

# **Highland Park Neighborhood Association**

## **January 2020 Minutes**

**Meeting Date: January 14, 2020**

At 7 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the meeting to order. She acknowledged the bad weather and thanked all attending. She introduced herself, Secretary Judy Jones and added Vice President Jessica Powers was stuck in traffic and expected later.

Sanfelippo asked if everyone was seeing meeting minutes. She asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to the meetings minutes circulated for the November 12. None were offered. She then asked if the group had any preference whether there was a motion to approve the minutes or that 'hearing no changes, the minutes stand approved'. The group consensus was for the latter, that anyone with an objection or changes could express that. Sanfelippo stated that the November 12 meeting minutes were approved.

### **Police Update**

Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park's Beat Officer, Officer King who asked if there were any questions, complaints, abandoned vehicles or areas requiring additional patrols. A resident asked, "How do we get people to lock their cars?" The attendees responded with laughter. Officer King told the group not to leave anything of value visible in their cars, to put things in their trunks, to lock the doors. He cautioned people on leaving product boxes on the street for extended periods of time, such that someone driving by might realize what kind of gifts the holiday season had produced. Sanfelippo shared the neighborhood had been working with the city to get some flyers printed to be put on cars that are parked in funny or inappropriate places creating a potentially dangerous situation, that the notices might say, for example, "Aren't you glad this wasn't a ticket?" or "Don't leave valuables in your car" or "in the time it took me to leave this note I could have broken into your car".

Officer King told residents if they see anyone suspicious who does not appear to belong in the neighborhood, to report it. He went on to say that residents should not give money to vagrants or panhandlers, that in most cases they bought drugs with it. A resident asked a question specifically about people who are asking for money on the Hwy 31/280 exit ramp at St Vincent's. Officer King said specifically to not give these people money, that it was against the law to be on those exit ramps. Someone else asked about people collecting money supposedly for organizations - Officer King replied he didn't trust where those funds were going, that he suspected even those efforts were scams. He said they should have a permit but even still they should not be collecting money on highway entry/exit ramps.

Someone asked where to call if reporting a suspicious person. Officer King replied to call the precinct. Sanfelippo shared the number was 205-328-9311.

Officer King said it had been a good month, a few car break-ins, no robberies. He told everyone to always be mindful that just because it hasn't happened in a while doesn't mean that it won't happen, that residents should be careful and aware of their surroundings regardless of time of day.

### **Youth Towers/Mrs Alice Westery**

Sanfelippo introduced Alice Westery, the Founder and Executive Director of Youth Towers, an organization that helps to prevent homelessness in young adults in the city of Birmingham. She said they met back in the fall, and she was immediately taken with Westery's heart and this organization she had created to specifically help with kids aging out of the foster care system.

Westery first thanked the neighborhood association for what they do in the communities especially by being sure people are informed and that information gets out. She said she was impressed by Sanfelippo, that she met her and since has seen her everywhere out advocating for our community.

Westery said she wanted to share a brief history explaining why she does what she does. She formerly she had been Independent Living Program Coordinator for the Jefferson County Department of Human Resources from 2003 to 2016, working with young people 14-21 years of age. These young people had been traumatized, neglected, abused within the foster care system and the program that Westery coordinated helped them transition smoothly from foster care. Westery said that even though the program was well funded it was next to impossible for young people to make this transition smoothly without the support of a community, without a village per se. She said young people they had previously worked with would come back to her and say they either aged out of the system at 21 or were emancipated at 19 - and were now homeless. She said she had expected to retire from DHR but that turned out not to be 'the plan', that she realized, there was more to be done. She said the young people told her what their problems and challenges were, that they were not yet ready to be on their own, they needed a support system, connections to the community, how to navigate life and not fall into the abyss. She said Youth Towers wasn't just about preventing homelessness, that it was also about ending it. She explained that Youth Towers was still connected to the Jefferson County DHR, that they refer young people to Youth Towers before they age/emancipate out of the system so perhaps homelessness can be prevented. She said they provide a support system to these young people and meet them where they are. She said they now have 43 agencies who support the program and their continuum of care. Westery said if there's services needed that Youth Towers can't perform, they refer the young people to these other organizations. For example, Youth Towers doesn't do substance abuse or mental health but they do get the young people to a place, physical and emotional, where they can receive these services from other agencies. She shared that when she resigned from DHR in 2016 she was serving about 150 young people. When she left the office today,

