

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

February 2020 Minutes

Meeting Date: February 11, 2020

At 7 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. She introduced herself, Secretary Judy Jones and added that Vice President Jessica Powers had a conflict and wasn't in attendance.

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. Hearing none he shared, to laughter, that the residents live in a good neighborhood. Sanfelippo said this was because residents were keeping an eye out and reporting suspicious activity

Public Works Update/Tammie Wheeler

Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park's Environmental Code Enforcement officer, Tammie Wheeler. They shared that Wheeler was the officer who handled reports of dumping spots, abandoned vehicles, junk and overgrowth. Sanfelippo asked the group if anyone had locations they wanted to report to Wheeler. When none were offered, Sanfelippo went on to say that she had submitted a complaint, that some residents of the Claridge related to the doctor's office next door to EATS on Highland, that he was storing a bunch of equipment in the back. Wheeler confirmed the address and added that her responsibility was residential but that she had sent them a letter.

Resident Anne Sunkel asked where to report public areas in the neighborhood where litter was an issue. She shared that, for example, there was a terrible litter problem all along 26th at the 280/31 overpass near St Vincent's. Wheeler said she had written this location up along with two other overpass areas requesting the Brush and Trash clean the areas. She said she didn't know whether they would actually do it but that she had submitted the requests. She added that sometimes the locations were in areas where the city and state had agreements regarding litter management. Jones suggested that perhaps we needed another neighborhood clean up effort. She added that perhaps it was good that

we were reaching this deep to find problem areas to address. Jones then shared with Wheeler another problem area, on 31st near Clairmont, next to the apartments being redone. Wheeler said she would take a look at it.

A resident asked Wheeler about the maintenance crews that usually take care of the Highland Ave boulevards, they didn't seem to be there as often, there seemed to be areas that still had fall leaves. Wheeler said she would inquire about their schedule. Jones said she had, several times, seen landscapers at residences on Highland, blowing leaves into the boulevards.

Fire Department Update

Sanfelippo confirmed the firemen present were from the station near Avondale Park. She said someone had told her that the fire department on Highland near Western was closing. The firemen said 'absolutely not'. They introduced themselves and shared there was not a whole lot of new things to share, but that they were still doing their smoke detector install project. Sanfelippo asked if they also furnished the smoke detectors, that at one point they didn't have them. The firemen said they had resumed furnishing the detectors, at least at their station anyway. They shared being excited to have a new fire chief who had been sworn in the 2nd or 3rd of this month.

Anne Sunkel asked about the number of fire department units responding to calls at, for example, Episcopal Place, and whether it was standard for a firetruck to respond. The officer said yes it was, that the firetruck would actually arrive first to assess the needs and determine whether to summon additional transport. He said a lot of time an ambulance wasn't even called.

Jones asked the number to call for smoke detectors and was told it was Public Information at 205-785-1332. Sanfelippo said their presence had reminded her to remind residents to change the batteries on their smoke detectors; that if the detectors were over ten years old, to get a new one; if residents had any gas appliances to get a CO2 monitor too; and to be sure and have a fire extinguisher. The fireman added that along with smoke detectors they also would furnish CO2 detectors.

Active Shooter Training/Sgt Harless

Sanfelippo introduced Sgt Ron Harless, explaining she met him when he did a presentation for the Community Police Academy. She said it had never really occurred to her how to be prepared in an 'active shooter' situation. She conceded it was a very grim topic but unfortunately in this day and age, it's one that we should be aware of and consider what we would do.

Harless introduced himself, saying he was a sergeant with the Birmingham Police Department. He said he was currently assigned to the Department's Training Unit. He said he had also been at the South Precinct, Auto Theft, Robbery, Homicide, was

promoted and went back to South Precinct and worked until August of this past year as a supervisor on the overnight shift. He said he'd been involved in 'active shooter' training for about 10 years, that he started by going to training himself and then became interested in becoming an instructor. He said often Alabama gets a bad rap about being prepared for things, being at the bottom of a lot of national lists - but that has not been the case with respect to 'active shooter' preparations and training. About six years ago the state mandated that all police officers have mandatory active shooter training. He said the mandated training was ongoing, that whether you'd been with the department for 15 years or just started, that you would receive this training. He added that it was also now a mandated part of Police Academy classes. He said the mandated training was a great idea but it was also important to consider that over half of active shooter events are over before police arrive. This means that for 50 % of these events, it is up to the people 'inside' to arrive at and execute some course of action. The program was adopted by the US Department of Homeland Security, and also what he teaches, is the ALERT Active Shooter program. He said they also endorse 'Run, Hide, Fight'. He said another version of that is 'Avoid, Deny, Defend' and that they both basically work the same way. Harless said he goes out to schools, churches, anyone who will have him and that usually his presentations last anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half. He said his presentations usually begin with a video of Columbine but he wouldn't share that tonight. He said it was gruesome but it usually reminds people of where all this started twenty years ago because it was the first time the term 'active shooter' was widely used. He said we were still playing catch-up, even after 20 years.

