

# **Highland Park Neighborhood Association**

## **June 2020 Minutes**

**Meeting Date: June 9, 2020**

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo welcomed everyone arriving into the virtually held Highland Park Neighborhood Association June meeting. The meeting was being held virtually using Zoom because of ongoing 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 was unable to attend tonight. Sanfelippo thanked Highland Park resident Jamie Whitehurst for use of his Zoom account to hold this neighborhood meeting.

Sanfelippo asked if everyone had the opportunity to look over the minutes from the May 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 May 12<sup>th</sup> neighborhood meeting were approved.

### **Roll Call**

Sanfelippo verbally went through the names of attendees to confirm attendees (additional names were added later as individuals joined the meeting).

### **City Department Updates**

Sanfelippo said it had been quiet with respect to crimes being reported in the neighborhood. She reminded the group to call in any suspicious activity. She asked the group if anyone had any specific crime-related questions or issues. Councilor Valerie Abbott said that crime was really down in the city of Birmingham right now. She added that murders were only down 2 from this time last year so not really down, but that other crimes were down anywhere from 25-35%. She said she felt the pandemic had a lot to do with these improved statistics.

Sanfelippo said we did not have anyone on the call from Public Works or the Fire Department. She told the group that anyone having any issues could always email [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com) and she would pass along the question or information to the proper department.

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

Councilor Abbott reported that they did get lights ordered for Rhodes Park, that they were on order but had not come in yet. She said there was still some question about whether the lights would be installed by Alabama Power or Public Works. She expressed regret that this had taken as long as it had. Abbott went on to say the

public hearing to discuss the designation of the Avondale Entertainment District for 'open containers' has been scheduled for June 23.

Larry Contri shared that the other night he had noted there were only 2 operable lights in Caldwell Park. Mary Helen Crowe added that one of the working lights might have even been on the theatre property. She said it was very dark on the end of Caldwell nearest where John Carroll School used to be. She further shared that the end of Rushton Park near IPC seemed to be very dark as well. A resident shared that he thought that issue in Rushton was because there were no longer lights on that end. Sanfelippo asked Abbott what the best route was to get these light issues addressed. Abbott said she should continue to funnel these issues through Darryl Lee. She said he really knows how to ring people's bells and was successful finally on Rhodes Park, that she would ask him to do the same for Caldwell and Rushton. She said the Park Board was supposed to be getting all of the parks transitioned to being maintained by Alabama Power Company. She said she was hopeful that once Alabama Power takes over park lighting that we will not have these problems any longer.

Anne Sunkel asked if Sanfelippo had used the Alabama Power online portal to report the park outages. Sanfelippo responded she usually calls them because getting a specific address for a park is sometimes a challenge. Abbott added that she thinks Darryl Lee usually starts with the Park Board because they are ultimately responsible for keeping the lights on.

Sanfelippo said she had spoken with Darryl Lee that day on his efforts to find out about the \$50,000 line item in an old budget that was for 'Highland Park Garden Project', adding that we wanted to figure out what that had been for. She said Lee was still working on getting an answer about that.

Abbott said on today's council meeting agenda they voted to transfer all the remaining discretionary funds into each neighborhood association's account. She said it wouldn't represent a lot of money but she knew it would help with some neighborhood projects.

Abbott said in Budget and Finance they voted on enhanced software and equipment for code enforcement. She said this means when a zoning or housing inspector goes out to inspect a property, they will actually have something in hand that will show them which permits have been applied for and granted, what other departments are doing in relationship to this property because there are several different enforcement arms in the different departments. She said this will be wonderful for code enforcement in Birmingham.

Sanfelippo asked if the city has a draft budget yet. Abbott said the budget should have been received from the Mayor in May, they had been told to expect it in August and were now hearing October. She added that because of the pandemic that tax revenues had dropped significantly. She said they were expecting the city to be 73 million dollars short next year if current projections are accurate. Abbott said next year was expected to be a really difficult year. She said the mayor had warned employees, saying he was going to do everything he could do to avoid layoffs and salary reductions. She said the city not having money was very different from the federal government, that the city just could not go print more money. She said if the money doesn't come in the city can't spend it, adding that city revenue had dropped like a rock in April. She said anything funded by bonds would not be affected - because the city is required to use those monies for exactly the purpose of the bond issue. She said operating funds for the City of Birmingham are different, that if money isn't there, projects/services fall by the wayside.

