

BOOSTING OUR LIFESTYLE

*Increased investments, improved service delivery and infrastructure, and a safer, cleaner environment are just some of the positive spin-offs from our buoyant UIPs, writes **Debbie Reynolds***



To discount uMhlanga's UIP (urban improvement precinct) as just another newfangled pie-in-the-sky concept would do great disservice to a management plan which has facilitated practical improvements and enhanced economic benefits.

Conservative estimates are that uMhlanga will soon boast investments of around R5-billion and an additional annual rates base of R105-million since the inception of the UIP in 2008.

"It's all about commercial property owners and the municipality working



PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS

Above left: Ballito UIP cleaning team. Above: Dustbin repairs before and after. Left: Cara Reilly, UrbanMGT team member.

together to unlock economic potential," says Cara Reilly, a passionate member of the UrbanMGT team dedicated to creating urban management solutions for KwaZulu-Natal.

Having lived and worked in Gauteng, and being a journalist by trade, Cara became fascinated with urban management after she was poached from her editor's job to work as brand and marketing manager for a company which managed the Joburg equivalent of UIPs.



VISIBLE CHANGE

Top: Ballito paving upgrade outside Engen.
Above: Planting grass and plants in uMhlanga Rocks.

Cara came home to Durban seven years ago looking for a better lifestyle for her family, and after settling in Durban North, she was dead keen to put her experience to work. “Meeting up with Brian Wright, who was forging new ground in urban improvement precincts, gave me the opportunity, and five years later our team is growing and learning from the successes and challenges of urban management.

“Working on the understanding that the

“ Being able to show delivery on the ground is really important in that it shows that levies are being used wisely and that the local municipality is actively being engaged ”

current municipal rates base, and growing service demands, mean the municipality can only do so much to upgrade key economic nodes, so the formation of partnerships with the commercial sector is vital.”

Once a UIP is formed, commercial property owners and the management company put together an annual working budget which is submitted to the municipality for approval. The municipality then sets the UIP levy, related to the value of each property, which the municipality collects on the property owners’ rates »

community*

CLEANING UP
The uMhlanga Promenade has 2,3km of flat brick track running north to south.



BEFORE



AFTER



AFTER



BEFORE

UPGRADE

uMhlanga Rocks is reaping the rewards of a R5-million upgrade to the sidewalk paving to mirror the new brick work on the Promenade.

bill and pays over to the UIP management company.

“While churches, school and residential property owners are not obliged to pay the UIP levy, a good percentage who have seen the benefits are contributing on a voluntary basis,” says Cara. “It’s about building relationships and ensuring that everyone feels the UIP is working for them.”

The UIP provides supplementary services, such as security, cleaning and greening, general maintenance and actively lobbies the municipality to optimise service delivery.

While managing crime is an issue, Cara says the removal of urban decay is the game changer. “It’s Giuliani’s broken-window theory. It’s about cleaning up after storms, fixing bollards, upgrading facilities, repairing drains, planting trees, picking up litter and removing graffiti, getting dog owners to use the dogs’ mess dispensers ... the little bits and pieces that create the impression that someone cares and public space matters.”

Currently uMhlanga Rocks is reaping the rewards of a R5-million upgrade to the sidewalk paving to mirror the new brick

work on the Promenade, a project lobbied for by the UIP and planned, funded and implemented by the municipality.

Further north, Ballito is seeing the results of the symbiotic relationship between the KwaDukuza Municipality and commercial property owners. Its year-old UIP is currently focused on delivering visible change, which, says Cara, was important to get buy-in from the community.

“As with most new urban management initiatives, being able to show delivery on the ground is really important in that it shows that levies are being used wisely and that the local municipality is actively being engaged.

“We also launched the Ballito UIP with a strong physical brand, brought to life through a Facebook page, website and branded clothing and vehicles, so the UIP is very visibly in place.

“There has been incredible support from the community and more businesses are getting involved in positive ways, like buying bicycles for the patrollers, providing meals for staff and painting the lifeguard towers.”

She says the success of these UIPs is reliant on people seeing things happen, rather than just talking about them. “People want to see service delivery, so it’s really important that UIPs respond to the changing needs of the areas they manage.” *