

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

June 2019 Minutes

Meeting Date: June 11, 2019

At 6 pm President Sanfelippo called the meeting to order. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself and Secretary Judy Jones and shared that Vice President Jessica Powers had a conflict and would likely not be in attendance that evening.

Sanfelippo stated the May 2019 meeting minutes had been distributed and asked if there were any changes or corrections. None were offered so she announced the minutes were approved.

Police Update

Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park Beat Officer, Officer King (11 am to 9 pm, Monday - Thursday). Officer King shared the primary areas he covered were Highland Park and Redmont. He asked if anyone had any questions, areas they felt additional patrols were needed or parking/speeding related complaints. A resident reported ongoing issues related to parked cars on Milner Street near Caldwell. Officer King explained the challenge with the many illegally parked vehicles in Southside, that there was almost too many to control but that was no excuse for not writing them a ticket. He stated that their greatest success comes when they handle them 'on complaint', when people call in an illegally parked vehicle with a location, description and tag number and make a request to cite the offender. He said when they go to investigate and the car is there, they will definitely write a ticket. The resident stated the problem usually involved a number of cars parked at the apartment buildings on Caldwell and asked if she needed to get that information on all of them. Officer King said no, that she could get the information for several of them, report that information and share there were a number of vehicles parked illegally there. The resident also asked about apartment residents who were leaving mattresses, sofas, etc on Milner and could those be picked up. Sanfelippo explained the city would not pick up from apartment buildings, that it was the property manager's responsibility to work with apartment residents to dispose of that type of discards, but we could definitely report it to our Public Works representative Tammie Wheeler who is with Environmental Code Enforcement. She asked the resident to email her the exact location and that she would assist in getting it picked up.

Sanfelippo made an announcement that Captain Ronald Sellers, our South Police Precinct captain, had become Deputy Chief of the Patrol Bureau. She read a message from Captain Sellers sharing that he will move to Police Administration on June 8 and Captain

Raymond Cochran will assume command. He said Cochran has a great deal of experience, having commanded several different units in the Birmingham Police Department and that he will be a great addition to the South (Sanfelippo added that Captain Cochran's email is Raymond.Cochran@BirminghamAL.gov). Captain Sellers said he had been at South Precinct for over three years and has been excited to be there the entire time, that he believes we have made great strides in some areas and are still working on others. Sellers expressed appreciation for our assistance, information, emails, phone calls from each of us, sharing it has been a pleasure to work with us, the citizens and business owners in our area, to improve safety and to continue to make South Precinct part of the community. He cited year-to-date statistics that showed reductions in the South Precinct of 13.5% in property crimes and 9.3 % in total Part I crimes. He said we were headed in the right direction and this is due to the hard work of our patrol officers and citizen involvement. He thanked residents for their help and support in making Birmingham safer. Sanfelippo asked what a Part 1 crime was, Officer King responded that it was a 'serious crime' like robbery. Sanfelippo thanked Officer King and said we appreciated everything he does for our community. She reminded the residents that even if they think something is minor, to please report all crimes to the police.

Public Works Update

Sanfelippo introduced Tammie Wheeler from Public Works – Environmental Code Enforcement. Tammie.wheeler@birminghamal.gov She told Wheeler the Red Rock managed property at the corner of 34th and Highland was a continued problem, always having mattresses and furniture on the curbside. She asked Wheeler to walk the group through what she does when a complaint is received on a property. She said if the property is a residence she will send the owner a letter giving them so many days to bring the property into compliance. She explained that it was sometimes difficult to locate the owner's name because the state records weren't always current. She also shared that if the owner is an individual she had more options on how to deal with the situation. But if the owner was a business or corporation, her options were limited. She said she would make efforts, write letters, that sometime she ran into a business who was surprised at the issue because they pay people to remove trash like that. She said in those cases, she would send them photos and the issue would usually be subsequently resolved pretty quickly. Judy Jones observed it was the corporate owned apartment buildings who seemed to be the biggest offenders. Sanfelippo agreed. Jones said that Wheeler might not could *touch* the corporations but mused there might not be anything wrong if *someone* in the neighborhood called a company and complained. Sanfelippo told

Wheeler she had noticed that some of the previously reported 'hot spots' now had 'No Dumping' signs and asked if she had had something to do with that. Wheeler said yes. Jeff Wurst shared that he thought part of the issue was there was no mechanism through which apartment dwellers could get rid of something like an old sofa. He said he wasn't sure what a solution would be but that it had been an issue since he moved to Highland Park in the 1990s. He said he didn't believe they purposefully wanted to trash the neighborhood, just that they didn't have another solution to the problem of disposing these things. Sanfelippo said she felt the responsibility was on the building or property manager, that when someone moved in, they were given instructions on how to dispose of all kinds of trash. She said that was part of our goal in getting more contact information for building managers in the area so that we can politely remind them to remind their tenants of x, y, and z. Jones said she suspected that a buildings leases dealt with those sorts of things and that might provide a mechanism to enforcement for the manager. Sanfelippo told Wheeler that Highland Park appreciated all her efforts and thanked her.

