



STILL BAY BUSINESS/BESIGHEIDSFORUM



NETWORK TOWARDS SUCCESS/ NETWERK NA SUKSES

Annual Report

Period May 2024 to April 2025

2024/25 marked a significant transformation for the Stilbaai Business Forum - from a traditional chamber to an inclusive platform shaped by the shifting landscape of local enterprise.

This report reflects a year of listening, learning, and laying stronger foundations through policy influence, strategic collaboration, and a renewed commitment to practical impact.

For a more detailed account of how these efforts translated into practical value for local businesses, please refer to the attached Annexure A.

1. CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD

The year 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the original Stilbaai Sakekamer, a milestone that underscored the significance of this year’s transition to a new organisational identity. It reminded us that renewal builds on legacy, and that the values that shaped our beginnings—collaboration, resilience, and a commitment to local growth —continue to guide our path forward.

Building on that foundation, we entered a new chapter as the Stilbaai Business Forum NPC, a strategic platform designed to serve a broader and more diverse business community. We intentionally moved beyond the boundaries of formal membership to provide inclusive support for both established and emerging businesses, recognising their shared contribution to the town’s economic and social momentum.

A new identity — built to serve more, include more, and drive local economic development.

This report highlights the Forum's initiatives and deliverables for 2024/25, including building strategic partnerships, strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems, supporting informal enterprises, and promoting inclusive local economic activity. It showcases efforts to position Stilbaai as a leading business hub—where businesses of all kinds can connect, grow, and contribute to shared prosperity. *The tangible impact of these efforts—what they mean for local businesses in real terms—is detailed in Annexure A: Business Value Summary, attached to this report.*

2. STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2025 - 2027

Our strategy is structured around four themes:



3. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024/25

3.1. Strategic Partnerships: Relationships That Deliver Impact

In 2024/25, our role as a connector, advocate, and catalyst was strengthened across all levels of influence—**locally, regionally, and nationally**. Instead of simply maintaining relationships, we used them as strategic tools to shape policy, support partner organizations, and promote inclusive economic development.

Partnerships are no longer symbolic — they're strategic.

At the **local level**, we contributed to Ward Committees (Wards 1 & 3) by providing input on advertising space, informal trading, safety coordination, and municipal policy, directly influencing decisions affecting the business environment. Through broader public participation processes, including municipal budget consultations, Integrated Development Planning (IDP), and policy reviews, business perspectives were formally incorporated into local planning. Our submissions remain available on our website. Additional contributions were made to discussions on spatial development and infrastructure through the Stilbaai Community Forum, and continued support was provided to integrated safety initiatives via the Community Policing Forum and the Stilbaai Security Network.

A strategic planning session was facilitated for Stilbaai Tourism, enabling the organisation to clarify its vision, define roles across the tourism value chain, and develop a focused roadmap for marketing, development, and innovation. The process also strengthened alignment and encouraged shared accountability within the local tourism environment.

Building on this foundation, our influence expanded at the **regional level**. We supported the Hessequa Business Forum through mediation and strategic input, and were invited by the municipality to assist with revitalising other business organisations in the district. As guest speakers at regional events, we shared insights on sustainability, leadership, and chamber governance.

In September 2024, we participated in a panel discussion at the AHi Western Cape Congress on “Collaboration between business chambers and local government for economic growth.” Our contribution and presence at the gala evening reflected our recognition as a benchmark for other chambers in the province, thanks to our partnership model.

This regional visibility enhanced our **national** engagement through the Small Business Institute's (SBI) chamber network. Monthly forums enabled us to contribute to policy discussions and participate in:

From local input to national dialogue — small town voices are shaping bigger

- Advocacy with Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) and the National Tourism Stakeholders Forum to promote coastal SME priorities and reduce red tape;

- Chamber revitalisation programmes, including leadership development in partnership with PUM Netherlands;
- Dialogues on SME digitalisation, township chamber support, and the role of business forums in infrastructure and community safety.

These engagements positioned the Stilbaai Business Forum not only as a local anchor but also as a respected contributor to national small business development.