Sanfelippo asked 1) to confirm the mask ordinance had been extended to July 3 and 2) when the curfew order would expire. Abbott said the curfew expired the previous night at midnight and was over. She said the mask ordinance had indeed been extended until July 3. She emphasized the necessity of compliance with the ordinance because regardless of what people were saying about the need for masks, that people were still getting sick and dying. Sanfelippo asked if everyone was serious about wearing masks at city hall. Abbott replied the Council was solidly behind the ordinance since most every member now knew someone who had died from the virus.

Larry Contri asked Abbott if the ordinance applied to an event, for example at the Highland House, that you would be expected to wear a mask? Abbott replied that with the exception of family members or people you live with, you were not supposed to get within six feet of other people without a mask on. Contri asked whether making that happen was the responsibility of the event planner or the responsibility of the owner. Abbott said she thought the person who owned/operated the facility should be on top of it, making sure people are complying on their property.

Sanfelippo shared that Jasmine Fells, our Community Resource Officer, had three meetings tonight so couldn't join us. She said she has been receiving more inquiries on the Sisters Houses so had asked Fells for her help in perhaps talking to the inspectors and getting updates for the neighborhood. Sanfelippo said she had learned the house had been inspected May 26 and the inspector recorded 'slow progress'. She said for those of us in the neighborhood who watch for progress, it had been obvious there had been little done since the back was framed and the windows went in. Sanfelippo encouraged residents to continue applying pressure

by reporting abandoned/problem properties to 311. She shared that Nicole King working with some of the landlords on these situations. Sanfelippo said she knew the overwhelming consensus was that we wanted to see the properties preserved but that it was all moving too slowly.

Mary Helen Crowe highlighted a liability issue with the properties saying the situation reminded her of Parliament House, owned by UAB, that had been abandoned and people were getting in it and at some point there was a murder, the building got set on fire, that if something like that happened, other properties could catch fire. Sanfelippo agreed and said that was a very valid concern and said that when she reaches out to Fells next she will reiterate that as well. She added there had been a recent report of possible drug related activity near there, in the vicinity of the houses and Public Storage. Sanfelippo encouraged people to report their concerns to 311, that she felt there could be strength in numbers on this issue. She said once the courts get caught up post-virus she will touch base and see when the next related hearing is scheduled. She said she would try to attend, not to 'speak' per se, because she wasn't part of the case, but that she felt it a benefit to sit in the courtroom and actually hear what the judge felt and was actually saying. She said the judge had, in the past, essentially encouraged the owner to sell the properties if he was not going to proceed on improving them.

## **Old Business**

**Do Dah Day Donation Update.** Sanfelippo shared that the city had questioned Highland Park's approved \$2500 donation to Do Dah Day since the event had been canceled. She said she had discussed with both the neighborhood officers and the spending committee and the consensus had been to still go ahead and give that money to the Humane Society and Animal Control through Do Dah Day. Sanfelippo said everyone was certain these organizations still needed these funds.

**Arlington Development Petition.** Sanfelippo said leadership had been contemplating when to wrap up the petition process opposing the proposed development on Arlington. She reported the petition had 624 signers, that this included 200+ from Birmingham, and the rest of the supporters were spread out across the country. She said what was interesting to her was that others were obviously moved by the situation and wanted to support the petition. She said when she sent the petition results that she would share this breakdown with the city.

Mary Helen Crowe asked Phillip Foster if he had heard anything else on the development lately. Foster replied there had been no activity as of late, that he suspected the developers were working on other projects. He said realistically, with

the covenants in place, there's nothing the developer can do that he'd want to do within those limitations with that property. He said he hasn't heard anything from the Mayor's office with respect to whether they were still being lobbied to remove the covenants. Councilwoman Abbot confirmed she hadn't heard anything on the project either, that the mayor's office has been entirely silent on the project. She added the Mayor knew how she, Valerie Abbott, felt about the project, that she felt the city didn't need to change anything, that they should just leave the agreement in place the way it is.

Anne Sunkel said she thought that Redmont did a petition also, but we confirmed some residents shared HP's with Redmont residents.