He said that 'Run Hide Fight' is basically about options, things that you can do when you're faced with a split-second decision. He said that in an 'active shooter situation' someone is actively engaged in killing someone, not for any purpose other than that, there's no robbery or burglary. He said most of the time they feel wronged by society for some reason. He said he believes these incidents are often copy cats from other events seeking similar fame or notoriety. He said in his training he wouldn't use the names of the shooter, deciding against giving them any more attention or recognition.

Harless discussed myths of 'active shooter events': 1) Active shooter suspects will always display tendencies for violent actions; 2) "It won't happen here" - it's already happened here; UAB Hospital a year and a half ago, a couple of years prior to that there was a shooting at UPS, before that a shooting at St Vincent's. He said Birmingham has been lucky, that we are fortunate because the city has a lot of officers out on patrol every day, that many municipalities can't afford the manpower to do that; 3) Police will always respond in time to stop the shooter; He said people that initiate these events do not want to engage the police, that often they will kill themselves before the police arrive - and because of that, they will want to accomplish maximum damage before police arrival.

Harless said that he was of the mindset that if you believe you can do nothing against an armed intruder then you won't be able to. He went on to say that even just having a game

plan in the event of a shooter is doing something. He said this doesn't mean you have to fight every single time because if you're unarmed that might not be the best way to go = but learning and considering actions related to 'Run Hide Fight', that is doing something.

He discussed the shooting at Aurora, Colorado saying it started 12:38, the 911 call was placed 1 minute later, the shooter was arrested in the parking lot 6 minutes later. Harless said that was awesome police response time but even so, there were 70 shot and 12 killed.

Harless put up a slide showing there were 326 active shooting incidents between 1966 and 2012. He said over 40-50 years, that doesn't look so bad. Then he put up another showing that between 2016 and 2017 there were 50, saying they're not slowing down.

He said he will break it all down but that having an intelligent escape plan - when necessary barricade and hide. He said that sometimes, when there's nothing else to be done, you have to fight back. Building occupants should evacuate the facility if safe to do so; leave behind any belongings; visualize the whole escape route before beginning to move; avoid using elevators. He asked how many times people go into a location and know more than one way out? - adding that it is good to know more than one way to exit a facility. He said a simple thing is not to go back to get belongings; that we are conditioned to not forget our belongings - and when we do, our automatic response is to go back and get them. Harless said that if building evacuation is not possible that individuals should hide and secure the area, blocking the door with furniture, turning off lights and cell phones, etc. He said leaving is not always the right thing to do, that personal safety might fall behind your obligation to others if you were a teacher, health care worker, etc whose job is to take care of others - in these cases your best option might be to lock down and barricade up. He said - sounds silly but silencing electronic devices is important. Harless shared barricading is often a good idea because most active shooter events are over in 7-8 minutes, that bad guys know, when they enter a facility, that the police are coming. He asked that when they know their time is limited, how much time are they going to waste trying to get into a room that is locked or barricaded? They are looking for easy targets. He said creative ways to block an entrance may not ultimately stop someone but sometimes just slowing a shooter down is a good thing.

A resident asked Harless about an inexpensive (possibly \$10) small metal device that you could put at the top of a door that would make it where it couldn't be opened - and whether our school system was purchasing those. Harless said not that he was aware that Birmingham was doing that but that they did make this training available to schools also. He said he hated to say this but that a lot of time it came down to money, that we weren't talking about a few doors, we were talking about thousands. He said that was one reason that he spent time on creative effective solutions from available materials that were free - like older fire hoses cut into sections and slipped over door closing mechanisms to prevent them from being opened. He said he went to an elementary school in Titusville that was the best facility he had been to with respect to preparedness; they had game

plans that included turning lights off, dropping down accordion paper mounted over windows, rally points outside, etc. He said a lot of time high schools, because of their size, were a lot more difficult.