3.2. Strategic Projects: The Brugmark

As a flagship local economic development initiative, the Brugmark has become a key component of the Forum's mission to promote inclusive entrepreneurship and regional economic growth. Now in its fourth year, the market has demonstrated steady growth, increased participation, and tangible community benefits.

The Brugmark is managed by sound business and governance principles. A transparent stallholder application process, evaluated by an independent panel, ensures fairness and aligns with regional development priorities. Management and finances are handled professionally, and the market functions as a structured entity governed by systems that support long-term sustainability and value creation.

Infrastructure upgrades have continued following the implementation of the 2022 architectural master plan. To date, significant enhancements include the construction of a central atrium, four brick kiosks, 36 shaded stall structures, improved seating, and the installation of a comprehensive security system. These changes have improved both functionality and user experience while strengthening the market's physical identity.

***The Brugmark proves
that informal doesn't
mean unstructured***

A key highlight remains the December holiday market, which has become a seasonal destination in its own right. Survey feedback and visitor engagement suggest that the market consistently exceeds the expectations of holidaymakers while providing high-impact opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Demand for stalls still surpasses supply - a clear sign of the market's importance and attractiveness during peak season.

The Brugmark's footprint extends far beyond Stilbaai. Vendors from throughout the Hessequa region, including Riversdale, Heidelberg, Albertinia, Melkhoutfontein, and Jongensfontein, now participate regularly. For many, the market has served as a launchpad to test products, gain experience, and take early steps toward formal business registration. It has become a practical and inclusive means of promoting economic participation, particularly in the informal sector.

In recognition of this progress and the clear value created, the Forum submitted a formal request in 2025 for a long-term renewal of the Brugmark contract. The motivation outlines both.

the achievements since 2021 and the potential for future expansion phases, including paving walkways, landscape improvements, expanded security infrastructure, and development of neighbouring areas.

3.3. Cultivating a Vibrant Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Engagement, Visibility, and Belonging

Creating an environment that fosters business growth involves more than just infrastructure and advocacy - it depends on connection, recognition, and visibility. In 2024/25, we focused on encouraging meaningful engagement through curated events, peer learning opportunities, and initiatives to increase visibility. Whether through networking sessions, recognition events, or digital outreach, our goal remained consistent: to build a business community that is connected, confident, and future-oriented.

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Honouring Our Legacy

A significant milestone this year was celebrating the Forum's 40th anniversary - initially established in 1984 as the Stilbaai Afrikaanse Sakekamer. Several former chairpersons and vice-chairpersons were honoured for their contributions and leadership during different phases of Stilbaai's growth. This event provided an opportunity to reflect on the Forum's evolution from a local chamber to a strategic platform for inclusive business expansion. It highlighted the significance of continuity and institutional memory in shaping our evolving identity.

In the same spirit of recognition, we also paid tribute to the closure of Matchbox, one of Stilbaai's most iconic and creative businesses. Founded in 1981 by Lynette Cronjé, Matchbox has grown over the past four decades into a household name and a familiar presence in our town. As a former Chairperson of the Sakekamer, Lynette was actively involved in promoting local business activity and had a particular passion for positioning Stilbaai as a distinctive tourism destination. Her story serves as a poignant reminder of the lasting impact that values-driven entrepreneurship can have on both place and people.

Recognising Women Entrepreneurs

As part of our Women's Day celebration, the Forum hosted a special gathering for all past recipients of our Prestige Awards. The event acknowledged their lasting contributions to Stilbaai's business landscape and created a space for renewed connection, reflection, and peer inspiration.

Building Future-Ready Leaders

As we look to the next generation of business leaders, developing strong, connected, and future-ready entrepreneurs remains a key focus area. A highlight was guest speaker Nicky Abrahams, who delivered a compelling session titled *"The Art of Networking."* She shared practical tools for building authentic business relationships, an especially valuable skill in close-knit communities like Stilbaai.

Practical Innovation: Exploring AI for Local Business

In February 2025, the Forum hosted a session titled “*Unlock the Power of Artificial Intelligence for Your Business*,” presented by Jaco Verster. Local business owners were introduced to practical AI tools and how they can support everyday challenges, such as staff shortages, rising costs, and limited marketing.

