

# **Highland Park Neighborhood Association**

## **April 2020 Minutes**

**Meeting Date: April 21, 2020**

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo welcomed everyone arriving into the virtually held Highland Park Neighborhood Association April meeting. The meeting was being held virtually using Zoom because of health and safety concerns related to the Covid19 virus. She called the meeting to order and introduced herself, Vice President Jessica Powers and Secretary Judy Jones. She thanked Highland Park resident Jamie Whitehurst for allowing the neighborhood to use his professional Zoom account for the meeting.

Sanfelippo asked if everyone had the opportunity to look over the minutes from the March meeting. She asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to those minutes. Larry Contri moved the March minutes be approved. Mary Helen Crowe seconded the motion. Sanfelippo asked if there was any opposition. Hearing none she stated that the minutes for the March 10<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved.

### **Police Update**

Sanfelippo said she had reached out to Captain Cochran, Davoris Ragland-Pierce and Officer King for updates and issues. She said each of them had reinforced that things in our neighborhood had been pretty quiet overall. She said that Valerie Abbott's assistant Darryl Lee had shared that the rest of the city had seen a bit of an uptick in crime. Sanfelippo reminded all to keep calling in any suspicious activity, anything that seems out of place. She shared the number to call was 205-328-9311.

### **Public Works Update**

Sanfelippo shared the city could continue to do regular pickups for garbage and large trash/brush but that recycling services had been suspended. She said they were not encouraging residents to go out but that anyone who wanted to continue recycling during this time could take them to Birmingham Recycling and Recovery (BRR) at 9 41<sup>st</sup> Street S in Avondale M-F 7am-4pm. Sanfelippo said BRR takes everything the city currently does - to include #1 and #2 plastic, cardboard, newspaper and other types of paper (no glass). She said she understood that Target had also suspended their glass recycling as well. A resident asked if Sanfelippo thought the service would be resumed by the city. Sanfelippo replied yes definitely, adding that in this 'stay at home' environment the Public Works staff had been overwhelmed with the increase of trash being created with so many people at home. Another resident mentioned the pilot of a new recycling method where the city furnishes a large receptacle that is then emptied once a week. Darryl Lee shared the pilot was continuing. He also added that Public Works had also been affected by workers taking family leave because of illness or children being home. He said when all this was over he felt all services would be resumed at the usual levels.

### **Fire Department Update**

Sanfelippo said there was no update from the Fire Department at this time but that we all certainly did wish them well during this challenging time.

### **Peacekeepers/Onoyemi Williams**

Sanfelippo asked if Onyemi Williams was on the call. When there was no answer she shared with the group that Williams had been scheduled for the April meeting to share about the Birmingham organization Peacekeepers.

### **City Council Update/Councilor Valerie Abbott**

Abbott added to the comments earlier about the suspension of city recycling services saying that essentially it was due to garbage overload and personnel issues; that some in Public Works had needed to take family leave and that has left them short handed. She shared that the trucks are sometimes not finishing until 5 or 6 pm. She said that when the trucks get full, they have to make a trip to the city dump which, when there's more trash, it accordingly adds time to their day.

Abbott said one of the things brought up by the mayor at today's meeting was that people are not always providing accurate information to 911 operators when they call about a health emergency. She said that if the Fire Department was sending their emergency medical technicians that it was critically important they be given correct information about the emergency (including any COVID-19 symptoms).

Sanfelippo told Abbott that someone had contacted her this week about the lights in Rhodes Park being out. She said she had reported the issue several times. Abbott said her office would follow up on it, determine what the problem was, whether it was money or manpower. Abbott added that she had put a good bit of her District 3 discretionary money into Parks and Recreation, for them to make repairs as needed.

Sanfelippo asked Abbott if she could get an update on the steps in Rhodes Park that are blocked off with caution tape. She said it appeared that the steps and part of the rail might be damaged. Abbott said her office would look into it.

Sanfelippo referenced the District 3 Town Hall meeting that had been canceled and asked if there were plans to reschedule it. Abbot said it would definitely be rescheduled but they had not discussed dates yet since no one knew how long *this* would go on. Abbott added, that even if they reschedule it there's a fair amount of uncertainty about how many people would actually feel okay about attending.

### **Announcements**

Sanfelippo said it had been brought to her attention an issue that people are posting about on Nextdoor about a man who typically is parked on the east side of Rushton Park and talking to, harassing women walking. She had confirmed that Officer King was aware of

the situation but that it will be difficult for him to do something about it unless he actually witnesses it occurring. She encouraged people to be careful especially if a woman and walking alone, perhaps cross the street or just generally avoid the man. Mary Helen Crowe asked if this was the man who reportedly was in a BMW hatchback and stalks women after he says hello to them. Sanfelippo said yes. Crowe said apparently this had happened a number of times to women leaving Rushton and heading up their short section of Cliff. She said he apparently follows them, parks and reportedly ‘enjoys himself’ while parked. Sanfelippo said she would check those posts on Nextdoor, get those details and pass them along to Officer King. Someone mentioned the man had a basketball and a question was asked about the missing basketball hoop in Rushton. Valerie Abbot said Parks and Recreation had taken it down so that people wouldn’t be tempted regarding those activities right now. Jessica Powers said she had also had a talk with Officer King about the man. She said one way the situation might could be handled was if the women threatened, harassed or stalked by him would come forward and file a police report and swear out a warrant. She said she could understand if the women didn’t want to do that but if someone would be able to then we would have a chance to get him out of our area.