Harless shared that he was unaware of any active shooter case in the United States that started inside and moved outside, that if you were inside and make it out, then you live, that's always the best-case scenario. He displayed a number of slides showing creative 'outside the box' solutions to blocking a door to slow shooters down.

He said 'fight' is the last thing they talk about, that if you can't escape, you have hunkered down but despite your best efforts the person is coming through, you have to assume the mindset that either that person or me is walking out - and it's going to be me; that in those cases there is always something around that can be used to create weapon - whether it's a chair, a microphone stand, fire extinguisher.

He then showed a video - 'Run. Hide. Fight. Surviving an Active Shooter Event' (produced in Houston and funded by the Mayor's Office of Public Safety and the Homeland Security Department).

(Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mzI_5aj4Vs)

Harless pointed out that once the police arrive on the scene that their main objective is to stop the killing, that they will bypass the wounded, the people hurt, because you can't stop and give anyone any treatment if there's still a shooter. The fire department, the ambulances, are all going to be staged off at another location until the police have the scene under control. He referenced a recent shooting in Thailand and some individuals upstairs at the site who had to stay in place for five hours before the police got to them. He said he didn't know what their policies were, but here, if it was a mall, a school or hospital, even if they stop the shooter on the first floor, that they still don't know if there's other shooters there. He said they will go through and methodically sweep the whole location. He said they did a sweep of the whole facility at UAB-Highlands, that when you have a site of that size, it will just take a long time.

He suggested people visit the Department of Homeland Security's web site for more information <https://www.dhs.gov/>. Harless said this free presentation is usually about 1-1/2 hours long, that he visits schools and churches and is not restricted to the city limits. He said if people knew of other Alabama locations who could benefit from the presentation to contact him ronald.harless@birminghamal.gov, and there were probably 250 instructors throughout the state.

City Council Update/Councilor Valerie Abbott

Sanfelippo introduced Councilor Valerie Abbott who, as she walked up, thanked Sgt Harless for his presentation. She shared that today was 'Council Day' - and that the

biggest thing they did was pass a city ordinance that allowed alternative modes of transportation on our city streets. This means scooters, bicycles, motorized skateboards - which will be very interesting. Councilor Abbott said she had a lot of questions, she wanted to know about insurance, will these people have insurance, if they cause accidents who will pay, who is going to enforce the part of the ordinance that says they can't ride on city sidewalks because, in her experience, 'enforcement' is an issue. She said that in the end, the majority of the council and the mayor really wanted this to happen, that they felt this would make the city look progressive. Sanfelippo asked if this ordinance was in response to the 'Bird Scooters' that recently made an appearance in the city. Abbott said the ordinance wasn't in response to 'Bird' but that it actually excluded the company (though not in name). It excluded companies that had gone into a city without seeking permission through proper channels. She said now, different vendors can/will submit different proposals to the city for bringing in vehicles and providing them to people. She said companies will have to allow people to either reserve them using their smart phone or have a way to reserve if they don't have a smart phone. The equipment will also have to be all over the city, that they can't just choose the hot spots. She expressed concerns about safety in neighborhoods if a lot of these 'vehicles' were sharing the road with automobile traffic especially with the kind of topographical differences that we have within the city. She added that the drivers of these 'alternative vehicles' don't have to have a driver's license, don't have to have insurance, and they don't have to wear helmets. She said her advice to car drivers was to consider their own liability and do what they could to protect themselves. Someone asked about a comparison to bicycle riders, Abbot said that these new 'alternative vehicle' riders were required by the ordinance to obey the rules/laws of the road like bicycle riders. A resident asked if there had been any discussion of adding more bike lanes in the city, Abbott replied no. Another resident asked if it was illegal to ride bicycles on the sidewalks, Abbott replied yes.

Anne Sunkel talked about her experience with bikes and scooters on the road when she lived in Key West, that the key issue was whether the alternative vehicles followed traffic rules - but she said the police there were empowered to enforce, give tickets, even DUIs. She said there was a difference in safety between residents who owned their vehicles and tourists who rented one from a purveyor. Abbott said the ordinance did require the rental companies to educate the public though she wasn't sure what form that education might take and that she assumed it might be through a customer's smart phone or computer. Sunkel shared that one thing that had helped in Key West was a requirement that bikes have a flashing white light on the front and a red light flashing on the back. Abbott suggested that residents read the ordinance for themselves, that she would share a link to it so it could be posted on Highland Park's web page.

