

ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

BY JODI CHETTY

UIP gets neighbourhoods working

In recent years, the acronym 'UIP' has been on the lips of several community leaders and businessmen. The Urban Improvement Precinct concept has made a significant impact on a few communities in KZN. We speak to Urban MGT marketing and communication consultant **Cara Reilly** for an in depth view.

In any environment, urban decay threatens property value and business prosperity. The aim of systemic urban management, like a UIP, is aimed at stemming the rate of urban decay as quickly as possible. Cara mentions how important it is to understand the holistic view of a managed urban environment. "It leads to improved social cohesion, cleaning, greening, maintenance, social responsibility, communication and, most importantly, safety and security."

Essentially, a UIP is established to fill the gap in government service delivery to public areas, thus ensuring the expected level of quality in public areas. Establishing a UIP requires commitment from a group of individuals who are willing to support it. "There is no clearly defined or step by step process as the type of area and owners within it will dictate what approach is needed," says Cara. There are a few general areas property owners will consider, including: establishment of boundaries in the area, engaging with stakeholders on the notion of the UIP, studying the property valuation roll, undertaking a feasibility study and drawing up a monthly budget looking at potential income for the area. "Once the formation of the UIP is approved by council all property owners with its boundaries are required by law to contribute to the UIP."

Three UIPs stand out as noteworthy successes

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in KZN: Umhlanga Rocks, Florida Road and the newly implemented Ballito. Cara says Umhlanga Rocks has since experienced growth in property values in terms of multi-billion rand investments, property upgrades and expansions and new niche tenants moving into the area. In Florida Road, an iconic strip in Durban that is truly the heart of the Berea, residents and property owners invested deeply into the UIP. "The baseline approach was physical interventions, making visible changes with cleaning, maintenance and security services, that start to change perception and work towards slowly improving investor confidence. To date the UIP has visibly improved the aesthetics and safety of the road from cleaning, greening and maintenance projects to the implementation of Sidewalk Monitors and collaborative projects with Metro Police." Ballito, the newest UIP, began

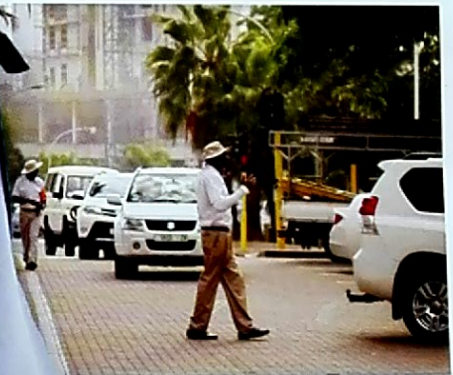
in November last year. "The focus was on special projects in high visibility areas and on the beachfront, aimed at improving the overall aesthetics of the area, particularly for the festive season. Added to this the UIP has focused on the development of a working relationship with KwaDukuza Municipality for better service delivery. With the very visible success of this work and the growth in the positive relationship the UIP has developed with KDM, the UIP is now turning its' attention to the Ballito Business Park.

While UIPs are funded by commercial property owners, all three of the aforementioned UIPs have had monthly voluntary contributions from residents, NGOs, churches and other organisations. "These contributions are what allow the UIP to deliver higher levels and a wider scope of service than what is laid out in the business plan. The fact that these owners pay consistently and willingly shows that the value of the managed structure is very definitely felt." ■

URBAN IMPROVEMENT



FAR LEFT: Dedicated Metro Police service on Florida Road. **LEFT:** Edging the lawn on the Ballito Promenade. **BELOW:** The Ballito UIP security team. **BOTTOM:** Maintaining easy traffic flow in the Umhlanga Village. (Photos by: Umhlanga UIP, Florida Road UIP and Ballito UIP)



What is a UIP?

An Urban Improvement Precinct (UIP) is a sustainable funding mechanism for urban management and improvement of public areas, with the financial responsibility equitably shared by precinct members.

Through a UIP, the commercial property owners in a defined geographic area come together to collectively manage the public space in that area through a special levy. The UIP budget is funded by property owners in the UIP area and is calculated on a pro rata basis against assessed property values.