave some road reserves without mowing. In this area it means sensitive policies that take into account the nature of the road reserves.

1.5 We request please that the policy be redrafted, by taking the parameters in 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4 into account.

2. EXISTING CONSERVANCIES.

2.1 Whilst the policy may be suitable for built-up areas, we submit that the proposed treatment of vegetation is not suitable for the Hangklip Villages, where the vegetation of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve and its buffer zone extends into the Hangklip Villages by way of street verges, open spaces and built erven that are all kept in their natural vegetation state. This retention plays an important role in biodiversity and the rapidly diminishing coastal fynbos.

2.2 The appealing natural character of the Hangklip Villages greatly depends on the maintenance of the street verges, public and private erven in its natural fynbos state.

Comment [T1]: There will be increasing pressure on Govts and on municipalities to preserve Biodiversity

2.3 The individual Hangklip Villages also have registered Conservancy status. The conservancies undertake hacks to remove alien vegetation on public and private erven and street verges and also remove overload of combustible material.

They have also formulated approaches to fire prevention in consultation with their ratepayers.

These approaches are reviewed with the OM from time to time.

2.4 We request please that villages with Conservancies be exempted from the general policy and that a new provision be inserted that clearing of vegetation in conservancies be in accordance with a management plan agreed with the individual village conservancies.

3. EXISTING CIRCUMSTANCES.

3.1 Indigenous vegetation on built erven, to which the policy does not apply, is of similar nature to those on unbuilt erven, open spaces and street verges.

We submit that the proposed policy for unbuilt erven, open spaces and street verges, that ignores the surrounding circumstances, is too simplistic to be acceptable.

3.2 The indigenous vegetation generally grow to a natural height in excess of the proposed 500mm.

We submit that the ratio of 1:2,5 be applied to determine the height of vegetation and the extent of height clearance around house and streets, and which leaves indigenous vegetation beyond the safety range in its natural state.

4. PROPOSED ROOIELS CONSERVATION OVERLAY ZONE (RECOZ)

4.1

Rooiels subscribes to the firewise initiative.

However:

The Rooiels RECOZ proposal, which has been accepted practically unanimously by a large attendance of Rooiels ratepayers in November 2019 is seemingly at odds with the OM proposed policy as presently formulated.

We submit the extracts below as additional motivation for exemption of conservancies as per paragraph 2.4 above.

4.2 We please draw the attention to following extracts the draft RECOZ

4.2.1 The purpose of the RECOZ is described, amongst other points, as follows:

“Rooiels strives to conserve its natural character by:

- Protecting and maintaining local landmark features such as Klein Hangklip Mountain, the Koppie and the green edge facing the wetland areas, the Rooiels River estuary and the coastal open zone.

- Protecting and maintaining the Rooiels Nature Reserve and natural street reserves. These serve as green linkages between the mountains and the coastal open zone and contribute to the rural and eco-character of Rooiels.
- Ensuring that the natural green fynbos context remains the dominant element and that the built environment remains subsidiary to the landscape, rather than dominating it.
- Protecting natural and indigenous fauna and flora “refuge” in Rooiels through respect and harmonious co-existence.
- Be a Fire-wise community by being cognisant of the high flammability of the fynbos and act in a responsible manner to prevent risk to life and property
- Working with the Overstrand Municipality to ensure that regulations enhance the character of Rooiels.”

4.2.2 A noteworthy firewise paragraph reads as follows:

“13.12 FIRE-WISE

13.12.1 As a fire-wise community, owners need to have a ready supply of water. To relieve pressure on the water supply system, rainwater harvesting, and storage is encouraged. Owners are encouraged to investigate coatings / claddings / materials that incorporate flame retardants. In the event of fires, wind carried embers are a great risk to structures. Compliance to Overstrand Municipality Building codes and regulations is obligatory. Non-compliance places the residents at risk and may have insurance claim implications.

13.12.2 Property owners are encouraged to limit the extent of vegetation clear-cutting of erven for building purposes.

13.12.3 Property owners are encouraged to limit the clear-cutting of vegetation with regard to fire safety and instead to apply vegetation trimming around residential units to a minimum ratio of one meter height of vegetation to each two-and-a-half meter distance from the residential unit.”

4.2.3 Street reserves are especially important to Rooielsers:

“13.5 STREET RESERVES (STREET VERGES):

In order to protect and maintain the street reserves, which serve as green linkages between the mountains and the coastline and which contribute to the character of Rooiels, the following natural features will be maintained:

13.5.1 Streets and roads will not be widened and will be brick-paved where necessary.

13.5.2. Streets and roads already serve as firebreaks. Fuel-breaks will not be constructed next to streets and roads, unless specifically required and motivated for in terms of the an Overstrand Municipality approved Fire / Rescue & Disaster Management Plan presented by an approved Rooiels community organization, such as the Rooiels Rate Payers Association.

13.5.3 Trimming may be done of vegetation that overhangs streets and road verges in accordance with the management plan mentioned in 13.5.2.

13.5.4 Indigenous vegetation is preferable and encouraged as verges to retain the character of Rooiels and to contribute to global biodiversity.

13.5.5 Road edge and storm water channel treatments must be designed as far as practicable as water features to fit in with the rural context.”

Yours faithfully,

Piet van Rensburg

Chairman, FRIENDS OF ROOIELS.