Abbott shared that she had talked to James Fowler about the neighborhood parking zone project and learned that it was currently on the back burner because the city is working on upgrading their parking meters to kiosks where you can pay with your smart phone. She said this project and a couple of others had temporarily taken precedence over the parking

zone project - but that Fowler assured her that it would eventually move to the front burner.

A resident asked about potholes, how to get some attention to them. Both Sanfelippo and Abbott said to report them and furnish the location/address to the 311 call center or online portal.

A resident asked about golf carts. Abbott said golf carts weren't included in with this ordinance. She added that there was a limit on 'speed' for the vehicles included in the ordinance. A question was asked about privately owned Segways. Abbott said she understood that when the mayor signed the ordinance they could be on the street as well.

A resident asked how to get a street light replaced, saying one in front of the 2600 condo building (the Highland Avenue side); she said it was hit by a drunk driver about 2 years ago and it had never been put back up, that the whole pole and base was gone. Abbott said the city has a contact with Alabama Power Company, that they were in charge of all the street lights and said she would be happy to report it.

Sanfelippo asked if Alabama Power Company now had responsibility for the lights in city parks. Abbott said yes, but that there was a tiered schedule for 'park light replacement' and that Alabama Power was slowly getting to all of them. Sanfelippo said there were 5 lights in Caldwell Park that had been out for 5-6 months, that she has reported it to Alabama Power, to the City - and she didn't know what else to do. She added that recently she noticed that all the lights were out in Rhodes Park so she wasn't sure how to follow up. Abbott said she would try to get an updated list of the parks and when they're supposed to be replaced.

A resident asked about transportation projects that might be in work supporting the World Games. Abbott said the Council saw a video today about the World Games coming to Birmingham. She said the committee (World Games 2021 Organizing Committee) recently installed a new CEO - Nick Sellers (previously with Alabama Power and Southern Company). She shared the committee was working on all things related to the games, to include transportation, but it has been announced that the city's Bus Rapid Transit project will not be ready in time for the Games. Someone asked how many visitors were expected to be in the city for the Games, Abbott said she didn't know, that she had heard many numbers tossed about. She said it would be a lot of people - but not as many as the 'Police and Fire Games' if the City gets those. She said those Games would be in 2026 and that Birmingham was trying to get them for the City. She went on to say that the World Games would be a good trial for the city's ability to organize for this type of event. Abbott said there'd be a number of event locations around the city - some at Oak Mountain, some at CrossPlex, some at the different colleges and universities around the city. She said there will be a need for volunteers, especially people who speak other languages.

Abbott gave an update on the ‘Sisters Houses’. Judge Price is still on top of Mr Keller’s activities; that Keller went back in front of the Judge in January, that the Judge was pleased with the progress on the house. She said that Keller is to go back in front of Judge Price in April. His next project is the roof and gutters, that recently they had completed replacing the window in the back of the house. She said it was her understanding that Keller was now moving progressively to improve the quality of the houses. Sanfelippo said she had finally heard back from PEP who reported the work was moving very slowly, that he was working on the back of the house. She shared that Keller missed his inspection in November and is required to have them every 30 days. Sanfelippo said Keller has received so many ‘second chances’ and she was about to request the inspection reports for January and February - and that if he missed one, that she would advise Abbott. Abbott said the Judge and the court is in charge; that they are running the show; not the city or the mayor. Sanfelippo said she understood, that the neighborhood was just frustrated because of how long this had been going on, that Keller had long ago used up his chances and this time should not have even gotten a permit for the work. Abbott said the Judge ordered the work to be done and that is why the permit was issued by the city. Sanfelippo clarified that she has been notified by the city legal department that he was granted a permit due to a “misunderstanding between the court and PEP.”