they were up to 354 young people. She said this didn't mean they were housing all these people, that some stayed in their cars, abandoned houses, under bridges, on the street. She said one thing Youth Towers provided was hope, that even though they weren't able to house all 354 kids, they can at least give them the hope to continue on and receive the services available. She said the young people know they are not receiving 'handouts' - that what Youth Towers provides are 'hands up' until they are in a better place and able to have the best life possible. She said some of their young people have slid into a lifestyle of prostitution to make their way in life, that at times it can take 3-6 months just to reprogram them so they understand they don't have to do that in order to survive.

Westery said people often ask how she is able to accomplish what they do - and shared they have 15 interns per semester from 4 different colleges - UAB, Miles College, Samford University- and now Troy wants to come aboard. She said they were social work interns, both bachelor and master's levels, and some from public health. Westery also shared that they had received some HUD funding and were ramping up their staff, that if anyone in the group knew social workers who would be good in this work, to send them to her. She expressed gratitude for being able to address the group tonight, saying she wanted to get in front of all 23 city communities, potentially to have a 'Youth Tower' in all 99 neighborhoods.

Judy Jones asked what percentage of the youth had not finished high school - Westerly replied 55% had not finished when they entered Youth Towers programs. She said for youths affected by trauma and abuse, there is no way this doesn't affect their education. She said there are success stories with respect to education but always, their first priority has to be getting them off the street. Then - they observe and evaluate whatever those next steps are, whether it's education, transportation - whatever.

Jones asked what 'we' can do to help you. Westerly replied they always need funds because they are able to dedicate those funds to stabilization, housing, bus passes, etc. She said she also needs mentoring, employers, educators, housing opportunities. Westery shared that they asked the youth in assessments - what is the one thing they wish that someone had told them about life and growing up. She said one answer had moved and continued to haunt her the first time she heard it - the young person said, 'I wish that somebody would have told me something.' Westerly said when these youth achieve stabilization, when they go back in front of the judge, they will allow them to be reunited with their families. She encouraged people to visit the Youth Towers web site for ways they can support the mission of the organization. ([www.YouthTowers.org](http://www.YouthTowers.org))

### **City of Birmingham Announcements/Alexis Barton**

Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park's Community Resource Officer, Alexis Barton, who, in Sanfelippo's words, puts up with a lot of emails and questions and helps us with our funding requests processed. Sanfelippo thanked her for all her ongoing help to

include, most recently, help with the recent tree planting project, saying Highland Park couldn't have done it without her help.

Barton told the group she had three things she wanted to communicate to the group - a joke, an apology and an offer.

She said the joke first, which she conceded was 'terrible' and went on to ask: What did Elizabeth Taylor say to her 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> husbands? A pause as people asked "what did she say?" Barton's punchline (to laughter): "She said I will not keep you very long."

Barton went on with number 2, an apology, saying "I cannot help you nearly as much as I would like to. I cannot help you as much as you can help yourselves. Together maybe we can help Highland Park and ultimately Red Mountain far more than others have helped. And that is what I am offering in the time I am with the city.... not excuses, not vague answers, not shoving you off or hiding, running from you, not being available - so I encourage you to come see me downtown, come in, invite me to take a walk with you, call me, email me..."

Barton acknowledged the previous item was both an apology and an offer. She went on to encourage the group to take advantage of the resources they had sitting at the table in front of them, going on to say that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Barton stated that she would continue to read/listen to communications, regardless of how many there were, saying that was her job.

