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EPWP workers attending to the overgrown grass at Mountain Rise Cemetery. **PHOTOS: SUPPLIED**

**PRASHALAN GOVENDER**

Community and religious organisations have welcomed a long overdue clean-up of the neglected Mountain Rise Cemetery.

The move follows residents' regular complaints about overgrown grass and shrubs, vagrants sleeping on graves, and litter among the gravestones, among other things.

While they appreciated the clean-up, community members said the cemetery needed to be maintained on an on-going basis and not just once in a while; and that security needed to be improved in the area.

Msunduzi councillors Garth Middleton and Zinhle Ngubo said about 45 Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers were deployed to the area after a lengthy engagement.

"We are very happy that the maintenance, which started last December, is starting to have a visible impact on the grounds. However, to continue seeing progress there and in other areas, tools such as brush cutters need to be supplied in numbers, team leaders have to be competent, and team members need to know what they are doing," Middleton and Ngubo said.

Local resident Sharon, who did not want her surname mentioned, welcomed any effort to clean the cemetery. She and her daughter used to frequently visit the cemetery to pay their



EPWP workers attending to the overgrown grass at Mountain Rise Cemetery.

respects to her brother and parents who are buried there.

"The clean-up means a lot to my daughter and I. We used to go every two weeks to visit my family's graves, but we recently stopped visiting because the grass was so tall and we feared we might get lost or attacked," she said.

Sharon said they were so concerned about their security that they would wait for a male relative to accompany them on their visits to the cemetery. She added that she hoped efforts were put in place to improve the security in the area.

Resident Keith Abrahams, who has multiple members of his family buried in the Mountain Rise cemetery, said he was "happy to see attempts to restore respect to the area". He said showing

respect is always important, especially when the dead are involved.

Another resident, Izabel Gerhardt, a warrant officer Class 2 from Ingobamakhosi Carbineers — the reserve force for the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in Pietermaritzburg — said when she visited the cemetery last November, the grass was thigh-high. She said she is excited about the general upkeep efforts that were finally beginning in the cemetery.

She said that she knows many widowers who are horrified by the state of the graveyard and are fearful of going there alone.

She also added that she hopes, in addition to general upkeep, the security at the cemetery will also be improved.

President of the Midlands Hindu Society (MHS), advocate Ranjiv

Nirghin, said he was finally happy to see the municipality stepping up and starting to deliver services that have been requested for a very long time.

Last week, *The Witness* reported that a meeting with concerned citizens was held over the non-functioning crematorium based at the cemetery precinct.

The concerned citizens' organisation gave the municipality a month to provide an update on the way forward or face court action.

Prominent community member and former city councillor, Lucky Naicker said he was pleased with the development.

"Kudos to the municipality for the efforts being taken to maintain the cemetery. It is sad, however, that it took multiple complaints and threats of court action for the municipality to take the initiative to upkeep the cemetery," he said.

He also said that residents should see fruitful expenditure being exercised more often since they pay exorbitant rates and taxes.

Meanwhile, chairperson of South African Minority Rights Equality Movement (Samrem), Daleep Lutchman said he felt that the municipality "was forced to act to save itself from further embarrassment".

Municipal spokesperson Ntobeko Mkhize did not respond to requests for comment by the time of publication.

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