Fire Department Update

No representative from the Fire Department was present.

Do Dah Day Update

Sanfelippo reported that Rusty with Do Dah Day had been held up with work and would not be able to join us this evening. She was hopeful he would be able to attend the July meeting. She reminded the group that he had attended before Do Dah Day to share their plans to consolidate the event into a single park, Rhodes Park. She asked for a show of hands of residents who went to the event and a good number of people indicated they did. She asked about their experience. Residents responded the weather had been perfect, that the crowds were better and constant all day, and the event people were great with clean up. Larry Contri asked if we knew anything yet about marginal profit with the footprint changes this year, Sanfelippo responded not yet but they would check with Rusty for more information on this and that hopefully he could attend the meeting at a later date. She said she did talk with him about the 28th Street location of the food trucks, that it has caused some congestion and that Rusty had shared they would likely move the trucks next year to the perimeter, up around Highland, to help with the flow. She also reported that pine straw had been put down to cover tree roots in the park and that we would likely remind them each year to do this.

Report from City Council President Valerie Abbott

Sanfelippo introduced our City Council President Valerie Abbott. Abbott said they were interested to have a new South Precinct Police Captain, that they usually switched out every two to three years. She said that they planned to meet with Captain Cochran early on to be sure he understands our district because District 3 issues were sometimes different from other districts in the city; that District 3 issues were often more related to quality of life issues rather than more violent crimes. She shared that today the City Council passed an agreement giving Alabama Power Company responsibility and ownership of 266 light fixtures in 16 city parks, that this would include maintenance, bulb replacement, the changeover to LED lights, etc. Sanfelippo asked if this action included the parks in Highland Park, Abbott said it did not, that this was a pilot to determine whether the program would be cost effective. She explained when the pilot was completed there will be a secondary list of parks for the program but that list had not been developed yet.

Abbott shared the Council approved the purchase of burned down Ensley High School from the Board of Education for \$50,000. She said the idea was to develop the property for some kind of housing, that they would be looking for partners/investors. Larry Contri asked whether the purchase included the Bush Middle School property behind the high school, Abbott answered that it did not. Abbott reported they had the Municipal Judge appointments today, which was controversial in that they had never taken a sitting city judge out of their seat and given it to someone else - but that they had done that today. Abbott said she did not vote for it. She said as the meeting was nearing the end, Councilman Hoyt came in and said that they had come up with some kind of deal where they would add another special judge, like a part-time judge, and then put the judge back that they had just declined to re-appoint. This vote passed. After the meeting they had a city budget workshop. She shared that the city budget is online for anyone to review. She explained the Mayor proposes the budget to the Council, then the Council reacts to it, sharing what it likes and doesn't like about it. She said today the Council had plenty of places they wanted to add money but that you can't add dollars without finding a place to cut funds. She shared one proposal was to float a \$40-50 million bond issue to pave all the streets needed instead of doing it incrementally over years. She said they would be interested to hear the reaction to this proposal from the city's Finance Director. She explained they would have another budget workshop after the Mayor had an opportunity to consider all the ideas that came out of today's meeting. She reminded the group of the change to the Mayor/Council Act by the Alabama State Legislature three years ago that said the Birmingham City Council could no longer change the budget as presented by the city's Mayor. She explained that the Council can suggest changes to the Mayor but if the Mayor rejects those changes the only option the Council has is to not

pass the budget. She said they had been trying to get this law changed, they had hired a lobbyist to appeal to state legislators but that the Council's lobbyist had been in opposition to the Mayor's lobbyist and that the situation remained an issue. Sanfelippo asked why the Council would send a lobbyist to Montgomery to compete with the mayor's lobbyist for something Birmingham based, whether the city budget had to go through anything related to the state government. Abbott explained it didn't have anything to do with the budget per se but because of the changes to the Mayor/Council Act the legislature had opportunities to meddle in city affairs. She cited the example of city efforts to pass a minimum wage and that the state had come right in and passed a law that said Alabama cities couldn't do this. She said the Council wanted the Mayor/Council Act changed back to what it was. She said initially Mayor Woodfin had said that if all the councilmembers were on board with this, that he would support it too. Then when all the councilmembers got on board with the effort, Mayor Woodfin changed his mind about supporting it. He directed the city's lobbyist to oppose changing the law back - and in turn the Council hired a lobbyist to encourage state legislators to make the change.