**Altamont Park Update.** Mary Helen Crowe asked if anyone knew what was going on with the Altamont park project. Councilwoman Abbott replied that the Rotary Club had wanted to renovate the park instead of 'forgotten' like the city left it - but had dropped the project because of the negative reaction from nearby residents. She said the park could just go back to its previous overgrown condition because that is apparently what the neighborhood wanted.

### **Miscellaneous Questions/Announcements**

**Recycling Update.** Sanfelippo reported that city recycling was still suspended but that residents could take their recycling to Birmingham Recycling and Recovery on 41<sup>st</sup> Street in Avondale. She asked Jones for some insight on how things worked at that facility. Jones shared that in her experience at the facility they just separate paper from 'all else', they have large blue cannisters for newspapers and non-confidential paper- and all else, the plastic, cardboard boxes into large metal bins right there. She said they appear to be having trouble with people putting glass and materials that aren't recyclable in the bins because there are signs posted explaining what materials shouldn't be included. Jones said she has been several times over the past few months, only one time were the bins full and didn't seem to be being emptied, that all the rest of the times it'd been orderly and easy to understand what to do. Sanfelippo reminded everyone of materials that can be recycled in Birmingham include #1 and #2 plastics (the number is in a small triangle on the container's bottom), aluminum and steel and tin cans and paper/cardboard (without food residue on it). She said a good rule of thumb is - when in doubt, throw it out. She thanked Jones for being willing to help residents over the past few months who wanted to recycle but who were unable to get to the recycle center.

A resident asked whether it might help to separate the materials when recycling, that perhaps that would help people to realize what materials weren't recyclable. Jones replied that she felt they didn't seem to have the space for that at this facility,

that much of their space seemed to be devoted to large trucks that would arrive and just dump large amounts of unseparated materials which would then go through the equipment and/or hand separating process. Abbott concurred there was a huge problem with people including trash in the recycles, that for example, when cardboard had been contaminated with food waste, it just goes to the dump. Sanfelippo said she would follow up with Leigh Schaffer who lives in Highland Park and works for the Recycling Center on a question about wet paper, whether it was still recyclable. Abbott said the Recycling Center actually charges the City for the percentage of trash/garbage that comes in with the recycles - so it is hurtful to the city (and taxpayers) because the recycling service is being paid for by the City and the City pays more for the garbage that is included.

Sanfelippo asked Abbott about the city's Recycle pilot program (happening in some areas of Forest Park and Crestwood), how long will it last, how long it would take to analyze the results. Councilwoman Abbott replied that the Corona virus pandemic had just thrown a wrench into everything and that so much about city services is off. She said she thought the pilot might have been in progress for about a week when the virus concerns took control. She said recycles were still being picked up in the pilot area but that she didn't know when they'd actually be able to think about the results, whether it had been a success or not, and that now there are questions about where the money will come from for next phase so that's a concern. She said they thought the pandemic had actually affected the results of the pilot as in with so many people home, the quantity of recycled material had gone up, that people felt they needed more containers - but that whether that would be a valid concern in normal times was unknown. Hopefully everyone goes back to work and the amount of garbage and recycles returns to normal that we will have a better sense of the pilot results.

**Neighborhood Sign/Flyer Update.** Sanfelippo happily reported that the neighborhood had finally received the previously approved and ordered flyers/door hangers that support, for example, the ordinance that forbids blowing yard debris into the street. She said a few weeks ago she looked out her window and noticed a landscaping firm doing exactly that on her street and thought this might be a good opportunity to test a congenial approach. She approached them, masked up of course, and explained the ordinance from the perspective of 'she was sure they'd want to know...' and shared neighborhood concerns about clogged drains. She said they were so very nice about it, which she said, admittedly is not always the case, so this was a pleasant surprise. Sanfelippo said as we approach leaf season this will become more of an issue. She said we had printed reminders for people leaving valuables in cars and for illegally parked cars. She said anyone who was wanted some of the cards/door hangers, to let her know via an email to [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com) ). She made one request of the group

and that was to avoid penning any snarky comments on the cards since the Neighborhood Association was identified in the content as the printer of the cards. She said the goal was to be more informational rather than reprimanding.