A resident asked about the status of the Arlington development project. Abbott shared that David Silverstein had been promoting the condo component of the project with different groups, trying to build a groundswell of support for the project outside the neighborhood associations. She said the legal settlement/covenants located by Highland Park resident Phillip Foster, is still in place. It limits the height of any building on that property to 65 feet, which is the same as the limitation in the current mixed-use-medium category that has been placed on that property as part of the city’s Comprehensive Plan. She added that Highland Park has not yet been through the Framework Plan process yet, that all the District 3 neighborhoods were last. She said currently Glen Iris, Five Points South and the North Side were undergoing their Framework Plan process. As a result there is a lot of activity related to developers trying to hurry up rezoning requests before the new zoning is finalized. She said she understood from the mayor that some of the people that Silverstein had been lobbying had come in to see the mayor in support of the project. Abbott said she encouraged him to hear from others who did not support the project. She suggested that people get on the list to go visit with the mayor to explain the alternative opinions on the issue. Abbott said she did not want the Highland Park and Redmont neighborhoods to be outmaneuvered after they had held votes on the project. She explained Silverstein had been to see Sirote Permutt and was now lobbying the city to negate the settlement, that there was potential that the two parties could agree to do that. Sanfelippo shared that Silverstein knew about the settlement. Abbott agreed saying his name was on the copy that was located, with a notation that it was ok to give it to Don Lupo, who was Redmont Neighborhood President at the time.

Someone asked about the pending development at the old Western site on Highland, Abbott replied the city has heard nothing from the developers yet on this project.

Someone asked when Highland Park would begin their Framework Plan process. Abbott said she thought sometime this coming summer, but that she would check on that.

Announcements

Sanfelippo shared that our Community Resource Officer, Alexis Barton, could not be with us this evening, that she was attending a Town Hall meeting. Councilor Abbott shared that we would also be having a Town Hall Meeting for District 3 and that she had asked the mayor to hold it here, at the Highland Golf Clubhouse, because it was a good central location. She said the date was initially March 31 but they hadn't realized that was the same date as an evening Council meeting, so now they were waiting on a new date and would email neighborhood officers when she had it.

Sanfelippo shared the next Trash and Brush pick-up will be Thursday, February 27. She said to be sure and make separate piles for furniture, appliances, trash - and another for mulchable items (bagged leaves and brush); to please try and keep the piles away from power lines and trees.

Sanfelippo said that the 311 portal was now working. She shared that if you go to the 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 the lottery for the garden plots will end this Friday, Feb 15 and that everyone should stay tuned for additional announcements.

Sanfelippo told the group she wanted to start an ad hoc committee to get the neighborhood 501c3 application process completed, that if anyone was interested to email her. She added that she wanted to also put together an adhoc committee, perhaps as part of the Beautification Committee, to work on sprucing up the playground area in Rushton Park - and anyone interested in this to let her know. Jones shared that she has been calling the police when she has seen dog owners with their dogs inside the children's play areas at Rushton and reminded people this is not allowed.

Sanfelippo shared there was an event the next day at Terrific New Theatre, 'Love Stories', put on by AIDS Alabama. This coming Sunday Bob McKenna, one of our neighbors and manager of the Clubhouse on Highland, would be speaking at Unity Church at 11 am, his topic is 'We Are Love DNA - Divine Nature Actualized'. She reminded the group that the Mercedes Marathon was this coming Sunday also and part of course was along Highland Ave; that traffic would be affected likely between 7:30 am and 1 or 2 pm.

Sanfelippo shared that Congresswoman Terri Sewell was having the Jefferson County ‘Congress in your Community’ event on Thursday Feb 20. She said there was also going to be a Resource Fair related to community services at 4:30.

Sanfelippo told the group that March 3 is an election day and that details could be found at AlabamaVotes.gov

Jamie Whitehurst shared he was a Highland Park resident and also worked at Episcopal Place. He said Episcopal Place has their 15th annual Gumbo Gala come up on Saturday April 18th, which is the weekend after Easter. Whitehurst said there was additional information on the Gala at www.GumboGala.com or www.EpiscopalPlace.org. He said people can register a team, buy tickets to attend, look at photos from last year - and contact him if any additional information is needed.

Sanfelippo said the next meeting was March 10 and we would go back to our 6 pm meeting time. She said that evening Dori Miles was to speak to us on Voter Registration and Voter Rights Restoration. She said April 14 we would have a representative from Peace Keepers to share what they do and how people can get involved.

Sanfelippo remembered we hadn’t earlier approved the minutes from the January meeting. She asked if there were any changes or corrections. None were offered and she pronounced the minutes approved.

Adjournment

Sanfelippo announced if there was no further business the meeting was adjourned. The meeting was then adjourned at approximately 8:40 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Jones

Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association