Barton reported that the city was doing a Community Needs Fair Housing Survey saying that if anyone had experience or would like to share information related to Fair Housing, that she was going to leave some paper surveys. She shared people could also access the surveys online. She stated the surveys were completely anonymous, to please not put any identifying information on them. She said any completed forms could be turned in to Sanfelippo by January 24. Barton said she had spent much of 2018 doing research on fair housing in Birmingham, studying why neighborhoods are where they are, the reason for their demographic makeup, how they have transitioned over time, and what that means for Birmingham now. She shared that for interested residents who didn't know all of this and wanted to, they might go to the Main Office of the Public Library and ask to see the city map from 1924, that the individual who would produce that map for visitors would gladly explain where/how we ended up around the city.

#### **Update from Councilor Abbott's Office/Trece Williams**

Sanfelippo introduced Trece Williams from Councilor Valerie Abbott's office. Williams reported on the Arlington project saying that Mr. Silverstein planned to go back before Planning and Zoning to present the 120 ft tall building project in Redmont (abutting Highland Park) again, that he still wants to push for city approval of the project. Sanfelippo shared some backstory - explaining that when the Sirote Building was built, a

settlement was reached with the city that limits the height of whatever building might be built on that piece of property. Sanfelippo shared that this didn't come up in the title search, the city attorney didn't learn about it until recently - and thanks Phillip and Diane Foster for all the work/research they had done to uncover this important piece of information. She said that in order for Silverstein to now do the project, he would need to get this settlement abandoned by the city. Jessica Powers added the city would have to agree to release the restriction or covenant. A resident asked what the height limit was in the restriction, Philip Foster replied that it was 65 feet, which was about the height of the Sirote Building.

Sanfelippo shared that Councilwoman Valerie Abbott and Darryl Lee in her office were both very much on the side of the neighborhoods regarding this project, that they do not want to see this project move ahead, especially at the height proposed. She said they plan to talk to the mayor and try to get him on the same page and not support the city abandoning this agreement. The question was asked where this decision would be made, Williams responded she felt like it'd be between the Mayor and the Legal Department and that Darryl Lee would be meeting on this subject with the Mayor's office the coming Thursday.

A resident said they thought the project had been turned down and that the consensus had been to wait until the neighborhoods Framework Plan had been completed, sometime in the spring of 2020. Sanfelippo stated that the developer had never really been on board with that plan. Foster said the City Planning Office has basically told the developer they have to start over from scratch because they've modified the plan from what they presented to the neighborhood - because they were denied the ability to rezone one piece of the affected property, saying the plan had changed substantially - and now there are legal restrictions that prevent them from doing what they want to do. He went on saying the planning office has essentially said to the developer, that if you want to continue you need to either design it so that it complies with the legal restrictions or try to get the legal restrictions lifted. So, Foster said, they are going to have to come back to the neighborhood with whatever project they want to move forward with and start the whole approval process over again. He pointed out the 65 ft limitation is actually 5 feet taller than what is in the city's own master plan for 'mixed-use-medium' which is what the planning office thinks it needs to be. Paige Klein asked if Foster would be willing to put some of this good factual information in writing so that she could add her own commentary to it and share it with friends or city officials. Foster said he would.

A resident shared he had heard from a source that should be 'in the know' that the 18 story Vesta project 'got away from us'. Jones said she wasn't under the impression that the project snuck under the regulatory radar, that she understood that neighborhood, Five Points South, actually wanted the project and supported it. A resident recalled Silverstein's original presentation, observing that his attitude more or less indicated he (Silverstein) felt he didn't really need our approval. The resident went on to ask - did he



need neighborhood approval? Sanfelippo explained that our approval, or lack thereof, is advisory - so it could potentially sway the opinions of our elected officials because they represent us, but that it is not binding; that he is required to share his plans with us. Consensus was that the city council has ultimate binding authority on rezoning requests. She pointed out that residents were always able to attend public hearings/meetings - and could even sign up to speak. Sanfelippo thanked Philip Foster and Diane Weatherly again for all their hard work and continuing efforts.

