

# **Highland Park Neighborhood Association**

## **May 2020 Minutes**

**Meeting Date: May 12, 2020 (via Zoom)**

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo welcomed everyone arriving into the virtually held Highland Park Neighborhood Association May 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 and Secretary Judy Jones, saying that Vice President Jessica Powers might join in.

Sanfelippo asked if everyone had the opportunity to look over the minutes from the April meeting. She asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to those minutes. Larry Contri moved the April 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 April 21st neighborhood meeting were approved.

### **Highland Park Garden Update/Tori McDonald**

Sanfelippo said Tori McDonald was on the line, that Tori had been the mastermind behind the Highland Park Garden in Rushton Park. Sanfelippo said she thought the Garden had its official opening and ribbon cutting the beginning of March. McDonald concurred adding it was right before all 'this' hit ('this' as in the pandemic and stay at home orders). Sanfelippo said she had gotten some calls/texts from residents asking why activities at the garden hadn't started up and had explained to them that the city had asked us to hold off on all of that while there was a 'stay at home' order in place.

McDonald said she didn't know how many folks present had been to the previous meetings when she had presented so she wanted to just provide a general recap of the project. She said the Highland Park Community Garden was in Rushton Park right across the street from Rojo, that it was a joint project of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association, Birmingham Parks and Recreation Board and Independent Presbyterian Church. She said it was started by neighbors and run by neighbors and that there was a Garden Committee made up entirely of Highland Park residents that arbitrates and oversees the project. McDonald said they had registration open in November for 19 open garden beds. She said they had 92 people sign up and did the ribbon cutting and a lottery the beginning of March. She said all of this was about a week before everything 'hit the fan', that they had been slated to have orientation and open the garden on March 16 - but that was about when everyone started canceling everything and as a result, they decided to postpone the orientation. They discussed everything with the Parks Board who wanted them to hold off on the opening at least until the shelter in place ordinance

expired April 30. McDonald said that had really wanted people there in April but that it just hadn't been feasible. She said progress had been made, that the soil had been mixed with compost, that the drip irrigation has been installed and that Birmingham Water Works has gotten the water turned on. McDonald said they opened to the gardeners on May 1<sup>st</sup> and to date, there was only one bed that had not been planted - and that those gardeners planned to plant it this weekend. She said they were in full swing and ready to go for the summer and encouraged everyone to go check it out. She added they were observing social distancing guidelines, that if you were in the garden they had asked people to wear face coverings and stay 6 feet from each other. She shared that the shed with the community tools will be closed to gardeners until June 1.

McDonald shared they had 20 beds total, that one of the beds was a large community bed managed by herself with assistance from some other people who didn't get plots. She said they were probably going to donate whatever comes out of that bed, asking folks to pass along names of organizations that might be appropriate. McDonald said they were also trying to keep people engaged through periodic events during the growing season. She said they have planned a lesson on compost and soil nutrients that would be open to gardeners with plots but also the public in general. She expects this to be in June, most likely via ZOOM - and will let folks know the date/time. She said they were also considering a 'cooking demonstration', perhaps sometime in July. McDonald said there were a ton of tomatoes and peppers planted and that there would likely be a lot of produce during July and August - so she thought they would have a salsa demonstration. She said more information on that to follow.

McDonald said if residents hadn't done so already, they could follow the garden on Facebook at Highland Park Community Garden, on Instagram at HighlandParkGarden - and now a web site, [www.HPCGarden.org](http://www.HPCGarden.org).

Mary Helen Crowe said she thought it might be a good idea to check with Episcopal Place to see if they might be a good recipient for some of the produce from the community bed. Jamie Whitehurst was in favor of the idea 😊

Sanfelippo thanked McDonald for all her efforts and leadership.

## **COMMITTEE/PROJECT UPDATES**

### **Rushton Play Area/Parks/Sidewalks Update**

Sanfelippo shared that a subcommittee formed to develop ideas to update the playground areas in Rushton Park had been in park brainstorming. Sanfelippo shared that the mystery of the huge mulch pile had been solved, they'd learned that

Independent Presbyterian Church had called Parks and Recreation about the condition of the playground areas, that the ground was bare and they didn't feel comfortable taking the kids into the areas. They requested mulch, the city complied but then when the Covid virus started affecting city activities they didn't get the opportunity to put it into the play areas. Sanfelippo reported they also took a look at the basketball court, that there is a natural spring that comes out near it resulting in perpetually soggy ground. She said they discussed possibly moving the court to slightly higher ground.

