

## Claremont Upgrades Central Area

The cranes are flying in Claremont Central – Claremont's Business District. They provide the obvious symbol of some R2-billion of private sector investment that is creating new office, retail and residential development in the area, according to the City's Spatial Planning and Urban Design Department. A public meeting will be held on Monday 7 May to discuss.

The new apartments – under construction over the remainder of this year will see some 2 000 new residents living in the area.

The Bus and Taxi Interchanges are being redeveloped, to support the increased use of public transport (R24-million is being provided by the City for this purpose), and work will start soon on the creation of Claremont Boulevard, for which the Claremont Improvement District Company (CIDC) has provided R22 million.

The Boulevard will run parallel to the railway line, between Letterstedt and Stanhope Roads, and will provide improved access to the area between the Main Road and the Railway Line, with the objective of reducing traffic congestion along the Main Road.

### A public environment

The City has been working with the CIDC on proposals for upgrading the entire public environment of Claremont Central and a two-year study by consultants has been completed. Officials hope to obtain Council approval for its recommendations by the end of the year. The public consultation process now underway is an important step in this process.

A public participation programme, including exhibitions and a public meeting, has also been formulated.

The study's proposals see the streets and squares of the area being reclaimed for pedestrian use, with residents benefiting from a selection of treed outdoor places, where birds and birdsong replace motor cars and tarmac.

The proposed upgrading includes the following concept plans:

#### Main Road

Main Road needs to be transformed into a place for public life, primarily for pedestrians, where people can meet, exchange news and socialise; in other words, a place to "go to", rather than a place to "go through".

The public transport / vehicular function of Main Road will remain, however, and – underground services permitting – trees will be planted and new pedestrian-friendly brick and cobble paving introduced.

Attractive, desirable and well managed market areas will be created, allowing the proactive and progressive relocation of informal traders along Main Road into markets, such as those in the revamped Dreyer Street, and at Newry Square.

The repaving and landscaping of the sidewalks will be extended to the key pedestrian crossings, such as Main and Vineyard/Hawthorne Roads, Main and Newry / Warwick Street.

#### Nothing square about it

Back in the 1980's, the City Council concluded that Claremont's CBD streets were ugly, and that there was literally no usable open space. Out of that was born the idea of a series of public squares in areas where people could gather, relax and enjoy themselves, even though no obvious locations existed at the time.

Council came up with the Four Squares concept and suggested that the logical places for these squares were at Sanclare, Draper Square, Newry Square and Warwick Square.

None of these squares have been realised, and they need to be upgraded. There are plans for a restaurant at Sanclare, in order to make the square a more fun place, and its upgrading will go hand in hand with the improvement of Dreyer and Corwen Streets.

Hopefully, with redevelopment of its parking garage, Warwick Square will be transformed into a genuine, properly treed, public open, green space.

Mature trees have been relocated from the Pick 'n Pay parking lot to the open space on the railway side of The Claremont Apartments and this space will ultimately become part of a new landscaped Draper Square off Stegmann Road.

To the south, construction will start soon on the new Bus Interchange. Its completion will allow for the creation of Newry Square, a new landscaped area in the open space towards Main Road, to provide informal traders with a better market. The Taxi Interchange is expected to be completed by the end of April.

#### Gateways

Landscape and urban design proposals have been prepared for each of the entry points to Claremont Central, to create a "sense of arrival".

#### Who will foot the bill?

The Council has provided the funding for all the necessary background planning and conceptual design work for the public space upgrades. It is envisaged that private developers and land owners in Claremont will seize the opportunity to include the proposed upgrades adjacent to their properties, as part and parcel of the development of their properties, thereby adding tremendous value to their own premises as well as the Claremont CBD as a whole.

The upgrading of public spaces, such as thresholds and squares, will need to be financed by the City, possibly in collaboration with private developers. The City will likely also have to fund the repaving of those stretches of the Main Road where redevelopment is not imminent.