Sanfelippo asked if Jasmine Fells was on the line. She was but was muted and spoke later. Sanfelippo shared that Fells was our new interim Community Resource Representative.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Update/Altamont Park**

Sanfelippo said she wanted to update the group on the Rotary Club’s efforts to improve Redmont’s Altamont Park. She said Rotary member Nathan Marcus had spoken to our March meeting about the work they’d done and their efforts to solicit ideas and concerns from interested residents in the area. Sanfelippo said the group received much negative attention and feedback, even before they had fully developed any ideas. Because of this they decided to step back from the project and let a new group, Friends of Altamont Park, manage any park improvement efforts going forward. Someone brought up the parking issue, that there wasn’t any room for parking. Sanfelippo said that was definitely one of the major issues raised but that the group hadn’t gotten to the point of soliciting or suggesting/developing their ideas and solutions for the issue. Valerie Abbott said it was her impression that the vision for the park was more for the community in that area and that it wasn’t intended to be a ‘destination’.

### **Update/Community Resource Representative - Jasmine Fells**

Jasmine Fells joined the call. She introduced herself as Highland Park’s temporary Community Resource Representative (CRR), saying that she only expected to have the position until it was filled with our new CRR. She said she was working to move ahead the projects that Alexis Barton had started. She said she had the signage project with

Birmingham Color Graphics who had won the bid. She said they recently sent in some information saying they needed an increase in cost for system time of \$100.00 as they needed to recreate scans that were sent to them. She acknowledged that Highland Park was likely frustrated with the process, that from what she understands it's been a long journey. She said the only thing in the way of completing the project now was a neighborhood vote authorizing the cost overage. She said that vote would have to be delayed until an in-person meeting, that the city was discouraging voting in virtual meetings. Sanfelippo said she had understood that a 20% cost over-run should be acceptable without an additional vote. Fells said she had received Sanfelippo's email on that and had sent it to Legal. She understood the issue had something to do with the over-run amount being identified after the bid had been placed, that the language on the bid sheet wouldn't allow the increase or the 20% policy to kick in. Sanfelippo said this indeed had been frustrating and that they'd discuss it further later.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS**

### **Neighborhood Recycling**

Sanfelippo told the group that she and Vice President Powers and Secretary Jones had a conference call last week. She told the group that Jones had volunteered to pick up resident recycles from people who requested it until the city resumed the service. Sanfelippo said she'd just gotten another request for pickup and would forward it to Jones.

**Trash and Brush Pickup** Sanfelippo announced the next Trash and Brush pickup would be Thursday April 30. She reminded the group to make separate piles for furniture and mulchables - and to bag as much as possible.

### **Neighborhood Clean Up Efforts**

Sanfelippo said she wanted to give a shout out to Michael Shattuck and Anne Sunkel, explaining they had done two rounds of clean ups at the 280 overpass near St Vincent's and The Nick. She explained that this was part of the neighborhood's individual clean up efforts being done in lieu of group clean-ups that can't be scheduled right now because of social distancing requirements. Sanfelippo said anyone interested in having their own clean up to do so and send her photos, adding that any and all efforts help.

### **Episcopal Place's Gumbo Gala**

Sanfelippo shared that unfortunately Episcopal Place's annual Gumbo Gala had been canceled. Jamie Whitehurst shared they would plan the next Gala fundraiser for 2021. He said they were going to have a virtual Gala event on May 18, saying that this would be an opportunity for Episcopal Place to support all the businesses/restaurants who have always supported them in this annual fundraiser. He said their website had a list of participating restaurants with links to information on their hours and curbside services. ([www.EpiscopalPlace.org/GumboGala](http://www.EpiscopalPlace.org/GumboGala))

Sanfelippo said Jamie had shared with her that over the past couple of weeks when we'd had all the heavy rain, that Episcopal Place had been flooded. Whitehurst said their first floor had over 4 inches of water. He added that fortunately there was no residential space affected, that it was all common space and offices. He said all the flooring was being ripped up. He said they now have a tent in their driveway for a reception desk. Whitehurst shared that staff really felt fortunate in that all their residents had been extremely kind, gracious and patient - and was able abiding by all their requests for social distancing through this time.

### **Do Dah Day 2020 Update**

Sanfelippo announced that Do Dah Day had been canceled for 2020 and that they were exploring options for a virtual event.

### **Rushton Play Area Committee Update**

Sanfelippo reported an ad hoc committee had been formed to spruce up the play areas in Rushton Park - and that this group was currently gathering/developing options and ideas.