A resident asked about the material the notices were printed on, Sanfelippo replied these were quarter page card stock. She said the front of the card was the reminder, the back explained the connection of the neighborhood association to the note.

**US Census Reminder.** Sanfelippo reminded residents that if they hadn't already to do the census to do it. She said it is easy to do and literally means more money for our communities (city and state). She said go to [2020Census.gov](http://2020Census.gov), it takes 5 minutes and you'll feel like an outstanding citizen.

**Trash and Brush Schedule.** Sanfelippo announced the city had published 3 months of the Trash and Brush pick up schedule for the city. Councilwoman Abbott said they had been trying to get Public Works to do this. She said Phase II of this effort to improve communication will include information on when the street sweepers are scheduled to visit specific neighborhoods. She said this would be valuable to know because it'd give people an opportunity to move their cars on the day the sweepers were scheduled.

Sanfelippo shared that pickups for the next three months would be this Thursday, June 11, July 2, July 23 and August 13. She reminded residents to make separate piles for mulchable materials (versus household debris/discards) and to keep piles away from power poles/lines and trees above.

**Mosquito Spraying.** Sanfelippo said she had not heard that truck coming around but that we were getting into the time where it would be happening across the city. She shared that anyone could opt of the spraying by calling 205-254-6413 and furnishing your address. Mary Helen Crowe communicated having called the number and not getting anyone to answer. Sanfelippo told the group if this happens to let her know and she'd forward the information to the Director of Public Works. Sanfelippo also reported having notified Tori McDonald and the Garden Committee of the need to coordinate 'no spraying' around the Rushton Park or the garden.

A resident asked a question about Trash/Brush pickup, as she assumed that the intent was that people were to put brush/debris for pickup in front of their own houses. Sanfelippo replied 'yes'. The resident asked what to do if someone encounters a situation where someone puts stuff out, not in front of their house but perhaps across the street, maybe in front of a house that was quasi-abandoned and whether there was any suggested recourse on that when it's routinely done and just makes an ongoing mess. She said she had tried to approach the resident/owner and

those interactions had not been successful. Sanfelippo replied yes, that the city was cracking down on what they call illegal dumping. She asked the resident to send her an email with the address and that she would report it to Public Works ([HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com)). Jones said it'd be good to send a photo with the email if possible.

Anne Sunkel shared she was on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> near Episcopal Place - and that because of a lack of good areas to leave piles on her street that neighbors work together to leave stuff for pickup in one designated spot on the corner near the stop sign and her house, that this makes it easy for the city to pick up as well.

**Beautification Committee Update.** Sanfelippo reported we still needed volunteers to water our newly planted trees during the dry season. Marian Wilson, Christine Wilson and Judy Jones spoke up and asked that their names be added to the list.

Sanfelippo reported they were still looking at options to upgrade the playground areas at Rushton Park, saying that they had recently added mulch to the play areas. She acknowledged a chronic problem with dogs being off leash in the play areas. She said she hoped to be able to present some ideas and recommendations at the meeting next month.

**501C3 Application Update.** Sanfelippo reported that Anne Sunkel and Morris Hiatt had been coordinating the effort to complete and submit a 501C3 application for the neighborhood. Sanfelippo said attorney and resident Marc Solomon had been reviewing the documents prepared thus far. Sanfelippo shared the neighborhood wanted to file for non-profit status to make it easier to raise funds for projects that affected/enhanced the neighborhood. She also asked anyone interested in serving on that board to let her know.

**Episcopal Place Food Truck Event.** Sanfelippo announced that Episcopal Place would be holding their second Food Truck event on June 26, 11 am to 1 pm. This event is open to anyone, not just Episcopal Place residents and will feature Italian food offered by Rucelli's Food Truck. Sanfelippo said this was a great opportunity to enjoy good food in a socially distanced outside setting, support local businesses and get to know your neighbors during this time.