Jeff Wurst asked Abbott for an update about the group of people in the Five Points who had been interested in hosting a dog park in Brother Bryan Park. Abbott said that an idea like this would take a good while for the city to consider and implement and that there was/is no funding to do something like this. She said the group had not yet made any presentation of the idea to the park board. She said she recalled their Neighborhood President coming to Highland Park and making a presentation/drawing on it but that they were a long way from anything being able to happen. Sanfelippo pointed out that one thing they did have going for them with this effort was Five Points has more commercial residents who could be potential sponsors and that they already have their 501c3 status so they have a good foundation for a public private project of this nature. Abbott shared that she thought their 501c3 status was inactive but agreed that the Five Points Alliance was a professional group made up of the businessmen and merchants in the area along with representatives from the neighborhood association. Abbott said trying to fund raise for a city park was slow going, that people see the whole of the budget and think there's plenty of money for projects of this nature. She shared that it used to be that 80% of city's budget went to salaries and benefits for city employees. She said this percentage is down some because the mayor had cut out some vacant positions to provide funding for other projects. She said Five Points might have \$50,000 in their neighborhood allocation but that you could not build a park for that kind of money. An option would certainly be finding a large wealthy donor who wants to be part of that kind of project. Sharon Nelson pointed out that at some point the neighborhood had raised money to renovate

Rhodes Park and asked who held that money. Residents had memories of the project but no one could answer that question.

Sanfelippo said she wanted to give Abbott a shout out and thanks for prodding the Department of Transportation related to the parking permit zone around St Vincent's hospital on 28th that the neighborhood has been discussing for some time. She shared that Abbott had sent a pointed and direct email saying "I've got citizens who are wanting updates on this, what is the status?" Sanfelippo furnished the group with the highlights received from James Fowler (the Director of Transportation) of where the effort is and why. She explained that Fowler came on last year so is relatively new to the position. Then Lakey Boyd, Transportation's Deputy Director of Strategy and Innovation, came on after that. The first quarter they spent conducting research into how things currently work (or don't work) and found holes, inconsistencies and places where there were no policies at all. The second quarter was spent on expanding and improving the policies, procedures, technology and equipment. They are working on an approach to more residential ticketing on weekdays. They are transferring Parking and Enforcement Officers to the Police Department to streamline activities related to towing illegally parked vehicles - as of now, a police officer has to be present to initiate towing. This staff change would allow the Parking and Enforcement officers to have that power. Abbott said she wasn't sure yet how these improvements would be realized as there were only eight P&E officers being transferred. Sanfelippo said the city was working on improving their vehicles, getting some new vehicles, new meter technology, management software and enforcement equipment. She added the funding was *unclear* at this point for those things. Sanfelippo said they were targeting this fall to begin developing the program for residential onstreet permitting and enforcement, that enforcement capacity was a key component to the success of these programs. She said she would keep residents posted as we have more meetings with them. Sanfelippo said she expected either Fowler or Boyd would attend one of our meetings in the fall to get input from Highland Park residents.

Sanfelippo recognized Helen Rivas. Rivas reported getting nowhere this year with enabling the funding of the Transportation Trust Fund that will allow money to go directly into a special account administered by ADECA (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs), that it has nothing to do with ALDOT. She stated it was passed last year, the commission is supposed to be set up, that appointments to the commission are supposed to be made by the City Council, the Governor, various other groups like Alabama Arise, Greater Birmingham Ministries have appointments. She says this statewide committee will then decide the disposition of the funds and that this

represents the start of getting transit funding. She shared that folks may or may not know but that ALDOT has left billions of dollars on the table in Washington DC; that every single road project has to have a mass transit component and though they may write it into the project they don't do anything about it. Rivas said we have to start bugging all of our elected officials to move on this effort. She said it's so annoying that we have to worry about parking because people have to have cars because we can't do without them. She encouraged people to get involved sharing that the Community Affairs Committee will be having a session either the second or third Monday in July related to transit and that she would get the word out on this.