### **501C3 Application Efforts**

Anne Sunkel said she had met with Morris Hiatt on the 501C3 application for Highland Park. She said she has the documents now, that both she and Hiatt had reviewed and approved previous edits and that they were now looking for an attorney who would be willing to do a pro-bono review of the application. She said they would also have to address a method to fundraise/seek donations for the funds needed for the state filing fee.

Sanfelippo told Sunkel she had spoken to Liz Wilson with United Way and that Wilson thought Highland Park might be eligible for some grant money for playground equipment once that 501C3 status was obtained.

### **Graffiti Busters Update**

Sunkel gave a reminder to everyone to continue looking for and reporting graffiti in the neighborhood. She said the Graffiti Busters group still had plenty of supplies and that this was probably a good time for these sorts of efforts.

### **Sidewalk Repair Project Update**

Sanfelippo reported several folks had been gathering data for sidewalk and brick repairs along Highland. She said the effort had gotten a little sidetracked considering repairs on side streets but the decision had now been made to start with Highland Avenue initially. She said she would be reviewing that info and that the next step would be to establish some pricing for the efforts.

### **Maintenance for New Trees**

Sanfelippo said that Ray Davis has created a list of all the new trees recently planted in Highland Park and that she would be adding photos/locations so that volunteers could be recruited to adopt a tree to water during the coming dry season. She said anyone interested in assisting with these efforts to email [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com)

### **United Way/211 Service**

Sanfelippo shared that residents needing services during this time could call United Way at 211. She explained they would be able to refer callers to available resources. She added that anyone interested in donating some time to talk to lonely seniors or shut-in individuals to email [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com) - whether you were the shut-in or the one wanted to volunteer time. Jones added that she thought it a good idea right now to check in on neighbors who live by themselves or might be more isolated than some, to be sure their basic needs are being met. Sanfelippo told Whitehurst to pass this along to his residents also.

### **Miscellaneous Discussion**

Mary Helen Crowe reminded the group of the time when St Vincent's Hospital committed to contribute dollars to Highland Park for playground equipment and that it might be time to approach them again about that commitment. She said her concern was that the commitment was a 'placation' of sorts in exchange for things they wanted to do with their property that the neighborhood wouldn't necessarily be supportive of. Sanfelippo said she would allow the ad hoc committee to do some of their work, put together some ideas and a budget so that she would have something firm to be considered.

Crowe asked about the status of the Arlington hotel/condo development, saying that as she understood it the mayor was considering removing the legal restrictions and allowing the project to move forward as proposed to support economic development in the community. Sanfelippo said everything was really on hold right now, that PEP meetings had been suspended. She conceded that the developer's efforts seemed to be aimed toward persuading the mayor and going around PEP. Crowe said that Philip Foster was concerned about those efforts and was encouraging people to meet with the mayor and express their support for keeping the current legal height restrictions in place. Crowe said the historic nature of this neighborhood was one reason they moved to this area. She said they were going to be pretty irked if this was going to be the mayor's response every time some developer came in with some kind of project like this. Valerie Abbott told the group that the mayor definitely has the power to have his legal department vacate the settlement. She said we definitely need to make sure that the mayor hears from neighborhood residents, that Silverstein was likely recruiting support from people in condominiums because they were already obviously predisposed to be supportive of those type developments. A resident asked Abbott if she would address this with the Redmont neighborhood since they were even more affected and opposed to the project.

Abbott said she would but that we needed to also realize that the current president and the immediate past president of Redmont were supportive of the project. Jones added that their neighborhood did vote it down as Highland Park did. Abbott concurred saying that Redmont voted it down 2 to 1. Darryl Lee spoke up saying they had encouraged people to meet with the mayor, individually and in groups, and that some had done that which was good. He said he believed Mr Silverstein was putting a petition together, soliciting signatures from people saying they wanted the development to go ahead. He said it might be a good idea for Highland Park and Redmont to start a petition of those opposed to the development. He said the petition he saw had about 100 signatures on it stating they were in favor of the development. He said they had been working hard to get the mayor to realize the impact to the community and that a petition would help them make that case. Sanfelippo said she would develop language for the petition and run it by Powers and Jones. Marian Wilson observed that with the social distancing right now it would be hard to carry around a petition and get signers, but that a few years ago she had put a petition/table with a poster in front of her house and it received some signers, that some residents might want to do that.

### **Shout Out to Mark Wilson!**

Sanfelippo pointed out that Marian Wilson's husband, Mark, works with the Jefferson County Health Department and had been working like crazy with everything going on - and that he had the community's gratitude for what he was doing to keep up healthy, safe and updated.

### **Other Items**

Sanfelippo reminded the group to be supportive of Rojo and their curbside service. She said Eats is temporarily closed but they hope to be able to reopen.

A resident asked about the huge pile of mulch in Rushton Park saying that it had been there for about a month. Sanfelippo said she wasn't sure if it was related to the garden or playground - but that she would look into it.

Bob McKenna said hello to all. He offered use of the Clubhouse or even Unity of Birmingham if more social distancing was needed - to invite Mayor Woodfin to meet with the neighborhood and hear our lack of support for the 'twin towers'.

Sanfelippo thanked everyone for attending the virtual meeting. She adjourned the meeting at 7:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association