**Unity Church Food Market/Bob McKenna.** Sanfelippo introduced Highland Park resident Bob McKenna and asked him for an update on Unity Church's upcoming Food Market. McKenna said he had been volunteering over at Unity. He said for anyone who didn't know about Unity, that is was a very out-there cosmic liberal church located near the Sisters Houses. He said a church priority was activities that reached out to and included the neighborhood. He said one idea that had come from



the young members of the church was a Farmer's Market with organic local farmers, to offer vegetables and flowers on Saturday afternoons from 4-7 pm through the rest of the summer and see how that goes. He said the Unity Board was excited about the idea and approved it - and wanted to see if the neighborhood might be on board with it. He said ideally during this Covid virus time (same as with the Pepper Place market), people would be able to place an order online/in advance and just come by and pick up the box which would be packed and ready. He said post-Covid, they hoped to have the farmers at a small walk-up market in the Unity parking lot. He said their vision for post-Covid time was more a more vibrant community interested in healthy foodstuffs grown in and around our city. Jones asked when Unity planned to start the market. McKenna replied if they received a greenlight from the neighborhood, because the farmers were already present at Pepper Place and Irondale on Saturdays, they felt like they could start as soon as Saturday July 4. A question was asked about where someone would actually drive through to pick food up. McKenna explained that the parking lot at Unity was fairly sizeable, that it had 66 places and borders on a back alley. McKenna said the city requirement for a market are that you be associated with a church or a school and that you have a parking lot and that there is a non-profit that is overseeing the market. Mary Helen Crowe said she hoped their payment mechanism was more robust than the one used by Pepper Place, that it fails fairly often. McKenna said yes, that was what he had heard from the farmers and they would definitely listen to the farmers on what they feel like would work best.

Sanfelippo said the neighborhood would definitely promote the effort, even perhaps by highlighting a different farmer every so often. She asked where people could go to learn more about the market. McKenna said he expected there would be information on Unity's web page and that perhaps the neighborhood could help with a direct share about it to residents.

McKenna said Unity wanted to do something to bring people together, perhaps entice people to get out of their 'carbon machines' and walk to a place to visit with good people and neighbors.

Mary Helen Crowe shared there was already an alternative market to Pepper Place at Automatic Seafood on Saturdays. McKenna said he was aware of this and in fact, they had contacted some of these farmers to suggest they participate later Saturday afternoons at Highland Park. Larry Contri pointed out farmers are often charged high fees by markets to exhibit sell their wares. He went on to say that that people might not realize these profits were often what these farmers would literally live off of for a year. He told McKenna the market set up at Pepper Place right now was a nightmare. He asked if Unity had considered advertising on Highland Park's website and actually selling from there. McKenna said they were continuing to review and

consult with the farmers on ideas for a what would work for this market and a payment/delivery system. Re farmer fees, McKenna said the Church had no interest in making a profit on this endeavor, they just wanted to be supportive of organic farming and the community. He said they planned to charge the farmers 10% of their sales, not to exceed \$40. McKenna said they would use the extra money to offset the expenses related to cleaning up afterwards. He said they were figuring things out and expected to continue to refine how it all worked as they went along.

Sanfelippo said she thought this a wonderful idea. Jones asked McKenna what Unity needed, what would be helpful to Unity, to show that the neighborhood supports the Market. McKenna said that when they go to the city, it would be helpful to have something to show them that would confirm the neighborhood's support. He added they wouldn't want to move forward without the neighborhood's support anyway. Mary Helen Crowe moved that Highland Park Neighborhood support Unity Church's Farmers Market, Phillip Foster seconded. After some discussion about how to record the vote the group decided to use the chat feature of Zoom and record their votes. Sanfelippo saved the 'chat' for a record. There were 16 votes to approve and no nay votes. The motion passed.

A suggestion was made that the Market opening be moved from the July 4 holiday until July 11. McKenna made a note and said he thought that was a good idea. Someone asked if a decision had been made yet on a payment mechanism, McKenna replied no and explained it would likely involve Venmo and that they were allowing the 5 young innovative farmers to take the lead on developing something that would work for them.

Sanfelippo thanked McKenna for sharing this information with the neighborhood. She asked for any more announcements or questions. Mary Helen Crowe spoke about some large tree pieces/parts above the Golf Course near the steps between Highland Ave and Highland Dr and expressed her hope that the trucks would pick these up on Thursday. Councilwoman Abbott suggested that if there were downed trees to not rely on Public Works seeing them, to report them to 311 with a specific location.

Sanfelippo thanked everyone for attending the meeting tonight. She adjourned the meeting at 7:18 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association