

## **Highland Park Neighborhood Association**

March 2019 Minutes

### **Meeting Date: March 12th, 2019**

6:00pm: President Sanfelippo called the meeting to order. She introduced herself, welcomed everyone and expressed appreciation for everyone taking time out of their busy schedules to come to the meeting.

Sanfelippo noted having sent out the February 2019 meeting minutes and asked for any changes, edits or corrections. There were none so were considered approved.

Sanfelippo thanked Jerry Moore for putting the neighborhood meeting signs out along Highland Avenue to let people know about the meetings. Moore reported they had started out with five signs, about six month ago one disappeared - and that a few days ago the city crew cleaning the medians lost another. Sanfelippo said she would order some more.

### **Announcement:**

#### **First Lutheran Church Annual Easter Egg Hunt**

Sanfelippo said that the neighbor had last month approved First Lutheran's annual Easter Egg Hunt for the Saturday before Easter, April 20, in Caldwell Park. She said she now understood they wanted to move it to April 13. She asked if anyone had issues with the date change and there were none.

### **Agenda Items:**

#### **New Bus Rapid Transit Service/Sharon Fugate**

Sanfelippo introduced Sharon Fugate, a resident of Park Towers and a member of the Transit Citizens Advisory Board (TCAB). Fugate shared TCAB was originally founded five years ago to provide citizens with an advisory channel to the BJCTA (Birmingham - Jefferson County Transit Authority) in an effort to improve public transportation. She said the first few years TCAB was organized they spent time around Central Station getting to know the riders of the system. Now they wanted to expand more out into the neighborhood groups to listen to what people have to say, answer questions and get information out. She referenced photos that were on the tables, saying BJCTA planned to acquire these orange vehicles and that they would be called the Birmingham Express. She explained extensive surveys had been done across the country and supported that people really wanted light rail. She said the problem with light rail was that it was expensive (materials and labor) and then it is inflexible in that you just can't move it. She explained the technology (Bus Rapid Transit - BRT) for our new vehicle had been developed to combine the good points of light rail into something that's going to be affordable and usable in cities around the country. Fugate shared it was a platform loader just like light rail is, that everyone enters the vehicle from a level surface which eliminates any accessibility issues. Tickets can be purchased on the vehicle with a 'dip' or a 'swipe' and every stop has a ticket vending machine so no interaction with the driver is needed. The vehicle runs in a dedicated lane on the road. Technology installed above the front windshield has a sensor that will communicate with the traffic lights. As the BRT approaches a stop light, if someone wants to get off or get on, the technology communicates with the traffic light and the light turns red. When loading and unloading is completed, the light returns to green and the cross traffic gets the red signal. This means the bus only stops when it is loading or unloading, increasing its route speed. Fugate shared the route being planned would go from Woodlawn to Crossplex, taking the route from an hour and twenty minutes to slightly below an hour. She said there

would be substations, with bays for Max buses, bike racks, parking, and indoor/outdoor waiting areas. Fugate explained the nature of the construction that would be required for the platforms/route and that construction would begin in Woodlawn this summer in an effort to be ready for the World Games in 2021. She said the City of Birmingham had applied for this grant; that because it is Federal money they have to have matching funds which will come from the City and the BJCTA - and as such, the project will not, at this time, extend into any other municipality. She further explained that once this technology is installed on our streets that it will be installed into our first responder vehicles so they will not have to slow down when they are on a call. A question was asked about cost, she explained she didn't have the numbers with her but that it was already funded, that it had been in the works for quite a while. In response to another question Fugate said the vehicles/route, when completed, would be managed as part of our BJCTA transit system. She confirmed prices for riders would remain the same, that riders would have the opportunity to purchase cards in standard denominations like subway tickets and that they would run on compressed natural gas.

Sanfelippo thanked her and said if anyone had more questions they could email [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com).

### **Magic City Smooth Jazz Event/Bernard Lockhart**

Sanfelippo introduced Bernard Lockhart. He shared that he worked for the City of Birmingham but that in his spare time he manages a non-profit called Magic City Smooth Jazz, a group that also does 'Jazz in the Park' every summer. He said that his group wrote a grant to the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts to present a collaboration between Magic City Smooth Jazz and Ramsay High School Theatre Arts Department to do a music/dance performance at Ramsay on Friday April 12, 2019 at 7 pm. Lockhart said tickets are \$10, available on EventBrite and at the door on performance night. He said all proceeds will go to Ramsay's Theatre Arts Department and for more information to call his number, 205-616-1735.