Rob Burton asked to be recognized. He shared that a similar thing to what Arise is pushing is the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF). He reported that Neil Rafferty has indicated he will support and sponsor this effort in the House and they had been doing a number of public hearings on it. Similar to the Transportation Trust Fund, the AHTF passed a few years ago, that they are now attempting to pass a companion bill so that it can have funding. He shared that passage of this would allow developers and non-profits to access money to build affordable housing. Burton said he was also looking at this from the perspective of the Birmingham Land Bank Authority whose only source of funding is the internal budget. He shared that if this funding source passed that it could also create another funding source for land bank authorities around the state to acquire money specifically for affordable housing development. This is being pushed both by Arise and Low Income Housing Coalition of Alabama (LIHCA). Burton said passage of this bill could potentially have a huge impact in the Birmingham area. Sanfelippo asked Burton to email her the details.

Helen Rivas was recognized. She asked the group to please read carefully what 'Opportunity Zones' are about, and asked if they are really going to be putting money into things that truly benefit the communities. She said, for example, when one sees a golf course being included in a high poverty area that it leads one to question intent. Rivas said there are multiple things that should be questioned and that she was happy to furnish more information to anyone wanting to find out more.

Sanfelippo announced that the next Trash and Brush pickup would be the coming Thursday, June 13. She explained they request, if there's enough space, to make separate piles for what is mulchable and the other throw out items (furniture, etc), because they use different trucks for these and it helps them be more efficient. She encouraged residents to report 'hot spots', where residents were putting things on the street the day after pick ups occurred or where pickups are consistently missed. She said these areas

could be reported to HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com, that we'd get those locations on a list and keep an eye on them.

Committee Reports

Sanfelippo reported that the Zoning and Planning Committee met and has worked on requests for additional 'no parking' signs in several areas. She reported they were also waiting on the city to research the feasibility of putting a speed bump on 30th street near Rhodes Circle. She said that an attorney on this committee also volunteered to look into the formation details for the neighborhood's 501c3 application.

Sanfelippo reported that the Local Historic Advisory Committee has reviewed a few cases with nothing of note yet.

Sanfelippo asked Judy Jones for her Communications and Safety Committee

Update. Jones reported the committee had been working on project ideas and goals. She reported that the neighborhood's email list had between 500 and 600 names on it - and that if we look at it as if we have some 6000 people in Highland Park, then we only are in communication with some 10% of the residents. She said one of the Committee's first goals will be to increase the number of residents in the email list. She said if there are good things being accomplished, the best thing we can do is let as many people know about it as possible. She reported the group also discussed creating 'new resident' information, that she wasn't certain if this would be in printed form or something on the web site - perhaps both. The information might include trash/recycle pickup days, contact information for city services, the neighborhood web site and Facebook page, information on noise and pet ordinances, etc. She said last month we had talked about standard communications to residents, that the committee wants to assist our President in coming up with text for those communications. She shared the group thought about safety related issues and after some online researching, located a template for a neighborhood safety audit. She said they also located a 'walkability audit' and much of that also related to safety, for example lighting, corners with bad visibility, broken sidewalks, etc. She expected the group to plan such an audit, to identify issues, possible solutions and present back to the neighborhood. She said they were inspired by the good work that had been done by the Graffiti Busters who had initially walked the neighborhood to find problem areas and then created an inventory and subsequently used the list to report progress. She said another goal was to create a list of apartment and condominium buildings in the neighborhood along with contact information for their property managers/firms.

Miscellaneous Questions/Discussion

Sanfelippo asked Jones if there was an upcoming Compassion Speaker event for June. Jones replied they had rescheduled the event because of it being Father's Day. She said that June's speakers from Episcopal Place had been rescheduled for July 21 which would be the 3rd Sunday in July.

Sanfelippo announced she may not be present for the next several meetings, that she had made application to the Citizens Police Academy. She said the Academy was a great way for citizens to get an insider's view of policing, the communications, dispatch, etc. She said the meetings are on Tuesday evenings for a couple of months and would include a few Saturdays.

