

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

March 2020 Minutes

Meeting Date: March 10, 2020

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the meeting to order. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself and Secretary Judy Jones. She reminded everyone to sign in if they hadn't already.

Sanfelippo said she hoped everyone had received minutes from our last meeting, February 11th. She asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to those minutes. Hearing none she stated that the meeting minutes for the February 11th meeting were approved.

Altamont Park-Sunshine Rotary/Nathan Marcus

Sanfelippo introduced Nathan Marcus with Sunrise Rotary, saying that he was trying to make another neighborhood meeting so she wanted to let him make his remarks early in our agenda. Marcus said he wanted to share about Sunshine Rotary's project to help Altamont Park realize its potential within the community. He said the property was originally donated to the City of Birmingham by Robert Jemison in 1921. He shared that Jemison's vision had been that this beautiful view of the city would become a park and be available to everyone. Marcus stated that in spite of its beauty and unique history, development had stalled and it's been in a state of neglect and disrepair for a long time. He said the Sunshine Rotary was excited to take the project on. He said there was a fair amount of misinformation circulating about their intentions, that in truth they wanted to incorporate community feedback into their planning efforts - and to that end, a community meeting had been planned for 5:30-7:30 pm, Thursday March 12 at the Highland Park Golf Center. He invited everyone to attend, hear about the project and contribute their feedback and ideas. Marcus said he considered everyone here tonight 'stakeholders' in this effort because they were engaged in 'community'. He encouraged everyone to attend the meeting March 12. He added, related to the misinformation being communicated about their efforts, that if people didn't hear it from him tonight, right now, that it wasn't true. He said they were a group of volunteer Rotarians who have worked with the Boy Scouts to make this happen. He said, he'd invite the folks here to come, get behind the curtain with them to see what was happening - but there was no curtain. He said he hoped to see everyone Thursday night.

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. Sanfelippo said she had received several complaints about a commercial vehicle parked on Lakeview Crescent. Officer King said he knew the vehicle she was referencing and

that he would check with his supervisor regarding the applicable city ordinances to determine what the correct course of action would/could be.

A resident expressed concerns about potentially illegal parking along 31st St between Niazuma and Highland - and whether parking on sidewalks was legal. Officer King said the best thing to do was to report vehicles when this occurred and that officers would respond and write tickets if appropriate. Parking on sidewalks is not legal. A question was asked about yellow paint on curbs, whether the city was still painting areas to indicate no parking zones. Councilwoman Valerie Abbott said the practice had been discontinued for some time, that the city had cut 'yellow paint' as a cost-saving measure. Sanfelippo added that when she had requested it several years ago she was told that Traffic Engineering no longer used yellow paint to mark non-parking areas. Officer King said he thought some of these situations would improve as the Police Department added resources to Parking Enforcement.

Greater Birmingham Ministries Voting Rights Project/Dori Miles

Sanfelippo introduced Dori Miles who talked to the group about voter registration and voter rights restoration. Miles shared that she was a volunteer with Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM) - and that she works with their Voting Rights Project. She said she helps register voters, saying she was going to take a giant leap and assume that everyone in attendance tonight was registered - but that she could also just help people check and be sure they are updated, with correct addresses and such. She explained what she did a lot of was help people restore their right to vote if they've lost their vote. One of the reasons she thinks it's important for people like her to talk to groups like this is because a lot of people don't realize that even if you have had a previous involvement with law enforcement, even if you are a prior convicted felon, you are eligible to vote in the state of Alabama. She explained there are 47 felonies that are considered disqualifying, that yes - if you've committed one of those felonies, then you've lost your right to vote. But as of a law change in 2017, if you've completed everything associated with your sentence, you're not on probation, you're no longer on parole, you've paid all your fines and fees associated with that felony and you don't have a felony pending currently, then you are eligible to vote. She said her pitch, while not necessarily to the people sitting in the room here, there may be people we know in this category who might benefit from this information. She shared an example - that if someone were convicted of felony drug possession in Alabama, as of 2017, you never lost your right to vote. But that there were a lot of people convicted of that, who may have done time for that, and they just figure 'oh I can't vote' - but she said, that is just not true. She said if you were convicted of trafficking in drugs, you did lose your right - but you can get it restored. She said she can be reached at GBM at 205-304-0481 - that if anyone knows of someone who needs assistance restoring their right to vote, to contact her. She said it was actually a fairly easy process but could be a little nuanced. She said she wanted to leave us with this one thought which she heard from Joyce Vance, who she heard speak when she first arrived about a year ago - that if every eligible voter in the state of Alabama registered to vote -

