



## **SafeParks report for PRABOA AGM 2021**

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### **Executive Summary**

The SafeParks scheme remains financially sound, albeit at breakeven. Engagements with Cortac earlier in the year have seen a partially reworked scheme ringfenced to cover Parkhurst only, with a more equitable allocation of management and head office costs between the SafeParks scheme and Parktown North/ Parkwood.

After taking a worrying dip between December 2020 and March 2021, and thanks to Lynn Rushton our administrator as well as Justin, Cortac's salesperson for the area, subscriptions have recovered to the more recent historical average of approximately 900 residential subscribers and approximately 40 business subscribers. The latter numbers having decreased in line with the increased departure of traders on 4<sup>th</sup> avenue as the Covid Lockdowns impacted trade.

A disappointing average of 40% support rate by residents and traders means that we are unable to negotiate for more security provider resources from Cortac or limit the annual increases due in March 2022. SafeParks have however managed to negotiate with Cortac and the monthly subscription has remained the same for the last 3 years with an attempt to encourage residents to sign up as we are mindful of cost constraints on residents. SafeParks will need to get this number closer to 50% or else we will have no option but to pass through increases to scheme members, to defray the increasing costs of the service. The alternative would be a reduced number of services from Cortac or another provider which is not ideal but we have a duty to ensure the scheme's viability.

There have been a number of delays with the VumaCam roll-out as key personnel turnover and signatures of agreements have impacted its progress. These issues have just recently been resolved. However and whilst a further roll-out of cameras is expected to begin, SafeParks is also in the process of reviewing a number of poles and camera placements to assess their contribution to the suburbs safety and ensure value for money for the Scheme's members. The costs of the VumaCam scheme are expected to run at more than R40,000 a month once fully rolled-out, which only adds pressure to the Scheme to improve its membership base and focus on value for money. May residents enquire why there are not more cameras in the suburb and the reason is due to this monthly cost which can only be fully covered if we see an increase in residents joining the Scheme.

The tortuous re-launch of the 4<sup>th</sup> avenue Car Guard scheme is sadly no closer to realisation. Whilst the traders have at least organised themselves into a body and are now part of the process... there remains a funding shortfall for the management of the scheme itself and the car guard shift changeovers. We will be attempting to get Cortac to perform this duty as we are able to increase SafeParks scheme membership.

### **The SafeParks pro-active security scheme**

The challenge of preventing crime in our suburb is that most crime originates from the streets and public spaces. It is thus impossible to secure our homes if we cannot secure the streets and public spaces. A home alarm monitoring service provider on its own will only help the resident on a reactive basis, meaning after a security breach has occurred on your property, which may be too late. A more effective security solution is to patrol the public spaces and streets, an initiative which requires commitment from the whole community and needs to be paid for by all residents.

SafeParks was created by PRABOA to provide a solution that can achieve this, but this is only possible if the initiative is supported by enough residents.

### **Funding by residents**

Parkhurst is a suburb of around 2,200 households, plus also a proportionally high amount of approximately 200 Parkhurst-based businesses. The vast majority of both groups already pay for some form of security solution, unfortunately, mostly only for a reactive home or business alarm monitoring service. The problem is thus not money – the current total spend by the community in the suburb on security is substantial. The key problem, however, is a lack of commitment to securing the community and neighbourhood; the suburb is highly fragmented in terms of service providers and they mostly only protect your home/ business on an armed response/ alarm monitoring basis, not the community and neighbourhood. Many residents are reluctant to move from their personal security provider as they think that they are happy with the service. But imagine the impact on the community and combating crime if the majority of residents contribute to the Scheme and grow the Scheme.

Other suburbs who have managed to get a substantial rate of support from their residents and business owners have been very effective in driving down crime. Some of our neighbouring suburbs have support of up to 65%, and in some instances even up to 85%. Although there are many voices in Parkhurst who are quick to complain about crime, they do not support our community. Sadly we could do so much more to prevent crime if we could substantially increase our support base.

### **The SafeParks/ Parksec partnership scheme**

From August 2016, PRABOA/SafeParks and Parksec had been cooperating under a partnership agreement with Cortac as the service provider. Parksec specifically for Parktown North residents and SafeParks for Parkhurst residents. f

The partnership has proven to be very successful, as membership has grown slowly but steadily and we have been able to add additional security measures over time. Yes, crime is still present in our lovely suburb, but can you imagine what crime would have been without the SafeParks initiative?

The contract with Cortac is NOT limited to simply responding to alarms and panic calls at residents' homes. Cortac vehicles each have two well-trained, very experienced and well-armed officers who are deployed to search for potentially suspicious activities on the streets. This is the critical first step to securing our public spaces. Just compare their equipment, presence and activities with other reactive security providers in our suburb to see why you should support the scheme.

Some residents feel it is necessary to support other service providers with the idea that, by having competition amongst the service providers, they will be 'kept on their toes'. To address this concern and ensure that Cortac continues to deliver outstanding service in Parkhurst, we at SafeParks have signed an agreement with Cortac where the services and prices are negotiated upfront, this agreement is reviewed every year. For example, there is an agreed price for a two man 24 hour vehicle, an agreed price for control room overheads etc. These prices include a realistic margin for Cortac.

All monies collected are used to purchase these services from Cortac. If there is a surplus, but the surplus is insufficient to purchase an additional vehicle or security service, this is ring fenced in the PRABOA SafeParks account. It is not simply given to Cortac as an additional profit, nor used elsewhere. Decisions on the purchase of services and how to use any surplus funds are decided by the joint SafeParks / Parksec Oversight Committee, with PRABOA functioning as an additional oversight role on governance and spending of surplus funds. An example of where surplus funds may be used is the addition of extra security during the year-end period, covered later in the report.

