

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

July 2020 Minutes

Meeting Date: July 14, 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 she wasn't sure whether Vice President Jessica Powers would be able to attend tonight. Sanfelippo thanked Highland Park resident Jamie Whitehurst for use of his Zoom account to hold our neighborhood meetings over the past few months. She noted attendance for these meetings had been very good. Sanfelippo provided a rough preview of the agenda for the meeting tonight.

Sanfelippo asked if everyone had the opportunity to look over the minutes from the June meeting. She asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to those minutes. Carla Youngblood moved the June minutes be approved. Mark Ritter seconded the motion. Sanfelippo asked the group to vote via Zoom chat. The motion passed and the minutes for the June 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).

Neighborhood Signage Update

Sanfelippo updated the group on the neighborhood signs and leaflets that had been approved, ordered and now received. She shared the printer incurred some unexpected set up activities for the project and that for formality's sake we needed to approve an additional \$100 above the amount originally approved by the neighborhood some months ago. Anne Sunkel moved the neighborhood approve the additional \$100 for payment for payment to the printer; Carla Youngblood seconded. Residents voted via Zoom's 'chat function'. The motion passed. Jones asked whether we shouldn't approve extra dollars on expenditures in case this happens again. Sanfelippo said she had understood that payment overages of up to 20% would be automatically honored by the city. Jasmine Fells explained saying that specificity was key, that this overage was due to a fee for work that had not been specifically included in the original project description/quote.

Southtown Redevelopment Update/Carole Clarke

Sanfelippo introduced Carol Clarke, General Manager of Southside Development Company LLC sharing that Clarke was working on the Southtown redevelopment

project. Sanfelippo said that Clarke had invited Cory Stallworth to join us as well and asked him to introduce himself. Stallworth replied that he was Vice President of Real Estate Development with the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District. Stallworth thanked everyone for inviting him to the meeting. He told the group that Southtown was about to undergo a major redevelopment into a mixed-use community (that will include affordable housing, commercial/retail space and hospitality space) by the Housing Authority along with their development partner, Southside Development. He said they had been working on this project for the last two years, working through a lot of the administration and city/HUD approvals. He said any project involving the redevelopment of public housing is very complex. He said the two years they had spent a lot of time working on a master plan - how the site will look and feel. He said they had spent a lot of time working with the current residents on site to be sure the developers understood the needs of both residents and stakeholders. He said they had developed an Advisory Council to provide input and be a sounding board for the stakeholders. He said there had been 'open house' meetings in 2018 where they really worked to engage the community. He said the master plan had been approved, was public and could be found on HABD.org and the developer's web site. He told the group as they continue to work through the project there may be some revisions to the plan.

Stallworth said they were focused right now on moving residents. He said they planned to include up to 280 affordable housing units. He told the group he'd been asked how they arrived at that number since originally there was 455 households. He said they had surveyed the residents and used caseworkers assigned to groups of residents to meet with them and determine their relocation options. He said in some cases, these changes presented an opportunity for the resident/family to move to another desired community or school zone they feel might benefit their children. They may want to be close to another family member or to take a Section 8 voucher. They might decide their family size would be better suited in a single-family dwelling. After the survey and all these discussions, they came up with about 200 of the 455 families who want to come back to this redeveloped Southtown Court site. Stallworth said they padded that number to 280 because they realize more families may decide to come back later. He said they really want to accommodate any family who wants to come back to the redeveloped site. Stallworth said when the relocation had been completed Carol Clarke's company, Southside Development, would come in and start demolition and put in the infrastructure for the site. He said the relocation phase would involve 1) temporarily relocating the families who wished to return to Southtown, and 2) permanently relocating the families who did not want to return. He said they planned to assist residents with boxing belongs - and even unpacking them. He said they would also assist with utility reconnections when they got to their new place, whether these locations were temporary or permanent.

Stallworth said they planned to keep 88 units/families on the site, explaining these were families that wanted/needed to stay at Southtown during construction for some reason - for example, they might have kids in school and prefer not to disrupt them. These families would be able to stay in Southtown while the affordable housing is being constructed and would go into the first units completed. Stallworth estimated it would take about 3 months to get all residents off the site. They will then tear down everything but those 88 units. He said some residents had already moved so the relocation phase has technically started. Stallworth said sometime towards the end of this year they will begin demolishing the buildings so they can prepare for the new infrastructure, new sewer lines, roads, etc. He said all of that will need to be in place before they start building. He told the group that care has been taken on the design of roads so that people will be able to get to the retail areas without creating any additional traffic congestion.

Stallworth said after the demolition occurs, the infrastructure will go in - and then Southside Development will begin construction of the affordable housing. Carol Clarke said this phase would take anywhere from 1 to 1-1/2 years. She said that the plan includes both Senior and Family centers. Clarke said she expected to be able to begin construction towards the middle of next year/2021 and finish up by the end of 2022.

Stallworth said this concludes their high level overview of the project and that they would be happy to take any questions.

Marcy Morgenbesser asked whether the pandemic was creating complicated wrinkles for the project. Stallworth replied at the Housing Authority, they had been teleworking for some time now. He said they planned to bring the staff who would help with the relocations on board shortly and that all interactions with the families would include social distancing and proper PPE, for Housing Authority employees and the residents. He said they were also working with the landlords of the relocation locations to be certain the proper deep cleaning and sanitizing occurs before residents moved in.