Williams shared that District 3 had a new website. The new address is [www.bhamdistrict3.com](http://www.bhamdistrict3.com)

### **Funding Request Guidelines**

Sanfelippo said that in a previous meeting several residents had suggested that we put together some funding request guidelines. She said she asked the Spending Committee to consider developing guidelines and that they were hesitant to attach any sort of binding criteria to the process. Sanfelippo said she then developed some general guidelines for the process that she felt were open-ended enough to provide guidance but not necessarily limiting in a way that discouraged people/groups from approaching. She read the proposed guidelines:

- Requests should be initiated 6-8 months prior to an event/deadline.
- Requests are to include: group/individual name, business type/entity/tax designation, amount requested, specific ways money will be spent, how event/effort will benefit the community as a whole
- Request is then submitted to spending committee who will make a recommendation to approve or not
- At the next NA meeting, the request along with the committee's recommendation is presented and voted on
- Group requesting funds is notified; if approved, project funding form is sent to city by NA President along with sign in sheets and minutes including who raised and seconded the motion and the number of votes for and against.

Sanfelippo asked if there was a motion to approve these guidelines. Powers shared additional information on the spending committee's lack of interest in establishing guidelines, saying different people served on the committee through the years and that neighborhood priorities could change, that they were reticent to place ongoing limitations or parameters on the process. The consensus was that a formal motion/approval wouldn't be required for the guidelines.

Someone asked why the process was so time consuming, Sanfelippo and Powers shared the request was literally a 17-step process. Sanfelippo shared that the funds approved last November for Do Dah Day had met roadblocks with the city. She said that since Do Dah Day wasn't an entity that provided services that the city could contract with them to provide, that we, as a neighborhood are not allowed to give funds to them. She shared

they were trying to find a workaround, for example, giving money to animal control, which is part of the Humane Society - which is what Do Dah Day benefits. And then, in turn, the money could be earmarked for some of the permits the organization has to get to hold the event. Sanfelippo shared that after purchasing the trees that were just planted in the neighborhood, that Highland Park had some \$47,000 in their account.

## **New Business**

### **Highland Court/Highland Ave/28<sup>th</sup> Pl S Intersection**

Sanfelippo reported receiving a request regarding danger at the intersection at Highland Court, Highland Ave, and 28<sup>th</sup> Place South, related to the difficulty in pulling out of 28<sup>th</sup> Place onto Highland. She said she communicated this to Alexis Barton and ultimately heard back from James Fowler that the city had been looking at a number of these type intersections since the summer. She said what they are leaning towards is making the intersection a 4-way stop and adding a couple of crosswalks. A resident pointed out this change would be really good for walkers.

### **Announcements**

Sanfelippo shared the next Trash and Brush pick-up would be this coming Thursday, January 16. She said to be sure and make separate piles for furniture, appliances, trash - and another for mulchable items (bagged leaves and brush) – away from low hanging trees and power lines where the claw can easily access piles. She said there would be no trash pick-up on Martin Luther King Jr Day (Monday January 20). She added that on this day there would be no city services (other than 911, fire, and police) - or city offices open.

Sanfelippo said that the 311 portal was now working. She shared that if you go to the [birminghamal.gov](http://birminghamal.gov) site and search for 311 portal, it will come up. She said it was awesome, you can see tickets you've submitted and the related status.

Sanfelippo said that Paige Klein and Philip Foster would be joining her and Judy Jones at the MLK Unity breakfast. She was excited to attend and that she didn't think our neighborhood had sent people to the breakfast in a number of years.

Sanfelippo shared that the Beautification Committee wanted her to give a shout out to the City Forestry Department and Alexis Barton on their support in our project to get 24 trees planted around the neighborhood. She said she especially wanted to thank Ray Davis for his work and tireless support of this and other beautification projects.

