

Hilson Bridge and The Gardens Conservancy

Progress 2019 - 2021

Context: 2014 to 2020

After years of walking along the stream and becoming increasingly dismayed at its neglect, Brett McDougall called a meeting of neighbourhood stakeholders in early 2014. That set in motion a series of events that would see this precious riverine environment being fenced, and tons of rubbish being removed from the stream and its banks by volunteers and NORA. But by the end of 2015 a more immediate threat presented itself – erosion. Summer storms between 2015 and 2017 eroded the river bank to the verge of The Avenue. Under pressure to act, the City committed funds in 2017 to resolve the problem, but bureaucratic bungles saw the R7.5m budget lapse without any work being performed.

Richard Holden, an engineer and water and sanitation expert and neighbourhood activist, stepped in to assist. He proposed retraining the river to meet the mouth of the bridge. These efforts received a boost when the Walmart Foundation donated \$10,000 to the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation in recognition of the work done by McDougall here and at the Orange Grove Waterfall.

The restoration was completed in 2020 with the volunteer expertise of Holden and the hard work of Thulani Madondo, and would not have been possible without the assistance of so many other volunteers and donors.



Richard Holden and Thulani Madondo

State of Hilson Bridge to 2019: erosion



State of Hilson Bridge to 2019: lack of maintenance of river and mouth of bridge, resulting in flooding.



Restoration: rebuilding the river bank



Restoration: erosion control blankets and planting



Now: no erosion, no flooding, a beautiful public open space