### **Do Dah Day/Rusty Russ**

Sanfelippo introduced Rusty Russ from Do Dah Day who provided the group with an update on event planning and tree protection. He reminded the group that 2019 Do Dah Day would be Saturday May 18 and would be held in Rhodes Park. He felt like they would bring additional pine straw to put over tree roots - and post event would move the straw under shrubs. He shared the parade will start at 11:01 with same route, stopping at Niazuma. He said the motto this year was 'One Park Twice the Fun!'. Sanfelippo shared there were some neighborhood people who planned to participate in the parade and support the event. She asked Russ to stay in touch on any updates or changes and that the neighborhood would help to get the word out locally.

### **Police Update**

Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park Beat Officer, Officer King (11 am to 9 pm, Monday - Thursday). He asked the group for any complaints or questions. Someone asked about a shooting earlier today, King responded that it occurred at 800 block of 24<sup>th</sup> Street South (South Town), that the individual had gotten caught in some kind of cross fire between two other people and was perhaps hit in the leg. Sanfelippo asked about a death on Highland Drive a few weeks ago. Officer King replied he thought it was someone who had an asthma condition and had overdosed.

Someone who resides on Lakeview Crescent shared the street had turned into 'construction dumpster row' with all the renovation projects on the street, and that there was a lot of damage

occurring to the streets, curbs and easements from the moving and emptying of the dumpsters as well as debris. She asked who to report this to and was told 311. Sanfelippo said she could also email her with specific addresses and she'd report it to the building inspector and get the issues addressed. She reminded the group that if they weren't sure if they needed a permit to call the city and ask - and if they needed city contact information to let her know and she would provide that. She further stated that if residents were doing major construction to get a dumpster, that the city cannot be expected to pick up construction refuse, that most contractors know this and will handle clean-up as part of your project. She added that residents shouldn't try to convert single family residences into multi-family because there are a lot of very observant neighbors and offenders will get caught; that to do something like this a resident would need to go to city hall and the neighborhood association to request that type of zoning change.

### **Resolution Against Permitting for Number 5 Mine/Rob Burton**

Sanfelippo introduced Rob Burton, the current secretary of Glen Iris Neighborhood Association, who used to live in Highland Park, and asked him to share about a resolution Glen Iris recently passed related to permitting for a new mine in the area. Burton said that similar resolutions had been presented to and passed by Highland Park in previous years. He reminded the group of the Shepherd Bend Mine issue back in 2010, that Drummond Coal wanted to put a mine on UA system property which would have been on the Mulberry Fork of the Black Warrior River in Cordova, with a discharge valve only 800 feet upstream from one of Birmingham Water Works main drinking water intakes. Residents in Cordova opposed it, and folks there were opposing it. A dozen Birmingham neighborhoods and the city council signed resolutions opposing it. He explained that it was the public pressure from these groups and local media that pressured the UA to not lease the land to one of the already permitted companies and that the second company (Reed Mineral Mine #5) went bankrupt waiting out the publicity. The Birmingham Water Works has opposed the mines in this area because they would increase pollution in Birmingham and increase water bills to compensate for the additional filtration costs and related upgrades. Burton explained the current issue is that a new company is now attempting to implement the same Reed Company proposal. The effort is in the permitting process with the Alabama Surface Mining Commission (ASMC) which is taking public comments through March 29. He presented a resolution explaining it was exactly the same resolution as presented to the association before, for the same reason. He said he would like to ask if the Highland Park Neighborhood Association would like to support a resolution in opposition to the mine and if so, our resolution would be signed and sent into ASMC as a public comment. Burton said there was a link on the Blackwater Riverkeeper website providing detailed information on effort. Rachel Reinhart made a motion to support the resolution, John Somerset seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Sanfelippo said the neighborhood officers would sign the resolution and a copy would be included in the next neighborhood email. Carl Sosnin asked if there was value in residents making individual comments. Burton replied definitely yes and that information on the Blackwater Riverkeeper site would provide supplemental information to individuals wishing to do this.

