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Auroville Bulletin 70

**Forecomers and Ravena threatened with land exchange, Legal update
and 62nd GB meeting minutes**

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Wednesday, 20th September 2023

Note: There are important actions to take at the end of each Bulletin, if you are reading on your phone you may need to click 'see more' to view the entire bulletin.

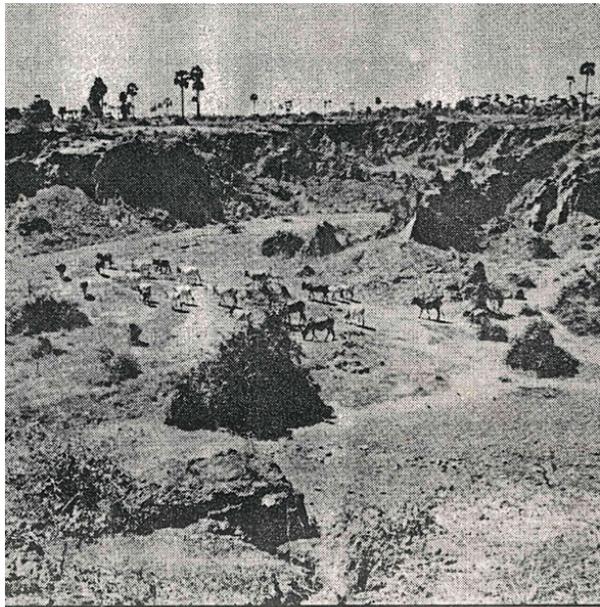
Please find a glossary of acronyms and terms used in this bulletin [here](#).

Urgent actions needed

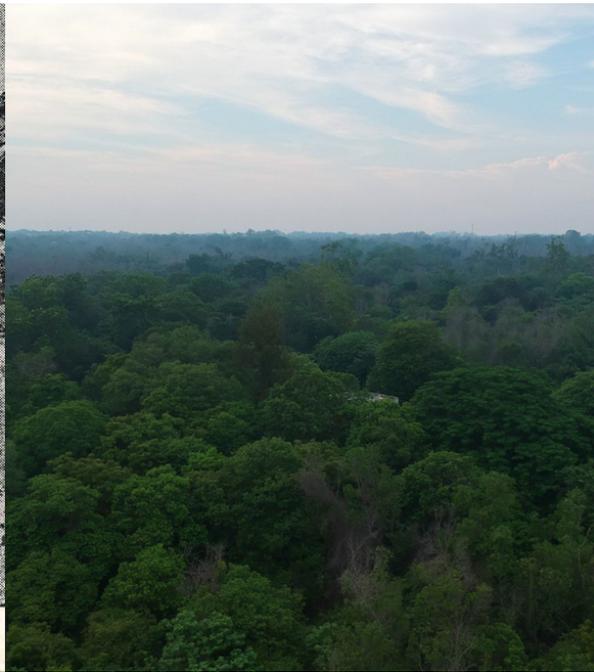
- **Assist with the documentation of tree-cutting:** Instances of tree-cutting are happening every week across Auroville. It is important to document where and when this is happening; If you are available and willing to help with documentation, please get in touch with evolvingalaxy@gmail.com.
- **Support for Maintenances:** An increasing number of Aurovilians have been cut off from their Maintenance, and are in need of support. For more information, please contact the BCC: bccoffice@auroville.services. If you wish to support the Farm or Forest Group as a whole, please contact us at evolvingalaxy@gmail.com and we will redirect you as needed.
- **Financial support for legal fees:** If you can donate towards legal and delegation fees, please email evolvingalaxy@gmail.com. Please see [here](#) for more information about why further financial assistance is necessary.
- **Help with the AVC room vigil :** Please participate! For nearly 8 months the community has held a 24/7 vigil in the AVC room in Town Hall. **More people are needed** to ensure the round-the-clock presence. Please contact avcouncil@auroville.services, WhatsApp 94430 03617 to sign up. See [here](#) for more information.
- **Join the Wednesdays for Auroville meetings:** There is a weekly community meeting held at the Tibetan Pavilion, every Wednesday 5:00-6:30 pm.