Sanfelippo reported that Adam Ward had been digging into the city budget and found that in the capital improvements section there is \$50,000 in funds for a garden in the park. Sanfelippo said she checked with McDonald on whether she was aware of the city setting aside money for the garden, and she was not. Sanfelippo said they have asked Darryl Lee in Councilor Abbott's office to check into this, that they were trying to determine whether this money was extra and we could use it for something, perhaps playground improvements. Sanfelippo shared that we would need more information on the process to request funds for capital improvement projects. She reported Darryl Lee telling her that Councilor Abbott's discretionary funds will be distributed into our accounts around July 1<sup>st</sup> once the budget is approved, that this will mean an additional \$6000 in our funds.

Sanfelippo reported that Adam Ward had also been working on the neighborhood sidewalk project, saying the project had gotten a little stalled with side streets - but they had now regrouped with an initial focus on only Highland Avenue and an intent to address side streets at a later date. She said Ward did a very detailed list of the linear footage marking where bricks are missing and concrete needs repair. Sanfelippo said a company previously used by the city was going to review the information/locations and give us a ballpark estimate on repairs. She said basically they planned to start with the sidewalks around Caldwell and move eastward eventually to Rushton and that this project is moving along.

Sanfelippo asked for questions. Harvey said he had a concern about sidewalks and was very interested in working with someone on that effort. Sanfelippo said she would connect him with Adam Ward who was a neighbor who had volunteered to work on this effort.

Mary Helen Crowe asked if there was any new information about the steps blocked off in Rhodes Park. Sanfelippo said they had not been able to get an answer from Public Works on this and she thought Valerie Abbott was going to assist us in getting an update on the steps and the lights in the park. She said she had been cutting the city a little slack on their responses because of the craziness created by the virus. She reminded residents that if they see where lights are out to let her know.

### **Neighborhood Recycling**

Phillip Foster asked whether we had heard anything about when the city might start up recycling again. Sanfelippo said there was no word on this yet.

### **Neighborhood Clean Up Efforts**

Sanfelippo shared that a few people did individual clean-ups in April, saying that efforts like these were greatly appreciated since group cleanups were not practical right now with the social distancing guidelines in place.

### **Beautification Committee Update**

Ray Davis reported there was still a water leak on the 2800 block of Highland Avenue. He confirmed that leak was in the middle of the street, that it looked like someone had drilled holes, maybe Spire. He said he thought there was another issue near Rushton Park where Cliff Road intersects Highland. Mary Helen Crowe said she had reported that to the BWWB a few weeks ago, that she didn't know if that did any good. Sanfelippo said yes it did, to definitely report those sorts of thing. Sanfelippo told Davis there was also a divot in the street at 31<sup>st</sup> and Highland that was starting to form a hole, to add that one to the list also.

Davis said the Beautification Committee over the next month or so will be working up a list of trees to purchase and where to place them. He said they were also working on an initiative to get the city to cut large dead limbs from trees, that several had fallen on vehicles and caused some damage. They would be working on a list of these to send to the city. Davis said if anyone knew of any locations of dangerous trees/limbs to let him know. Sanfelippo said people could email those locations with an address (a photo would also be helpful) and she would forward those on to Davis. [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com)

Davis also said there's an ongoing effort to pick up limbs and sticks, that they made piles for the city to pick up - explaining there were piles at Rushton, Rhodes and Caldwell Parks and one at the 2600 block of Highland, right down from EATS. He encouraged everyone if they were just out walking about and ran across limbs, to just grab them and drop them into one of the piles, adding that from what he's seen Public Works does pick the piles up from time to time, even sometimes between regular pick up dates.

Sanfelippo said they were also working with the map of the new trees planted this year, with the location for each so they could sign up volunteers to water them during the dry season. She said anyone interested in volunteering for a tree to please email [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com).

