

CO-EXISTING WITH NATURE IN A SUSTAINABLE AND BUSH-FRIENDLY MANNER

A GPNR forum on guidelines relating to the interaction between humans and the natural environment

This month's guideline deals with a topic that is really 'close to home', namely how to build and/or maintain our homes in a responsible and environmentally sustainable manner.

GUIDELINE 5

I. I own my property – can I build anything I want?

Based on the information below, the short answer is 'No'.

1. The relatively new **Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013** (SPLUMA) will in future be the most important Act to regulate all urban and rural land. We hope to bring you more detailed information about how it will potentially affect GPNR in the next Newsletter.
2. At this stage, the properties comprising GPNR are zoned as agricultural land. As such, another Act, the **Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act 43 of 1983**, and a number of local and provincial regulations, apply (subject to SPLUMA), which may limit what we can and cannot do or build on our properties.
3. In addition, there is environmental legislation that must be adhered to, notably the **National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998**. This Act lists certain activities that call for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out, especially for example, building on properties in sensitive areas close to the river. The Act also places certain restrictions on the building of lodges and the expansion of existing buildings for purposes of running a lodge.
4. Our **GPNR Constitution** contains provisions, which echo those found in similar constitutions. They bind Members contractually. These rules were included for very good reason, namely to preserve the natural environment. See for example clause 18.2.5. Note also the duties imposed on Members in clause 11.

Therefore, before starting any building project or any commercial project on your property, make sure that you know which rules apply. Non-compliance with legislation or the Constitution could lead to many unwanted consequences.

If you are unsure about the legality of a building project, an expert in the field is the principal planner Jacques du Toit at Jacques du Toit and Associates. Phone: 015 307 3710; Email: dutoitfj@mweb.co.za.

II. I have adhered to all the local, provincial and national laws, and the GPNR Constitution – now can I build whatever I want?

Here the answer is, 'not really'. There are many other 'rules' that are in some ways even more important than legislation and contractual obligations, although they are not strictly enforceable. They encompass sensitivity toward, and respect for, this beautiful place we call Grietjie and for all our neighbours, the two-legged, four-legged, multi-legged, no-legged and winged.

Once more, our Constitution offers invaluable guidance. Note especially the 'Objectives' in clause 7.

Below are some of these important 'rules' aimed at living in harmony with nature (and all our neighbours):

1. Respect for the bush

Do we love Grietjie and the bush because of the beautiful houses and gardens? Or, because of the lovely roads, lapas, braai areas and swimming pools? The answer is, of course, that we love the bush for the sake of the bush, the birds, animals, vegetation and landscape.

But unfortunately, sometimes our actions belie our words. What do we say when we build bigger houses and more garages, guest accommodation and entertainment areas than we really need? Why do we have so many roads zig-zagging through our properties? What do we say with our fences, which interfere with the movement of animals and keep out nature, the very thing we say we love?

Clearly, the bigger our footprint, the less space remains for natural vegetation and animals. Creating a large footprint not only has a (disruptive) visual impact, it also shrinks the larder that the animals depend on for their survival. Moreover, apart from the final footprint that interferes with the natural environment, the entire building process places great strain on the environment and the food sources of animals.

2. Bush atmosphere

We love Grietjie, specifically because it is the bush, and because of its 'bush atmosphere' as the GPNR Constitution describes it. But, what is this elusive bush atmosphere? By definition, it must be something very different to a city atmosphere, and the most outstanding differences between the two is that in cities we find:

- Light pollution
- Noise pollution
- Manmade structures dominating the landscape

- Colours and textures clashing with the natural environment

Therefore, to create a bush atmosphere we need to minimise the abovementioned elements as much as possible.

We can think too of other reserves that have a wonderful bush atmosphere and learn from them. Many of our successful sister reserves have very strict rules, for example, about which colours and materials to use in building, the sizes of buildings, and about how to shield lights and contain noise levels.

Think too, that often the reserves with the best bush atmosphere are the ones with the best reputation – they are also the most desirable and hence the ones where properties fetch the best prices.

3. Adhere to the bush 'rules'

In the long run, the more we leave of the natural environment, the better for us, for the next generations, and of course for the bush itself.

The real value of our properties lies therein that they are situated in a nature reserve – therefore, the more nature we leave, the more we enhance the potential value of our properties.

- **Carefully consider the impact of any building or renovation project and minimise our footprint if possible.**
- **Carefully consider the consequences of making more roads.**
- **Build with sensitivity and respect for the natural environment.**
- **Build green and live green!**

Compiled by Liz Lewis

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