Hot Topics

Forecomers and Ravena up for exchange



The Forecomers canyon in 1968

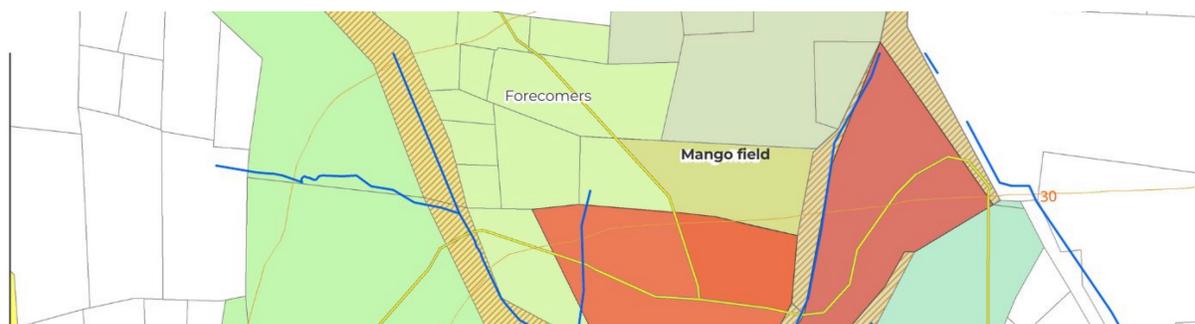


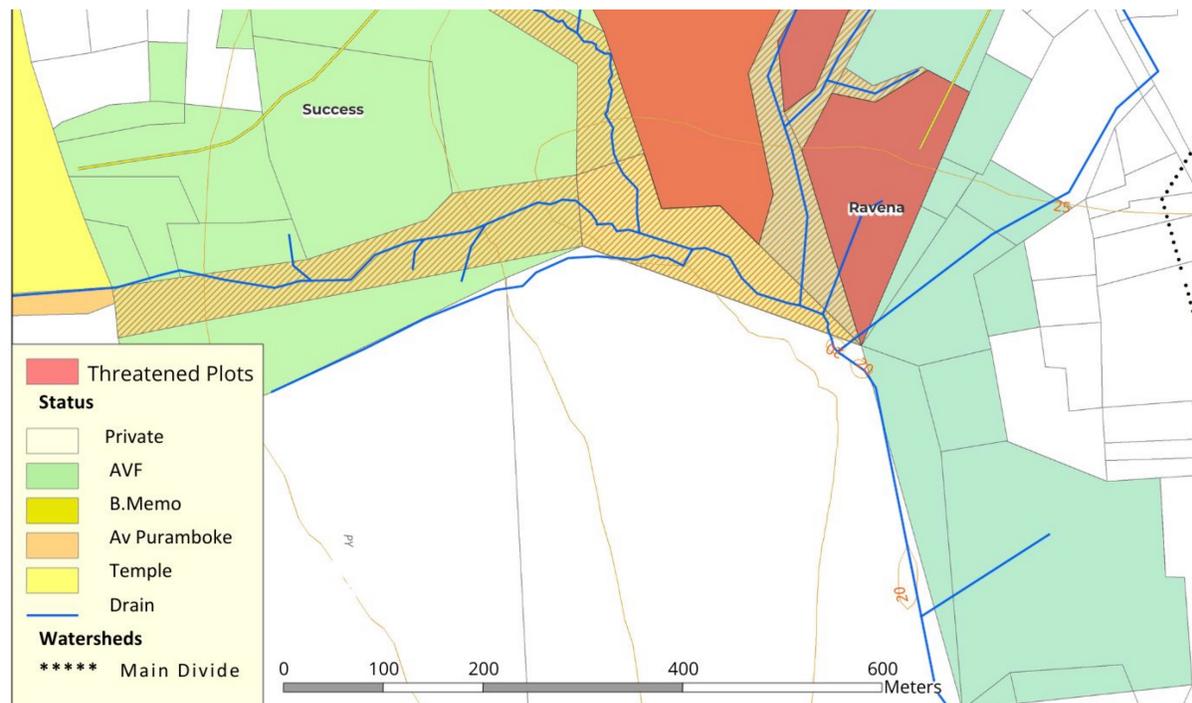
Forecomers 50 years ago and today

The AVFO is reportedly considering exchanging 22 acres of Forecomers and Ravena communities for Poramboke land in the City Centre area. Forecomers is the oldest, and part of the largest contiguous forested area of Auroville. Originally bought under the auspices of the Mother, and named for its function as the first settlement of Auroville. The canopy has grown into a lush green area from 50+ years of bunding and reforestation efforts. This area provides a 'green lung' for Pondicherry City, and a buffer zone between Auroville and Pondicherry. The edge of Forecomers forest is only one kilometer away from the Pondicherry airport, and 2 kilometers away from where most settlements begin in Puducherry and Kottakupam.

Besides its ecological significance for wildlife and water catchment, this area is significant in Auroville's history. The community of Success, which borders it on the west, was home to the first tree nursery of Auroville. The Mother asked Bob and Diane Lawless to be the first settlers in Auroville; they chose this area because it was "dramatically beautiful, though by far the worst farmland, the area around the canyon that Mother then named Forecomers. That name was not only given to the area. She also referred to us as 'the forecomers.'"