### **Arlington Development Update**

Larry Contri asked how many people had signed the petition relative to the Arlington development project. Sanfelippo said we currently have over 500 signers. Sanfelippo reminded everyone to sign and share the petition opposing the city dissolving the legal covenants for the Arlington project. She said someone had contacted her saying they really didn't oppose the project. Sanfelippo told them that we were not necessarily opposed to the development group building something on those pieces of property but to ask the mayor and city council to 'not' lift the height restrictive covenants was the major point of the petition, especially after the affected neighborhoods were to strongly opposed to the project. She addressed Contri's question about the number of petition signers, saying there were currently 565 -which she thought was good since she had heard the developer's petition might have only 100 signers. Contri asked if that was just Highland Park or if it included Redmont. Sanfelippo said there had been no effort made to limit where signatures came from - and that she would need to dig in and review the list of signers. She said the issue was actually bigger than just the neighborhood anyway since it goes to the city and how seriously they take votes by the neighborhoods, how well they hear the voices of the neighbors who care enough to come out and participate in the process.

Mary Helen Crowe asked if we would send the link to the petition with the minutes, Sanfelippo replied we would.

The link: <https://www.change.org/p/mayor-randall-l-woodfin-tell-mayor-woodfin-and-city-council-to-oppose-lifting-covenants-for-proposed-development>

### **Dogs Off Leash and Social Distancing Issues in Rhodes Park**

Contri asked if Officer Charlie King was still our beat officer during the day. When Sanfelippo replied 'yes', he asked if other residents had seen him lately. Several replied they had within the past several days. Contri said the reason he had asked what that Rhodes Park was more and more becoming a free-running dog park, that the yesterday he stopped and there 14 people in the park with dogs off leash - but that none of the people had on masks. He said that gives him grave concern especially with the number of people out walking now. He mentioned the lights were out in Rhodes Park also. Sanfelippo said she would mention that to Officer King and ask that he keep an eye on the situation. Sanfelippo said there was an ordinance in place and that people needing to be complying with that. She said she had seen a post on NextDoor questing an event at the Clubhouse on Highland. Sanfelippo said someone had confirmed that there was a wedding with the bride, groom and guests within the stated limit for of events - but that this individual had likely seen the guests outside and questioned it whether than was a 'larger than allowed' event being held there.



### **Neighborhood Signs Project Update**

Sanfelippo said she wanted to share a bit of fun information, saying that today she had picked up our signs! These were the neighborhoods signs for meetings, FIDO projects, etc - and flyers/door hangers for bad parking, valuables in cars, bagging leaves, trash receptacles, etc. Sanfelippo said the neighborhood had started the process of ordering the signs/flyers last July. She said the city process felt needlessly lengthy but that was further complicated by a cost over-run of \$100 for an unexpected (but reasonable) set up expense. Sanfelippo said we would have to vote on that additional expense at our next in-person meeting.

### **Miscellaneous Questions/Announcements**

Sanfelippo announced that the next Trash and Brush pickup day was Thursday May 21.

Ray Davis asked if there was an update on the 501c3 effort. Sanfelippo said Jessica Powers' husband was an attorney and had offered to review the application papers so the effort had not come to fruition but was still moving along.

Jamie Whitehurst shared a general head's up saying for the next 3 days Episcopal Place's fire emergency system would be being tested by the city. He told residents if they were walking by and heard alarms, to not be 'alarmed', it was just going to be happening at irregular intervals over the next 3 days.

Contri asked if we should assume that work on the Sisters Houses has gone dormant again, since they've done a little work and appeased everyone. Sanfelippo said she goes by there regularly to view what is happening, what's been accomplished and that things definitely seemed to be on hold now. She explained she has dialed back the level of follow-up on some issues because she realizes, right now, everything is reasonably 'Covid, Covid, Covid'. She said she knows it remains a frustrating issue for the neighborhood - and herself. She said he did get a roof on and has some windows framed out but beyond that, she had also observed it was stalled.

Sanfelippo shared they had received a report of something sketchy going on near the old Planned Parenthood building and the storage unit across the street, that there was a car kind of hanging around, that pedestrians walking by had observed some suspicious behavior. She said our Police contacts had been alerted to keep an eye out. Sanfelippo said this was just another reminder that if people see anything out of the ordinary or suspicious, to report it. She reminded the group that these 'reports' to the police could be made anonymously. She said residents could also email the neighborhood if the issue was not urgent at [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com)

Ray Davis thanked Sanfelippo for all her great work as President.

Sanfelippo said she appreciated everyone who joined the meeting tonight, encouraging all to “keep up the great work neighbors, we appreciate y’all!” And - to “let us know if we can do anything for you” And to “stay safe out there”

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association