Candidates:

Sanfelippo recognized Judge Martha Cook - Jefferson County District Judge – seeking re-election. She said she was making notes because a lot of what she had been hearing in the meeting was housing issues, that she was taking Tammie's name and information down because she had some ideas that be helpful in some of the situations that had been described during the evening. Judge Cook said she appreciated the opportunity to address the neighborhood. She said she had been appointed two months ago to replace John Amari who retired. She explained that as a judge you can't run again once you reach the age of 70 so she assumed that might be why he retired. She said she was brand new to the bench but wasn't brand new to the legal community, that she has practiced law for 22 years. Before she took this job she had been a mediator in private practice which she loved. She said a mediator is a peacemaker's job and that is very much her personality. She said mediation had a great segue to this District Court job because she hears cases that are \$10,000 or less, a lot of landlord/tenant issues, car accidents, collection cases - and that the people in her courtroom, often \$100 makes or breaks them. She said most of the people who appear before her don't have a lawyer, that before anything starts she makes sure those individuals know they will be treated just as fairly as the people on the other side who have a lawyer and that they will have a chance to tell their story and be heard. She said she considers her court to be the people's court. She shared a summary of her involvement in the bar community and told the group that she was from Selma Alabama and moved to Birmingham 20+ years ago. She said she loves her job because she gets to reach the community on a broader scale than if she could in private practice. Judge Cook asked for the neighborhood's support and votes in the Democratic primary on March 3, 2020. She said she was happy to come and speak to other groups and organizations, that she felt it an advantage to communities when people understand what happens in District Court.

A resident asked about the two abandoned (Sister) houses on Highland, what happened with the court actions in progress. Sanfelippo said there was a condemnation hearing at Municipal Court with Judge Price. Floyd Gaines, the attorney who gave us an update a couple of months ago and who is part of a private lawsuit related to the houses, met Sanfelippo there, that they just wanted to be a face for the neighborhood at the hearing. The owner was ordered to completely fix them up or demolish them by August 7. To do that he had to get a special repair permit. She shared that he had already been granted three - and that they normally only grant two. As a result, at the Public Improvements Committee meeting last week or the week before, he was denied a permit. Sanfelippo said he had pretty much backed himself into a corner of either selling or demolishing. There was another of his properties on Rhodes Circle with foundation issues and he was given until June 20 to correct that issue, that he has a permit for this work and it is underway. Councilor Abbot expressed regret that the historic houses, located in a historic district, can't be saved and concern about what might go in given the R7 zoning. Sanfelippo said she understood that the 'overlay district' prohibits something going in over 45 feet.

Sanfelippo introduced Alexis Barton, our Community Resource Officer. Barton said she was gaining understanding of processes and where things needed to be caught up and that she thought some headway was being made. Sanfelippo agreed and said that we had been receiving a lot of help from Barton and appreciated it. Barton said an event, Peace in the Park, was coming and that she would leave some flyers on that. She said she felt Highland Park was doing a great job with their communications, doing the things necessary to make improvements to the neighborhood and that she appreciated that.

Jones brought up the street paving, saying so much of the paving was needed because of previous sub-standard work by utility companies; that the streets get paved then a utility company comes and digs something up and their paving winds up being sub-standard. She said last month someone had brought up that there was an agreement between the city and the utility companies to do the paving but that somehow there seems to be something broken there. Because so many times when the utility company, whether it's the gas or water company, they dig something up, they don't repair it to the city standards. Jones said - it seems, that if this happened, we'd have a lot better streets. Barton said she would take that feedback back to the Mayor. Jones said her street had gotten paved but within three months, the water company had dug it up because of a water main issue and there were problem areas on the street again. She said she felt the utility companies were keeping the city at a disadvantage with respect to paving and that

the situation might be improved if they were at least doing the paving in accordance with city standards. Or that they paid the city to come in behind their work and do the paving. But regardless, she felt the city was concerned about the state of the streets, while the utility companies weren't so much. Councilor Abbott pointed out that the utility companies are supposed to put on a temporary patch and that people are supposed to drive over it for at least six weeks before they come put in the permanent patch, so they get lots of calls about the temporary patches. Jones said she hadn't known about the six week delay and that perhaps it will be better when people understand that. Abbott said she felt part of the problem was with private plumbers. Sanfelippo pointed out the city had done a great job with spot paving when people reported sink holes. She encouraged people to continue to report issues to HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com

Larry Contri asked if there was an update on EATS and their opening. Sanfelippo said she thought they were getting their staff together and she would check with the owner and share an update.

Adjournment: With no further business the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 PM.

Next meeting will be Tuesday, July 9, 2019 at 6 pm upstairs at Highland Golf Clubhouse.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association