The map below gives a sense of the plots under threat, showing that the heart of the forest would be taken out, separating Ravena from the rest of the forest, with potentially devastating effects for wildlife and water catchment efforts. You can find a full report with more images and facts on the [history and ecological significance of Forecomers here](#).





Legal update

AVFO appeal against 12th August 2022 judgment - Madras High Court - On 26th August 2022, the Auroville Foundation was granted a stay order on the implementation of the judgment of 12th August 2022, meaning that the judgement would not go into effect while the appeal process was ongoing. An effort was made to vacate the stay order that held off implementation of the judgment of the Madras High Court of 12th August 2022, which, amongst other things, confirmed that the RA cannot be stopped from executing its functions under the Auroville Foundation Act.

On 4th September 2023, an appeal bench with two judges, including the Hon'ble Madras High Court Chief Justice, heard the parties on this matter. Among other things, they noted that as a statutory body, the RA "may not be restrained from functioning. That would be against the very scheme of the Act [...]". You can [find the full order here](#). To explain things simply, this invalidates attempts of the AVFO to impede on the RA's right to make decisions and fulfil its role as defined in the Auroville Foundation Act, and thus confirms that the RA is authorized to function.

In [a massbulletin](#), the RA WCom noted that "The legal process is far from over but this is an important milestone and we will continue to work and take the necessary steps so that the proper role of the Residents' Assembly is respected and implemented."

The AVFO's appeal on the 12th August judgement, as well as the case on the legitimacy of the AVFO 'ATDC', are both scheduled to be heard on 27th September.

62nd Governing Board meeting minutes

The minutes of the 62nd meeting of the Governing Board (GB), which was held in December 2022 have now been shared more than 9 months later. The meeting itself, held in Chennai, was not announced to the community beforehand and only came to light after a [series of tweets](#) from one of the GB members. The minutes are very brief, covering just a few agenda points. The Secretary shared a report which stated that, at that time, they had received and verified 1849 of the residents listed in the Register of Residents (RoR). Nearly 9 months on from this meeting, no information has been officially shared with the community regarding the RoR update, which appears to be still ongoing. The Secretary's report also shared an update on 'visa matters' which claimed that there were only 2 'pending/special cases' and zero rejections.

Another agenda point was regarding the 'Organisation and Governance Committee (OGC)'. This committee was formed by the GB after their 60th meeting. As noted by the RA WCom in their [Observations on the 60th GB meeting minutes](#), "All the recommendations of the Organization and Governance Committee need to be shared with the Residents' Assembly as one of the statutory authorities of the Auroville Foundation". To date, none of the OGC's recommendations or meeting minutes has been shared. In their 62nd meeting, the GB have seemingly "delegated the performance of the Governing Board's function of general superintendence, direction and management of the affairs of Auroville" to the OGC. The current membership and functioning of the OGC is still not publicly known, raising further concerns on the group's transparency.

Please see [here](#) for the full meeting minutes.

Housing Service - recent incidents

The Housing Service was taken over by AVFO-appointed persons in August 2022, disbanding the Housing Board. The Housing Board was first created to provide the needed checks and balances to Housing Service decisions after many years in which there were allegations of corruption and misuse of power, with houses appointed in an *ad hoc* manner based on personal likes and dislikes. Without the Housing Board, the Housing Service is again not directly accountable for its actions and there are questions regarding a recent series of actions.

- On 9th September 2023, two members of AVFO's 'Housing Service' and one AVFO 'WCom' member visited the home of a recently deceased Aurovilian, and forced their way in by breaking the locks. The adult children of the deceased Aurovilian, one of whom is the steward of the asset and currently living at the location, arrived at the scene and managed to stop the intrusion, establishing that they were unaware of the visit because Housing Service had sent one email to the steward, which had not been received. The AVFO 'WCom' member reportedly said regarding breaking of the locks that if it was the only way to enter the houses then they would go ahead with many houses.
- Another family who were asked to vacate their house to make way for the Crown Road and were previously offered an alternative house, have since had that offer suddenly rescinded. For now, there is still no suitable solution for them.
- The Housing Service has also put locks on the house of another recently deceased person, with all his personal items still inside the house, without informing his long-term partner, a Newcomer who is currently abroad. The partner, who has lived in and contributed significantly to the upkeep of the house for 15 years, is unsure whether she will be able to stay in the house or access her and her late partner's personal items.