(Note: The Black Warrior Riverkeeper website is [www.blackwarriorriver.org](http://www.blackwarriorriver.org))

### **Neighborhood Block Watch/Devoris Ragland Pierce**

Sanfelippo introduced the speaker for the evening, Devoris Ragland Pierce, Crime Prevention Specialist with the Birmingham Police Department. She told the group she would speak this evening about what Neighborhood Block Watch is and how you start one. She said she would also share some personal safety tips that relate to specific issues we were having in our area with respect to car break-ins.

Ragland-Pierce explained Neighborhood Block Watch is a group that you, as a citizen, get started in your neighborhood. It helps the police because it adds eyes and ears in the area to notice suspicious people or activity. She stated firmly that the purpose was not to turn neighborhood residents into vigilantes, that everyone involved should take care never to put themselves in harms way. She said, with respect to suspicious people or activity, it's better to be safe than sorry, call 911 (for emergencies) or 328-9311 (the non-emergency number) and report it to the police. She cautioned residents about hiring someone for help or yardwork who was unsolicited by them and simply walking through the neighborhood. She suggested keeping a lookout for unrecognized cars or individuals who are repeatedly traveling streets, that these could represent future perpetrators of burglaries who were attempting to determine resident routines. She emphasized the importance of getting good descriptions of vehicles and individuals but said that resident safety was always the priority concern, to not put yourself in harms way by attempting to get close to the suspicious activity or individual. She said photographs were very useful but only if they could be obtained safely. She shared if you were trying to get a description of someone that it would help to look for identifying marks (tattoos, piercings, etc), hair length, color and if trying to figure out their weight, height, etc, compare them to yourself. She said clothing was actually less helpful because it could be easily tossed or changed.

Ragland-Pierce said the way to start a Neighborhood Block Watch was to first talk to neighbors, find out if they are interested, perhaps even discuss it in more detail at a neighborhood meeting. She said there used to be a rule of thumb to start a Block Watch with at least ten people on your street, this evolved to be less focus on number of neighbors/households to perhaps encompassing a 2-3 block radius where you can still see your neighbor's houses. The priority is to communicate with your neighbors, the goal is to be the eyes and ears of your neighborhood. She explained a Block Watch does not take a lot of time from individuals, it's you getting to know your neighbors, exchanging phone numbers and emails. Once you talk with your neighbors and determine there is interest, call the precinct, call me, your Crime Prevention Officer, come up with a date, time and place to meet; you can use someone's home or even the precinct if you like. She mentioned that there are people who live on the street who might not be good candidates for participating in Block Watch, to consider this when talking to neighbors. She shared that at the meeting they'd discuss things specific to your specific area and introduce the group to their beat officers. She said it'd be important that each group select a captain, that the captain didn't have extra duties, they were simply a point of contact for her. If something is happening in the neighborhood, Ragland-Pierce will contact the captain(s) so that the captain can contact the group members. She said many watch groups are formed in a reactive manner, something happens, people engage and form a group - but whatever the reason it was formed, whether reactive or proactive, it was important to sustain the effort and keep communication lines open, perhaps meeting at least every three months to keep people engaged or have socials to get people together. She shared about an annual block watcher's event called 'National Night Out' that is held in neighborhoods nationwide either the first or second Tuesday in August. She said neighborhoods might block off streets, have concerts, picnics, barbeques, all sorts of events to celebrate community and enjoying our neighborhoods by being 'out'.

Someone asked a question about officer response time. Ragland-Pierce explained all the calls coming into the dispatch center are assigned a rating code; the code is '1 through 4' system with '1' being an emergency (for example 'robbery in progress') for which the officer is dispatched immediately and '4' being the least urgent (for example, stolen car where the car is gone and there's no witnesses present).

Ragland-Pierce then went through some tips to reduce the chances of becoming a victim of car break-ins. 1 - Limit your loss - Don't keep valuables, computers, cameras, expensive clothing,

etc in your car. Do not leave change in your car's console. 2 - Lock your doors. 3 - If you see someone suspicious on the street, report it.

Ragland-Pierce thanked the block watchers for their help and said that every year they have a Christmas dinner to 'celebrate you!

Sanfelippo asked a question about calling the non-emergency number and being startled by a transfer to 911. Ragland-Pierce replied all those calls go to Dispatch and that the non-emergency staff may use their discretion how to pass the issue or call onward. She explained if the non-emergency call rolls over to 911, it was because the non-emergency line was busy. She also shared that occasionally a 911 caller gets a message which means all the 911 operators are on a call. When this happens, it's best to hang up and dial back, if possible.

