

FRIENDS OF KARURA COMMUNITY FOREST ASSOCIATION  
BARAZA WITH THIGIRI RIDGE / NEW MUTHAIGA RESIDENTS HELD ON  
TUESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2022  
AT THE SIGIRIA PICNIC SITE AT 17:15hrs

The meeting comprising 60 interested persons was called to order by Prof. Karanja Njoroge, Chair of Community and Stakeholders committee of the Board of the Friends of Karura Community Forest Association.

He began by introducing himself, Charles Ngugi, Senior Chief of Highridge (which includes Karura and Muthaiga), Margaret Wanjiru, Kenya Forest Service (KFS) Ecosystem Conservator, Nairobi County, and the members of the FKF Board in attendance -- Cristina Boelcke, Vice-Chair, Rose Muya, Sandra Osterman, Thigiri Representative, and Katherine Kariuki, Secretary.

He further gave the reason for the baraza, namely to understand the disquiet in the last two weeks regarding the access to Karura Forest Gate-F, which occasioned a letter from A.H.Malik & Company Advocates to the Kenya Forest Service and the Friends of Karura.

Before opening the floor for comments, he gave a brief history of Friends of Karura Community Forest Association (FKF), from its humble beginnings, Prof Wangari Maathai's contribution to Karura Forest, securing the forest with an electric fence, thus converting 'the lungs of Nairobi' from 'a no-go zone' to 'a go-to place.' Not only has neighbourhood security increased because of a now-secure forest, but forest-edge properties have become more desirable due to their easy access to the forest.

FKF continues to create awareness of the benefits of a forest to the young children from less fortunate schools by bringing them to the forest and providing many school bursaries.

FKF is a successful Community Forest Association and a role model for other national community forest associations. FKF could not have done all this without the support of the communities around the forest.

He emphasized the close collaboration FKF has with Kenya Forest Service as they co-manage the forest.

When the fence was done in 2011, with a gate on Thigiri Lane, a baraza was held in July 2011, attended among others by the New Muthaiga's Residents Association Chair, the then mayor of Nairobi, Thigiri residents, plus other residents' association representatives. Prof Karanja mentioned, after the gate was operational, there were three stables near the forest, and horse owners could ride their horses in the forest. They continue to do so today on weekdays on a designated circuit.

During the Covid years 2019 -2021, FKF witnessed an increase of visitors to the forest hence an increase in traffic especially during the weekends. FKF looked for ways to address this problem and found one which most visitors agreed worked, namely, open an exit gate at the end of Thigiri Close. However, this exit has created issues for some residents on that lane.

Continuing the meeting, the Senior Chief and the KFS Nairobi Ecosystems Conservator welcomed all and cautioned all that the baraza was to share various solutions in the interest of the forest and the generations to follow.

Meeting highlights: sharing views and discussing solutions

A number of established residents of Thigiri Lane along with a number of other residents expressed surprise at the road access issues as they had not experienced any problem at all. They are all regular visitors to the forest, and the traffic does not affect them. They commended FKF staff at the gate for the manner they manage traffic and visitors. They are also happy with the registration and tagging of visitors' dogs. FKF and KFS were commended for protecting this unique resource within the Nairobi city limits.

One long-time resident on Thigiri close, stated that the road was supposed to be a quiet family road where residents walk. However, because of traffic some residents are finding it difficult to walk along the road. Residents along the two roads are at risk of having their cars knocked when leaving their homes as

cars heading to or leaving the forest are driving at high speeds. A resident marathon runner agreed that speeding must be controlled but pleaded for access to the forest to be kept open.

One resident extrapolated the figure of 150,000 visits over the past year to a large and potentially growing amount of vehicular traffic on the two roads in question. Others questioned the validity of his numerical conclusions.

One FKF Life Member since 2021 (living on Thigiri Lane for 21 years) together with a Thigiri Close resident (since 2021) complained about the traffic and the amount of dust created by vehicles especially during the recent drought. They stated that in their view the process followed by FKF to have access to the forest through Thigiri Lane was flawed as they did not participate in the 2011 consultative baraza. They opined that Thigiri Lane is like a commercial road, not residential. They confirmed that they were behind the recent attempt to erect a wall to block the exit from the forest on Thigiri Close.

Two other Thigiri Close residents commented on dust and speeding, but noted that they still enjoy foot access with the kids and wish access to be maintained via Thigiri Close.

One resident of Thigiri Garden wondered if those objecting to the forest access and the gates had raised objections in 2011. Another (34-year) resident of Thigiri Garden, requested that the recently closed exit gate at the end of Thigiri Close be left open at least for pedestrian access to the forest.

A 25-year resident of Thigiri Close (an associate of A.H.Malik & Co. as well as past Vice-Chairman of the New Muthaiga Residents Association) claimed the word "inconvenience" in the recent online petition was not what was meant in the legal letter his company addressed to KFS and FKF. He claimed his firm's letter was addressing the legality of the process taken by the two institutions to create Gate-F.

#### Solutions Suggested to be Explored

>> Investigate creating a direct road to the forest using Thigiri Hilltop and then leave Thigiri Lane for cyclists and pedestrians. The Thigiri Hilltop is shown in an old (1972) map of the area displayed at the meeting.

>> A suggestion was made to collaborate with the County Government to create cycling and pedestrian lanes along these roads and to create more green spaces in Nairobi County as a way of releasing the pressure in Karura Forest.

>> Have two or three days in the week when no vehicles may enter the forest car park, thus encouraging visitors to walk or cycle to the forest.

>> Create an entry into the Sigiria Block of the forest along Limuru Road where the present pedestrian entry Gate-E is near the Belgian Embassy, keeping in mind the need to protect the small patch of indigenous forest there.

>> Move the car park at Gate F further into the forest, away from the residential boundary walls.

>> Avoid deforestation in the forest, whichever decision is taken.

>> FKF to communicate more with its members on their forest project; decisions to be transparent.

#### Way Forward

After lengthy discussions, residents, supported by the Senior Chief, decided that a working group should be formed comprising both sides of the discussions along with FKF Board representatives to work on the way forward,

The meeting unanimously agreed and requested that the decisions made should be cognizant of protecting the forest for the future generations. The Thigiri Ridge residents also requested transparency by keeping them informed at each stage of decision making.

There being no further business the Chair declared the meeting closed at 19:10 hrs.