Sanfelippo asked residents to continue reporting graffiti. She expressed a special thanks to Joe Watts who lives near Highland Drive and paints over any graffiti that appears on the steps between Highland Drive and Highland Ave. and the Graffiti Buster efforts, especially by Dehryl Mason and Anne Sunkel, had been hugely successful the past year.

Sanfelippo provided an update on the community garden. She said the lottery for the garden plots will end Feb 15. Anyone who is a resident of Highland Park neighborhood who wants to commit to paying \$35 for the growing season (March -November 2020) and planting a plot can enter this lottery. Winners will be randomly selected. She shared residents could sign up for the lottery online at <http://bit.ly/hp-garden-lottery>

Sanfelippo said the next meeting would be Feb 11 at 7 pm at the Highland Golf Clubhouse. She announced the speaker would be Sergeant Ronald Harless who will present 'Active Shooter Training'. She said Sgt Harless presented the training when she attended the Community Police Academy and that it was very good.

Sanfelippo said March 10 we would go back to our 6 pm meetings. She said that evening Dori Miles was to speak to us on Voter Registration and Voter Rights Restoration.

A resident asked a question about progress on the parking permit project that had been presented a few months ago by Colin Alexander. Jones said she recalled that he worked for Councilor O'Quinn's office and that he had studied the issue and prepared a comprehensive report for the Transportation Committee. She thought she had understood that the effort had been shelved for the time being while the Committee was working on issues related to the 2021 World Games.

Someone asked about Birmingham On-Demand, the new transportation system being piloted. Martha Cook shared it was pilot program serving mostly the western part of the city. She said she thought it was to be a six-month pilot. People were being encouraged to use the program, even if they just drove to a location within the map and leave your car. It's \$1.50 each way. The vehicles are Mercedes vans, they pick you up, sometimes you share the ride but that's only if there are others on your route. Cook shared the rides were 'corner to corner' but that if you were disabled, they would come to your door. She said she thought it might come east as far as St Vincent's. She added that there were plans to add funding, expand the service if it could be shown that it was being used.

### **Candidate Introduction/Martha Cook - District Civil Judge Place 3**

Sanfelippo introduced District Civil Judge (and current candidate for that position) Martha Cook. Cook shared she had visited Highland Park ten months ago when she was first appointed by Governor Ivey to the position. She said as a civil judge she doesn't hear criminal cases. She went on to say she had found tonight's meeting very interesting, since many of her cases deal with evictions. Cook said she has 23 years' experience as an attorney and mediator, and in fact had a thriving mediation business when she felt she was called to apply for this position. She said there were 20 people that applied - and that Kay Ivey selected her, in spite of her being a Democrat. She said she answered the governor's question about party honestly and left the interview thinking "I'm not going to get this job" - then about 3 weeks later she got the call from the governor's office that she



had gotten the job. Cook said her election date was Tuesday March 3, that she called that her *election* date instead of *primary* because she only has one democrat opponent in the race - and no Republican filed to run in the June general election. She said she has really enjoyed helping the citizens of Jefferson County, it's been such a blessing going out and meeting groups such as this one tonight and others in west Jefferson County. She said she'd always been told Jefferson County was a big county but she had no idea how big until she got out campaigning. Cook shared that she used to think judges didn't need to campaign because they were *judges*. She said she now thinks it's necessary, especially in the court in which she hears cases which involve disputes of \$20,000 and below. Cook says it makes her a better judge to know the addresses, see the people out there, know the neighborhoods, see the property management signs on the outside of apartment buildings. She said she is both the judge and jury for cases in her court and this local knowledge informs her. She told the group it had given her such joy to serve others and that if she wins March 3<sup>rd</sup> she will have a full 6 year term. She said she would appreciate everyone's votes. She shared that one reason she chose to come tonight was that she loves Alice (Westery) - that she has known her for a long time and what she is doing is just beautiful work. She said after the election she wanted to get more involved, to be a mentor, because she really believes in what Westery is doing and that it is literally saving people.

### **Adjournment**

Sanfelippo asked if there were any other issues or business. Hearing there were none, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association