and then actually got to the polls on election day, the balance of power in Alabama would change. Miles said that affected her very profoundly. She said if anyone here tonight knew anyone who may want to pursue getting their right to vote back, that she may can help them, GBM may can help them.

A resident asked if GBM also assisted in getting people to the polls, Miles replied 'yes'.

Helen Rivas said she was a longtime GBM supporter and volunteer and wanted to piggy back, that she concurred that GBM's efforts at restoring voting rights and physically getting people to the polls was very important. She went on to talk about GBM's 'baby' - Alabama Arise - that tomorrow, SB 75 and SB 209 were going to come up for a vote in the Alabama Senate Judiciary Committee - and those are allowing people to 'drive', which ultimately means getting to the polls, people who may not have paid all their fines yet for some legal issue, or other people who have had their driver's licenses taken away, that these will restore their ability to get a driver's license in all cases except those dealing with public safety.

Sanfelippo asked if there were other groups helping with voter rights restoration - Miles replied, yes, that Southern Poverty Law Center had a great on the ground program they were doing, but that most of those people had moved to Atlanta and were more involved with 'policy'. She said SPLC and ACLU both had information on this subject. She said she would help 'whoever' complete the application - and wait for the 44 days before the state will send the 'certificate of eligibility' to register to vote. And when that was received, she would help complete the 'voter registration form'. Miles said that surprisingly a good source of information on the process was the Board of Pardons and Paroles web site.

<https://paroles.alabama.gov/pardons-restoration-of-voting-rights/>

A resident asked if there was a place to get assistance paying the necessary fees before voting rights could be restored. Miles replied they often helped writing letters requesting waivers for fees levied at the time of conviction.

Public Works Update/Tammie Wheeler

Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park's Public Works Environmental Code Enforcement Officer, Tammie Wheeler who shared she handles reports of dumping spots, abandoned vehicles, junk and overgrowth.

A resident asked about a piece of power pole laying on the ground, who might retrieve that, haul it away. Sanfelippo said she would determine and get the location to Wheeler.

A resident asked about storm drain covers. Wheeler said that while she didn't deal with those issues, she could pass them along to the Public Works area responsible. A resident

communicated there was a problem with the drain at 26th and 11th. Jones reported a problem with a drain in Forest Park at the corner of 10th and 42nd.

City Council Update/Councilor Valerie Abbott

Sanfelippo introduced Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Abbott shared that today was ‘Council Day’ - and that she wanted to share several things that occurred at the meeting. She said, one, the council had addressed spraying for mosquitos, that O’Quinn and Hoyt had joined her in opposing the spraying in the city of ‘poison’ for mosquitos. She told residents to call 311 if they want to be added to the city’s ‘do not spray’ list. Abbott said she was an opponent of spraying, that there seemed to be too much risk to people, pets, wildlife and beneficial insects. A suggestion was made to get with Tori McDonald to request that the garden area not be sprayed. Sanfelippo will relay to Tori.

Abbott reported that the new Council President, William Parker, had made changes to the Council committees. She said the previous Administration and Education Committee had been split into two committees, that she would be chairing the Administration Committee and Darrell O’Quinn would chair the Education Committee. She went on to say that Steven Hoyt had taken over as Chair of the Transportation Committee, which had been previously chaired by O’Quinn.

Abbott shared that a Town Hall Meeting for District 3 originally scheduled for March 31st had been moved to Monday March 30 because the 31st was a previously scheduled nighttime Council Meeting. She said it would be 6 pm March 30 at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. She strongly encouraged Highland Park residents to be present and voice their concerns.

