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Auroville Bulletin 76

AuroOrchard update, New cuts to maintenances and Visitors Center leaflet change

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Tuesday, 5th December 2023

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

Urgent actions needed

- **Assist with documenting tree-cutting:** Tree cutting happens 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.
- **MM Neem Tree Vigil:** Residents have taken up a vigil to protect one of the old neem trees in danger of being cut to make way for the Matrimandir Lake. If you are willing to assist them in keeping their watch, please reach out to 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 :** For nearly 1.5 years 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 4:30-6:00 pm.

Urgent Topics

AuroOrchard update

In [Bulletin #75](#), it was noted that around a quarter of AuroOrchard has been exchanged for plots within the City Area. Residents of AuroOrchard were not informed of the exchange before it was registered in the Vanur Land Office. After the registration, the residents approached the Senior Land Officer of the Auroville Foundation twice. Each time, they were reassured that no part of AuroOrchard is or will be exchanged. However, it is now confirmed that the exchange did indeed occur and includes 10 acres of AuroOrchard land facing the state road, including a vital portion of AuroOrchard's cultivated area, its entrance and access, its principal bore-well and central irrigation system, as well as the cowsheds and godowns.

It is worth it to note again that AuroOrchard was the first farmland of Auroville. It was purchased by the Mother who named it and appointed its current steward, Gérard. AuroOrchard is one of the most productive and diverse organic farms of Auroville. The current exchange will completely impair the farms productivity. The Foundation Office, the AVFO 'FAMC', 'Farm Service', or any other AVFO-affiliated group did not get in touch with the Auro Orchard team prior to the land exchange.

The land owner has already come with AVFO 'Land Board' members to mark their new land and has begun clearing it for future use. During the marking, it came to light that the land exchanged also included the house built and inhabited by Jasmin and Aravinda, the latter of whom is currently an active member of the RA WCom. The house sits on a parcel that does appear to have been exchanged, according to the land papers. However, in [a recent statement of the AVFO 'WCom'](#) they deny that any house has been exchanged.

In [an update to the community](#) on Sunday 26th November, the RA WCom noted that according to commercial land estimates, the financial loss of this exchange for Auroville is estimated at 50-90 crores.

The RA WCom sent out [a second update](#) on Tuesday 28th November to inform the community that 6.5 more acres of AuroOrchard are due to be exchanged. This was confirmed in an [email](#) from AVFO 'Land Board' member Mrs Meenakshi. Another 2.5 acres will be exchanged with the Auro Oceanic resort owners, and the rest for more parcels in the City Centre. In her letter, Mrs Meenakshi asserted that AuroOrchard is only utilising about 10 to 15 acres of the entire 46 acres, and that AVFO "will take 16 acres which are not used for any farming activities and only bushes are there and obviously it won't affect anybody." These statements were based on a survey which was only done after the land exchange was finalised, based on incorrect survey maps.

Mrs Meenakshi's other statements were clarified by Anshul, one of the managers of AuroOrchard farm who met with Mrs Meenakshi as she was conducting her post-exchange survey. He released [an overview of the land use](#) including all assets and fruit trees related to the plots, noting that "it is not true that these 10 acres are not cultivated. Meenakshi ji saw all this on her survey." He goes on to state that "we are still in conversation with Ms. Meenakshi and I have hope that our proposals will be considered and we will be able to find a solution that retains crucial infrastructure for the farm which has taken a long time, a lot of investment and energy to develop." A [statement from the AVFO 'WCom'](#) notes that the new owner seems willing to dig a new borewell and help move the built structures, such as the cowsheds. Their claim that "the Foundation team met with people on the farm" was refuted in a [statement](#) made by AuroOrchard

team member Aravinda, it is also contradicted by the statement made by Mrs Meenakshi that the decision to exchange Auro Orchard land was taken in the 64th Governing Board meeting in August 2023.

Further cuts to maintenances

On 1st December 2023, several Aurovilians received [short emails](#) from the AVFO 'BCC' informing them that their maintenance would be stopped effective immediately. The reason stated in the mail was that "it [the maintenance] is not following under approved City Service budget". No other information was shared, such as whether they would receive their maintenance that month or whether they could access any interim support. Since the AVFO groups took control of the economy of Auroville, over one hundred people have had their maintenances cut.

At the recent AVFO 'working groups' meeting (see below for more information), Torkil (AVFO 'FAMC') gave a presentation which showed a clear change in direction from when the RA FAMC and RA BCC were in charge of the economy. The RA groups previously aimed to reduce the budget deficit by increasing Auroville's income whilst at the same time providing for the needs of the community. The new AVFO 'FAMC' has instead been administering stringent and sudden cuts to maintenances and budgets without explanation.

Crown Road, a muddy hazard

Since the start of the monsoon, travelling around Auroville has become increasingly difficult due to the ongoing roadworks that started in July 2022. As the Crown Road is considerably higher than the surrounding roads in most places, coming on and off the road is particularly hazardous and slippery. Accessing places like Sante and Mahalakshmi Home can be treacherous especially for the elderly and those with health conditions who need access to these locations, as the side roads are continually flooded due to the height differential.

On 28th November 2023, school buses were unable to complete their morning journey as the exit point was too slippery, and the children had to walk to school (see [here](#) for video). Sudden level changes and other driving hazards on the crown works without safety signage has caused multiple accidents, especially at night. Neither the AVFO 'ATDC' nor the CPWD have taken appropriate action for implementing safety measures or maintaining adequate alternative routes.