Attendees could complete a questionnaire to qualify for a free follow-up session, and two businesses were selected for tailored support. This hands-on engagement reinforced our commitment to accessible innovation and future-fit skills development.

*Real innovation starts
with real challenges —
not just tools*

Foresight in Focus: Understanding Consumer Shifts

Building on this momentum, a follow-up event is being planned in collaboration with the Bureau of Market Research (BMR) to explore consumer behaviour and retail dynamics. These insights will help our members prepare for both current conditions and anticipated shifts in buying patterns, supporting more agile and informed business decisions.

Expanding Digital Access and Reach

To promote consistent communication and expand our reach, we continued to invest in digital platforms. Our Facebook page, which reached over 413,276 people and generated 15,916 interactions, played a key role in promoting events, sharing insights, and celebrating business milestones.

Benchmarking against similar local business organisations indicates that our digital engagement performs significantly better, reflecting both the strength of our content and the growing relevance of our message across the Stilbaai business community.

Supporting Local Visibility Through Public Assets

We also increased member visibility and income by managing over 60 advertising-related facilities across Stilbaai, Jongensfontein, and Melkhoutfontein. These include dedicated advertising boards, braai areas, and refuse bins, all of which are maintained to high community standards.

A proposal was submitted to the Hessequa Municipality to take full responsibility for managing all advertising boards in Stilbaai, ensuring consistent infrastructure and reducing visual clutter. The Municipality replied that a formal tender process would likely be necessary. We remain committed to a coordinated approach that strikes a balance between aesthetic standards and the visibility of local businesses.

*Business visibility
begins with being seen
— and supported*

Affirming Shared Values and Strategic Insight

To further formalize our shared values and enhance professionalism across the local business community, we have finalized a revised Value Proposition for the Forum. This document serves as a tool that communicates the purpose and impact of our work, as well as

the opportunities it creates for all businesses to connect meaningfully within a supportive local network.

3.4. Organisational Sustainability and Local Impact

Sustainability at the Stilbaai Business Forum is about more than just funding - it's about staying relevant, building trust, and delivering consistently. In 2024/25, we increased our operational capacity, diversified income streams, and formalized internal systems to support long-term value creation.

We are more than a chamber — we are a platform for local leadership.

A key milestone was switching from SAGE to Xero, a cloud-based accounting platform that improves financial accuracy, accessibility, and responsiveness. This update enables more agile decision-making and better reporting.

To ensure focused delivery, we have established a portfolio-based structure that is aligned with our strategic goals. Each portfolio, including stakeholder engagement, events, safety, innovation, and tourism, is led by a board member or a working group. This shared leadership approach enhances accountability, continuity, and execution across our programs.

Due to the Forum's growth and rising operational demands, we hired our first paid staff member on a contract basis—a crucial step in enhancing our professional capacity and ensuring effective performance.

Income from advertising structures was reinvested in community upkeep, infrastructure projects, and boosting visibility for member businesses. Collaborations with local stakeholders, including Stilbaai Tourism and the Security Network, further reinforced our role as a development partner in the region.

Growth is not just about scale — it's about shared direction.

These developments demonstrate our dedication to creating not just a capable organization, but a lasting institution — one that evolves with the community and makes a meaningful impact.

4. LOOKING AHEAD: STRENGTHENING ROOTS, SHAPING GROWTH

As we look to 2025/26, the Stilbaai Business Forum remains focused on deepening its local impact while expanding regional relevance. Priorities for the coming year include strengthening our data-driven advocacy role, unlocking further infrastructure investment at the Brugmark, expanding our support to informal entrepreneurs, and providing more targeted value by focusing on the specific needs of different business sectors. In everything we do, we remain guided by the values that connect us - trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility for Stilbaai's economic future.

5. CONCLUSION AND APPRECIATION

We extend heartfelt thanks to all stakeholders who have walked this journey with us. Your time, trust, and support made it possible to transform a 40-year legacy into a future-facing platform for inclusive local growth. This report reflects your input and impact. We look forward to building on this momentum - together.