Old Business

Sanfelippo asked for any old business. A question was asked about the status of the Arlington condo/hotel development project. Philip Foster explained the developer, David Silverstein, had to withdraw his initial rezoning request because of legally restrictive covenants that had been put in place by a federal court in 1992. He explained these covenants limited anything built on the site to 65 feet and Silverstein is now effectively in a holding pattern, pending any new re-zoning request that can be crafted within the limitations of the covenants. Foster said he understood that the developer was attempting to lobby the parties to the original settlement agreement (Sirote and the City of Birmingham) to petition the same Circuit Court to either vacate or amend the agreement. Councilor Abbott strongly encouraged residents to let Mayor Woodfin know they oppose the city dissolving the agreement. Cathy Adams said she would be meeting the Mayor the coming Thursday, and Foster said he would accompany her. A resident observed that the framework planning process could be relevant to all of this and asked when Highland Park was scheduled for it. Abbott said she felt like the date had been moved more toward summer now instead of spring but that she would check and report back.

New Business

Sanfelippo shared information about a surveillance camera proposal from 'Flock Safety' that was being considered by the Spending and Communication and Safety committees. She said the cost for a camera was \$2500 for the first year and \$1500 for a second year if the service was extended. (And then \$2000/year after) She said she had seen a demonstration and the system was impressive, allowing a search function that could focus in on vehicle make, model and license plate number - but not faces. She said the system could also send the Birmingham Police Department an alert. She explained Flock would own and maintain the equipment but that we would own our data. A question was asked about permitting, Sanfelippo replied that Flock handles that. A question was asked about privacy concerns, freedom of information requests, and how hardened was the system - as in general vulnerabilities. Sanfelippo said she would find out and asked for residents to email questions and concerns to HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com.

Sanfelippo said a proposal had been made that Highland Park allocate \$2500 for a fall/winter tree planting. A resident made a request that we consider using more native trees in our next planting. Jared Nelson made a motion to allocate the \$2500 for the planting, Philip Foster seconded. The proposal was voted on, there were 15 yes votes with no opposing votes or abstentions.

Announcements

Sanfelippo shared that Highland Park's Community Resource Officer, Alexis Barton, was no longer working with the city and that we would have an interim CRO assigned.

Sanfelippo introduced Liz Wilson, United Way's Director of Grants Management and Community Initiatives. Wilson said she wanted to share about some of United Way's priorities and community programs. She started by stating her strong encouragement for everyone to complete their 2020 Census form, that it was critical to our state. She shared the last census in 2010 only had a 72% completion rate in Alabama. Wilson explained the 435 U.S. congressional seats were allocated to states based on census numbers and without more census participation Alabama was in danger of losing one of its seven seats. She shared that a study by George Washington University found that in 2015 the US government returned almost \$1600 dollars to Alabama for every person counted in the census - and that these dollars were allocated in 2016 by some 55 programs whose services are in some part connected to census data (for ex, Medicaid, Head Start, Pell Grants, Title 1 Grants, Snap, etc.). Wilson said that people could complete the census online or wait for the knock.

Wilson shared about the United Way's community initiative, the 211 Call Center - that Alabama residents experiencing hardship could call 2-1-1 for information on health and human service organizations in their community. Wilson said as part of their Financial Stability Partnership that United Way would offer tax preparation services for free to

individuals whose income is \$54,000 or less. Information on this assistance can be found at <https://www.uwca.org/our-impact/financial-stability/free-tax-prep/>

Sanfelippo shared the next Trash and Brush pick-up will be Thursday, March 19. She reminded residents to 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 shared the Ribbon-Cutting and lottery drawing for our Community Garden had been held the previous Friday. She reported that 96 people had applied for the 19 plots and they were currently querying the winners to see who might be interested in splitting their plot with another family just to be able to involve more people.