Work begins on VIP access road

Work has begun to mark out the new VIP access road. This road, which will be for the sole use of VIPs visiting Auroville, will impact Buddha Gardens, Shambala Farm and the Dog Shelter. The stewards of those areas were [recently informed](#) that they needed to be prepared to shift or remove any structures that lie in the path of the road or the parking lot that is also going to be built. Buddha Gardens and Shambala Farm have been informed that there will be no new land allocation or financial support given. The Dog Shelter has been allocated a new area to move to but there is no clarity yet about how the move will be funded.

Visitor Centre leaflet change

The wording on the information leaflet given out at the Visitors' Centre (VC) has been changed by the new 'executive team'. The [old leaflet](#) gave key information about Auroville, including 'A Dream', the Charter and some details about how Auroville started and how it continues today. It also mentioned the Auroville Foundation Act. The [new leaflet](#) makes assertions such as "The Mother tried to get the building of the city started as soon as possible, as the Aurovilians needed a city to live in, but due to a lack of funds, focused first on the Matrimandir". Another misleading section mentions that "The Residents' Assembly ... can give advice to the Governing Board about improvements, based on their experience 'on the ground' rather than mentioning that the Residents' Assembly have decision making powers in Auroville. This presents the hundreds of daily Auroville visitors with incomplete and misleading statements about Auroville, its history and its functioning.

Other Updates and Information

Observations on 62nd GB meeting minutes

The RA WCom shared their [observations](#) on the [62nd Meeting Minutes](#) of the Governing Board (GB). This meeting happened in December 2022, since then at least two more GB meetings have taken place, in February and August 2023. Breaking with precedent, no information about the recent GB meetings have been shared with the community, instead GB members have [shared updates](#) about the meetings on their social media accounts. The 62nd meeting minutes were made available only recently, over 10 months after the meeting took place, and the 63rd and 64th meeting minutes have not yet been made public.

AVFO ‘working groups’ meetings

On 18th November 2023, a meeting called '[Community Connect](#)' took place with presentations from the AVFO 'WCom', 'ATDC', 'FAMC' and 'RAS'. Apart from members of the AVFO 'working groups', about 25 people attended the meeting. As there was reportedly some confusion in the community about who was holding the meeting, the RA WCom sent out an [announcement](#) to clarify that "the 'groups' mentioned in [the AWARE] announcement were not the ones selected by the Residents' Assembly". An [abridged version](#) of the meeting was later released on Auronet.

Here were some important points and inaccuracies brought up by members of AVFO 'working groups':

- **Court Cases:** AVFO group members claimed there are 22 cases pending in the courts. It is not clear which cases they are referring to, as there are currently only seven active court cases: four court cases being brought by members of the RA and three filed by the AVFO. The four cases brought by members of the RA pertain to the membership of the Working Committee, the constitution of the AVFO 'ATDC', and violations of the National Green Tribunal judgement. The three active cases filed by the AVFO include an appeal against the 12th August 2022 judgement of the Madras High Court, an appeal against the April 2022 NGT verdict, and FIR (criminal complaint) cases against 6 Aurovilians.
- **Role of RA:** Anu dismissed the recent affirmation by the court that the RA may not be stopped from functioning by stating that the RA had "never been stopped". This is contradicted by the AVFO's ongoing attempt to curtail the role of residents in Auroville. Some actions include ignoring working groups selected by the RA, dismissing and devaluing the role of the RA in courts and in practice, as well as undermining decisions taken directly by the Residents' Assembly through RADs.
- **Visas:** It was mentioned that there was a total of only 2 of people with visas "pending". This does not match with the reports of at least 20 people who are in this situation. This also ignores that approximately 30 people have received a letter with an adverse comment stating that they are "obstructing ... the Master Plan" (please see [Bulletin 74](#) for full details).
- **Entry Board:** It was claimed that the Entry Board has a "blacklist" of people who are being refused to join Auroville. This claim was [countered](#) by the Entry Board in the days following the meeting.
- **Email access blocked:** AVFO 'WCom' members claimed to know nothing about emails to auroville.org.in being blocked. Instead, AVFO 'FAMC' member Margarita stated that this was being managed by Dr G Seetharaman, AVFO Officer on Special Duty, and Mr Satyanarayan, AVFO Undersecretary. When asked by audience members who is currently administering Auronet, AVFO 'working group' members replied they did not know.

New Circulars by Deputy Secretary

Two circulars were released recently by the new AVFO Deputy Secretary, Mrs Swarnambika. The [first](#) was sent to SAIER urging them to organise activities in schools to celebrate Constitution Day. The [second](#) was on visas, blaming the visa hold ups on foreign Aurovilians for not giving their paperwork on time. This is despite many Aurovilians beginning their visa application months in advance of the recommended time due to the AVFO's delay in giving out recommendation letters. In the past, recommendation letters were usually given out around 7-14 days after the paperwork was handed to the AVFO; however now they can take several months.

Media & Other Links

- **Times of India, Gujarat Edition “Will Thara and Ravi return to the state?”**: A [report](#) in the Times of India claims the Auroville Secretary “is expected to return to the state administration early”, before her tenure officially ends in May 2024.
- **AV News Podcast 8**: The 8th episode of the AV News Podcast is available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [YouTube](#) and on [this page](#) of the Auroville Media website.

About us

We are a group of Aurovilians 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 websites <https://auroville.media/> and <https://standforauroville.org/> contain 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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