### **How much do residents have to pay?**

Monthly subscriptions are divided into two parts :

- a Public Space Security (PSS) contribution and
- a Home Alarm Monitoring fee, often called an Armed Response (AR) fee.

The PSS debit order goes to SafeParks and the agreed fee is then paid to Cortac. The AR debit order goes directly to Cortac. While this may seem unnecessarily complicated, having the PSS debit orders payable to SafeParks gives the community, through SafeParks, control of the scheme. Should we need to terminate Cortac's services at some point in the future; we are able to move the combined PSS contributions to a new provider. The power lies thus with the community, not the security provider. We would like to confirm that we are generally happy with the security services provided by Cortac to date. Where there are problems of service delivery, we engage directly with Cortac senior management to address such.

Currently the PSS monthly contribution is R417 (which includes a discounted R25 PRABOA membership fee) and the AR contribution is R382, giving a total contribution of R799 per month.

While it is possible to contribute to the PSS on a stand-alone basis and to purchase your home armed response from another AR provider, it is not possible to only purchase the AR portion from Cortac as it is a negotiated highly discounted rate.

Please keep in mind that you are almost certainly already paying for a home security provider. By joining the SafeParks/ Parksec scheme and switching to Cortac for your AR you will improve the scheme's total revenue. This will then directly translate into additional proactive security measures for the benefit of the community, with direct oversight of how it is spent.

We will shortly be negotiating the 2021/22 increases with Cortac. Clearly we would like to avoid cost increases as much as possible in the bleak economic climate, however salaries and fuel costs are a substantial part of the cost basis, especially as our Cortac vehicles patrol 24 hours of the day, 7 days a week. Note that this is another way that the reactive security service providers save a lot of money as they mostly park and only move around a few times a day!

Our view is that we will be able to keep the current PSS and AR rates the same until at least March 2022, should we then need to do an increase, clients will be notified.

### **Public Space Cameras**

Cameras are only one part of a community security solution. Due to all the foot and vehicle traffic in Parkhurst, as well as all the open entry and exit points, cameras cannot give the security cover that they can in a fully controlled environment. In controlled areas, intelligent rule based cameras are much more effective as they search for specific incidents/ movements. In addition, the cost of monitoring cameras is very high. Cameras are however very good for post-event evidence gathering, picking up vehicle alerts and responding to crime events.

What have we done to date:

- We have engaged with various security experts on possible solutions and developments.
- Since September 2017, we have installed permanent CCTV and Number Plate Recognition cameras at selected high traffic areas.
- We have also installed a high tech mobile camera solution in one of the Cortac roaming vehicles, which has led to a number of arrests.
- The Vumacam initiative will see 22 poles being live in Parkhurst at strategic points, mounted with a combination of CCTV and ANPR cameras with Cortac as the sole monitoring access point. These 22 poles have been strategically placed from the gathering of crime intelligence and recommendation from Cortac.

### **Vehicle thefts**

By far the most crime that happens in Parkhurst is theft of or theft out of vehicles, mostly parked in streets by visitors or where residents have inadequate safe parking, especially over the weekends visiting along 4<sup>th</sup> avenue. SafeParks have continuously highlighted the risk of this to our clients, especially regarding certain targeted vehicles, using cell phones or laptops in public spaces or people leaving visible items in vehicles. Most of these thefts happen to non-clients or visitors to Parkhurst, some who may not even be aware of the risks. This is unfortunate, as most of these crime events could have been avoided. As the end of the year starts approaching, we see an increase in driveway robberies where residents are followed home and their valuables are stolen. Avoid wearing expensive jewellery and watches and do not transport a big amount of cash in your vehicle. When approaching your home, make sure you clear your distractions of your phone and switching off your music, check your surroundings to ensure that no one is behind you or around you. Only enter your premises once the street is clear.

### **Current financial position**

The scheme is financially sound and any surplus SafeParks contributions are ring fenced and will only be used for security related initiatives, as well as keeping a security reserve to cover at least one month's expenditure.

In addition, we have signed a 24 month contract for the imported roaming number plate recognition system and have to keep a provision against this liability. We have once again made a substantial provision to implement additional security over the 2021 year end period (Christmas season), where we always see an unfortunate spike in criminal activities.

## **The way forward**

A huge portion of the community unfortunately still only contribute to reactive security providers or not at all. If we had more financial support, there is so much more we can do.

What you can do as a resident:

- Join your street Whatsapp security group (some streets also have vacancies for street captains)
- Support the SafeParks PSS solution
- Use Cortac as your AR security provider
- Encourage friends and neighbours to join or switch to the scheme
- Get on the weekly security newsletter (contact Lynn at [lynn@safeparks.org](mailto:lynn@safeparks.org) )
- Join the Cortac refreshment support group to provide support to those dedicated patrol officers. Thanks to Charles Davis for organising this group and for all the volunteers, you know how much the guys appreciate your efforts!
- Phone in all suspicious activities to the Cortac control room – whether you are a Cortac client or not
- Be involved in the community!
- Join and monitor our website and Facebook pages:  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ParksecSafeParks/>  
Website: <https://parksecsafeparks.co.za> and <http://www.parkhurstvillage.com/join>
- Many thanks to those of you who are our loyal supporters.

## **Join the Security Oversight Committee**

We need more resident volunteers to join our Oversight Committee. Please note that due to the confidential functioning of this Committee, volunteers will be interviewed, will have to sign our Terms of Reference, be willing to dedicate sufficient time to serve the cause and be active contributors to SafeParks and Cortac.