Sanfelippo said she was forming an ad hoc committee to work on ideas and recommendations to spruce up the playground area in Rushton Park. She said anyone interested in helping with this project could email HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com

Sanfelippo said Anne Sunkel, a passionate and helpful Highland Park resident, had stepped up to help with another ad hoc committee that was working on 501c3 formation process for the neighborhood. She said there may be a 'hat-passing' since the neighborhood could not use city funds for the filing fee. Jones said one idea might be to have a fundraiser at Rojo, that sometimes Laney lets organization have events and a % of sales.

Sanfelippo reminded everyone of the District 3 Town Hall meeting with the mayor and Councilor Abbott on Monday March 30 at 6 pm.

Sanfelippo said Tuesday March 31st will be the evening City Council meeting. The public meeting will be held in City Council chambers at 6 pm. She said anyone who wanted to speak to be there by about 5:30 to sign up since they cut that off at some point before the meeting starts.

Sanfelippo announced that Episcopal Place's Annual Gumbo Gala was April 18th.

Sanfelippo said our next meeting would be 6 pm Tuesday April 14th upstairs at the Highland Golf Clubhouse. She shared the speaker would be Onoyemi Williams with Peacekeepers, an organization whose goal is to decrease violence and increase peace in our city. She said Williams would share about the organization and how people can get involved.

Sanfelippo asked if there were any other announcements. Ray Davis spoke up and said, related to our new trees, that we need some volunteers to adopt a tree to keep them watered for the next year to two years. He said we had been fortunate with rain since

they had been planted but that come May, June, July we know it will get pretty dry. He said he has a sign-up sheet if anyone there wanted to volunteer for that. He said it may only be watering once or twice a week, depending on weather, just to pour a few gallons of water on them. A resident said she thought it'd be a good idea for someone to coordinate with the volunteers to let them know the weeks when 2 waterings were needed. Davis concurred. Another resident suggesting pairing volunteers with trees near their homes. Sanfelippo said she would follow up with him on perhaps a map of the tree locations and perhaps number or name them.

Davis asked about the roped off stairway at Rhodes Park. Sanfelippo thanked both he and Adam Ward for bringing that to our attention. She said she had followed up on it that day and would share when she received some information from the city.

Davis shared there wasn't a single light in Rhodes Park that was working right now. Sanfelippo said she had reported that but would do it again. She also told the group that she thought it was good to 'squeaky-wheel' issues like that and encouraged people to call 311. She said if residents had not yet gone online to register for the 311 portal to do so, that it was finally back up and running. (<https://www.birminghamal.gov/311-portal>)

Sanfelippo recognized Rod Scott. Scott said he was a state legislator and had served in that role for 14 years. He told residents that getting a non-profit status for the neighborhood would be a good idea because it would make it eligible for their representative's discretionary money for worthy ideas. He said, as an example, that he had just given \$10,000 to the Southern Flight Museum for their virtual reality machines. Scott then shared with the group that he was currently running for Jefferson County Treasurer. He said he had graduated from Red Mountain Alternative High School on 24th Street at Niazuma. He said he also has an Economics degree from Yale University and an MBA from Dartmouth. He said he had also worked for IBM, Southern Mainframe Computers, Cigna (doing wealth management and therefore having securities licenses) and did strategic planning for Liberty Life. Scott said there was a run-off election on March 31st and he would love to have the neighborhood's support. He explained the roles, saying you have the Tax Assessor that assesses, the Tax Collector that collects the monies, and then you have the Treasurer that deposits the monies into the banks and builds those relationships with the banks. He said this is significant because for every dollar you put into a bank the federal reserve system can loan out \$10. Jefferson County is putting in \$40 million that allows the banking system to loan out \$400 million. Scott said his interest is in economic development, work force development and financial literacy in our communities. He said those would not be his responsibilities as a Treasurer but based on the kinds of things he can influence, based upon what he knows, those are the things that can be worked on within these relationships. He added that as everyone knows, we need to move from an industrial society to a computer, information-based economy, that we will need to have all hands on deck so that we can really work

together instead of working in opposition to make these things happen. He asked residents to vote for Rod Scott for County Treasurer on March 31.

Adjournment

Sanfelippo announced if there was no further business the meeting was adjourned. The meeting was then adjourned at approximately 7:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association