She was asked about Neighborhood Watch signs and confirmed the city did have them at a cost of \$35 and that included the city installing the signs.

Ragland-Pierce thanked the group and said she could be reached at the Precinct by calling 205-933-4146.

### **Announcements**

Sanfelippo thanked the Graffiti Busters, saying they had started taking down graffiti through the neighborhood. Anne Sunkel pointed out some graphics/boards that showed the locations of all the taggings/graffiti in Highland Park along with what type of property it was on. As progress is made, they will change the color of the marking to show it has been removed.

Sanfelippo thanked everyone who applied for positions on the neighborhood's standing committees. She said she expected to be finalizing those within the next week or so and will be sending out emails to connect members so they can get started.

She announced that anyone not having a photo voter ID, there's an event for this at the Birmingham Library on March 23. She said information on this would be included in an upcoming neighborhood email.

### **Report from City Council President Valerie Abbott**

President Sanfelippo introduced Valerie Abbott, District 3's council member and Council President. Abbott shared that the 311 Call Center was up and running and that service seems to be much improved. She said according to Mayor Woodfin, the new and improved Center would be functional around the first of April. She encouraged people to use the Center, that if someone had issues or questions related to public works or zoning, to call them.

Jessica Powers asked about her term as President. Abbott said she became President in 2017 and that her two-year term would be up this November. She added that Council terms were 4 years.

John Somerset asked about an update for the Major League Baseball Academy at George Ward Park. Abbott said at the present time it was not moving forward, that the neighborhood it was to be located in had voted against it and has continuously opposed it. Abbott said she thought the Council would have voted it in but the Major League people said they didn't want to be somewhere they weren't wanted and withdrew their request and said they would look for another location. Abbott said she felt the Park Board had been less than transparent in their dealings on the project and had caught the neighborhood by surprise and lessened the chance for their support. Carl Sosnin asked who the group was that was attempting to open this Academy. Abbott replied they are 'Major League Baseball' - they are looking to the future as

people aren't as interested in baseball as they used to be, not as many people who want to play or watch - the Academy would be a promotional tool for major league baseball, that they come into a city (usually one that has a franchise, which Birmingham doesn't, and that perhaps there are only three others in the US in cities without a franchise) to open an academy for 'underserved' children ages 5-18. But oddly their central location was to be adjacent to Homewood which made people question their motives since the primary under-served populations in Birmingham were a good distance away from George Ward Park.

John Somerset asked how a Park Board, that is in charge of city public lands, decide they are going to privatize part of the park. Abbott replied there is a legal question about that, that she had sent an email to the mayor today pointing out the sections of the state constitution that are being violated by being a dedicated city park and entering into an agreement giving a group exclusive use of public property. The mayor's legal team had told the Council it was perfectly legal but Abbott decided to put it in writing and ask for a written reply, her suggestion was to get an opinion from the Attorney General.

### **Announcements**

Michael Dan Letson of Legal Services Alabama introduced himself and explained they typically do free legal work for indigent individuals in the community, but that they also do wills for others with some income requirements. He said the wills were free for individuals over 60. More information can be found at <https://legalservicesalabama.org>.

Judy Jones shared the first two events for the monthly 'Path to Compassion' speaker series had gone well. The February event had featured Ashfaq Taufique, President of the Birmingham Islamic Society. The March event would be Sunday March 17, 3:00-4:30 pm at the Clubhouse on Highland. The speaker this month would be Rev Dale Cohen who had previously been the pastor at Canterbury Methodist and Trinity Methodist - and had been her neighbor on 13<sup>th</sup> until he had been transferred last year to the Methodist Church in Florence Alabama. Jones said they would not have an event in April as the third Sunday was Easter and the May speaker would be from Greater Birmingham Ministries. She said that though the first four speakers were representatives from the religious community, in June the focus would shift to the secular when speakers from Episcopal Place would share on how they build compassionate community. Jones said her goal related to the series was to gain insight into how to evolve Highland Park into a 'compassionate neighborhood'.

Stephen Lowy made a suggestion that the association obtain a microphone so that residents attending could better hear the discussion. Sanfelippo said she would look into that.

**Adjournment:** With no further business the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:40 PM.

Next meeting will be Tuesday, April 9, 2019 at 7 pm upstairs at Highland Golf Clubhouse.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association