Other Updates and Information

Solitude Farm land issue

Solitude Farm of Krishna and Deepa MacKenzie was recently embroiled in a land issue, as 7 members of the neighbouring panchayats came and claimed that part of Solitude Farm was partially built on temple land. In a [video message](#), Krishna reports that the panchayat leaders were told by the AVFO that Krishna was not given that land by Auroville but was occupying it, and to go to Solitude directly to deal with the matter. As Krishna notes, “That seems a strange thing to say, since we have been here since ‘96,” and: “In Auroville if there is a land dispute you would go to the Land Board [...] they have everything to deal with such an issue correctly. You wouldn’t go to the land steward.”

In the video message Krishna also reveals that they received an email in January 2023 asking them to vacate their house to make way for the ‘Outer Ring Road’. He noted that there is temple and village land on the other borders, and that the Auroville Foundation does not own the required land to complete an ‘outer ring road’

Forest Workers gratuity payments

On 11th September, the Forest Group [wrote](#) to the AVFO ‘FAMC’ and ‘BCC’ requesting that they fulfill financial obligations to fifty forest workers, some of whom have worked in Auroville forests for over forty years. Gratuity payments amounting to over 41.5 lakh are owed, as well as one month pay in lieu of notice, which amounts to a further 5 lakh. The Forest Group wrote “The employees have been informed of the situation and these employees now require that their gratuity is paid by the BCC, from the "Gratuity AV services" account, according to the precedence of the last 15 years. It is also only felt fair that since no notice of termination of employment was issued by yourselves, then a month’s wage in lieu of notice should be paid”. The AVFO groups have not yet replied, but had previously indicated that no gratuity payments would be given to the forest workers.

Concerns for safety on the crown road’

The ongoing works on the Crown Road, which have slowed or halted on some stretches, combined with summer monsoon rains, have caused difficult travelling conditions across Auroville. As the new road is higher than the surrounding areas in most places, and the stormwater channels appear to be inadequate at catching rainwater, the muddy bypasses that are alongside the Crown have become dangerous in some places, flooding readily and leaving thick mud. Over the weekend of 17th and 18th September, a car was stranded in the mud by the Youth Center crown road stretch.



Open letter by RA WCom

On 18th September, the RA WCom shared an open letter in which they state that they “are aware that many of us struggle to stay positive and not give in to exhaustion and fear and a feeling of helplessness at the destruction and lack of humanity that seems to go on with no consequence”. They later add: “We understand the fear that is felt by many and we don't judge it or the reasons for it, but we hope this won't be the place we each choose to act from. Fear is useful, it informs us where the danger lies. But it's not a good decision-maker. We call on us all to act from a space of collective aspiration, hope, and faith.”

You can read the full letter [here](#).

Errata: Outer Ring Road case

In the last bulletin, it was reported that the case submitted by “an affected resident asking the court to intervene in the planned ‘Outer Ring Road’ was not admitted by the Madras High Court, as the said resident had been offered another house”. This was an error as the resident has not been offered another house.

Media & Other Links

- **AV News Podcast 3:** The third episode of the AV News Podcast is available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [YouTube](#) and on [this page](#) of the Auroville Media website.
- **The Hindu: India was a tree planting laboratory for 200 years – here are the results:** <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/india-was-a-tree-planting-laboratory-for-200-years-here-are-the-results/article67273574.ece/amp/>
- **New India Express: Palmyra tree roots stronger in TN:** <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/aug/15/palmyra-tree-roots-stronger-in-tn-2344935.html>
- **On Auroville blog: On Auroville - Paradoxes and Possibilities** <https://onauroville.noblogs.org/>
- **Auroville Consulting: The Carbon Sequestration Potential of Auroville -** <https://www.aurovilleconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Carbon-Sequestration-Potential-of-Auroville-2023.pdf?mibextid=Zxz2cZ>
- **Youtube Documentary: Life in Community The Youth Centre Auroville -** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=eQclG7hcw-xc5g95&v=k3OY9YMFyQY&feature=youtu.be>

About us

We are a group of Aurovillians who are actively involved in understanding the current crisis situation in Auroville in order to find a way forward together.

We stand for:

- Respecting our community processes for decision-making
- A collaborative approach in developing Auroville using integrated methods such as the Dreamweaving initiative
- Transparency and fairness in the organisation of Auroville
- Creating unity with our diverse voices

If you wish to know more, the website <https://auroville.media/> contains a great deal of information on the current situation.

Please note that our previous bulletins can be found at this link: <https://linktr.ee/evolvinggalaxy>

With regard to future actions, those who have particular skills such as writing, social media, film editing etc are welcome to write to evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com. Also feel free to share with us information, questions or suggestions.

We hope this has been helpful. Let's keep working to find a way to bring us closer together to the beautiful dream of human unity in Auroville. We can do it... together.

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