Clarke said there were definitely processes that were happening differently because of Covid. She said some of the normal things that the Housing Authority does is assist residents in finding places to live which usually would involve taking them on a tour. She said that type assistance couldn't happen *physically* right now, that it needed to occur more virtually. Stallworth added that having the right PPE was important because they still had to assist families who might not have access to platforms that would allow virtual activities. He said they were trying to be as safe as possible and would continue to monitor the situation. He said that right now

things were moving ahead, relatively on schedule - but if things got worse they would delay the project if they needed to. Clarke added that they were very cognizant of the realities of the current situation and realized that some of the new processes they were having to create could elongate the schedule.

A resident asked what 'mixed use'/hospitality meant relative to this project. Clarke replied it was 'hotel', that St Vincent's Hospital creates some demand for one. Clarke conceded that hotels had been hit hard by Covid but they think they may have a deal and hope it comes to fruition. Right now people who use St Vincent's often need nights at a hotel and tend to go to Homewood or Five Points South instead of staying in the area. She said St Vincent's had actually wanted to develop a hotel in the area across University but that they could never assemble everything needed to do it. Clarke said she hopes they will be able to accomplish this for them and the community. Stallworth added that having these sorts of amenities on site was good for the community but it also would create employment opportunities for the Southtown residents.

Sanfelippo said she heard 'mixed use' but wondered if the community would be 'mixed income'. Stallworth replied that it would be mixed income as well, saying that a portion of it will be based off the Section 8 platform and that they intended to have some market rate units as well. Clarke added that the intention was to make it no more than 50/50 market rate and affordable housing, as in no more than 280 at market rate and up to 280 affordable units. She said that right now the market is pretty saturated on market rate units, that they would just have to see how things go in terms of market demand. She said there was a possibility of student housing and condominiums - but she said, they don't even know if students are going to be on campus or virtual yet. She said Covid has some components of the plan up in the air but right now, the plan was 280/280. Stallworth said it was important to them to create opportunities for all families regardless of income level.

Sanfelippo said there were a handful of houses (dilapidated) right around the site and she asked if those would be purchased and part of the 'plan'. Clarke said the current plan did not have the project crossing 10th Avenue. She said there was a little sundries store on 24th, at around 10th Ave South, that they had not purchased that property. She said there was a parcel they intended to purchase at the corner of 10th Ave South and 23rd St South, two old shotgun houses and that development of that parcel would be included in Phase 1.

Sanfelippo said she knew that in the beginning of the project there was some unrest about the project on the part of the residents. She said she knew this was a pretty major change to embrace and wondered if feelings had continued to evolve in a more positive direction. Stallworth said they were now at a point where they have

significant support for the project. He said when they first started there were a lot of families getting misinformation and believing rumors. He said the Housing Authority had become more thoughtful in their communications with the families, hosting more townhalls, having smaller groups which allowed people to really ask questions, express their feelings and talk through things. He said they have a Facebook page which they use to keep the residents informed. Stallworth said they could also access their case workers for information. He said they had developed a newsletter which they send to residents just about monthly. He said incorporating these types of additional communication had really made a difference in how people felt. He said they now have a lot of residents who are excited about the project and asking 'when am I going to move?!

Jones asked once demolition started, how would traffic around the community be affected. Stallworth said the project would definitely involve some rerouting of traffic since some of the building sit right next to the road(s). He said they were working through the demolition plan now so they can determine what will need to be closed off - and that he would definitely be willing to come back later and give us an update on that. Stallworth shared their website was www.HABD.org and the website for updates on the project is <https://www.habd360.org/>

Sanfelippo thanked them for attending the meeting.

City Updates

Sanfelippo said she didn't believe anyone from the city council was on the call tonight. She said she understood that a rezoning request had been approved, at the council meeting today, to create a packaging and distribution center on the site of the old Century Plaza Mall (Crestwood Blvd. and Oporto Madrid) that has been vacant for years. She said the neighborhood association was mixed in its support for the project, perhaps having voted 6 to 5 against the project.

Sanfelippo said a resident had communicated to her that the lights at Caldwell Park were being worked on. She said she was still waiting on an update on Rhodes Park lighting. She said the last she had heard from Darryl Lee (Valerie Abbott's office) was that the lights had been damaged because of dogs urinating on the base of the poles. Sanfelippo said she wasn't sure what a workaround would be since there were plenty of dogs at Rhodes but the park couldn't stay dark. She said she would continue to push for answers.

Sanfelippo said she had not received an update on the stairs at Rhodes Park, that the yellow caution tape put there a few months ago had deteriorated. She said people needed to be careful using those steps at the northeast corner of the park.

Sanfelippo said she had also asked the city for an update on the Hanover Circle repaving project. She said neighbors had reported the presence of people from various utilities marking/preparing for repaving. She said she was surprised to have this much activity without communication from the city because it would have been good to have given residents a heads up. Bottom line, we still do not have a date for the paving, but last update stated it could be late fall.

Community Resource Officer's Update/Jasmine Fells

Sanfelippo called on our Community Resource Officer Jasmine Fells, saying that Fells had been doing an excellent job. Fells reported that it had been a pleasure working with Highland Park. She said there were great things coming out of the Mayor's office right now. She said she didn't know if anyone had had the opportunity to visit Birmingham Police Department's food giveaway but that it has been a great success. She said they planned on doing the giveaway at least once a month at the precinct on 1st Avenue. She said if anyone knew someone who would benefit from this program to let them know.

Fells shared about the success of the 'Eat in the Street' event in the Avondale Park area July 9-11. She said they had blocked off the streets for participating restaurants to allow for socially distanced dining and that attendees had really enjoyed themselves. She said the event had originated from the mayor's office in an effort to address the issue of reduced patronage for our local businesses during Covid19. She said she expected this program to be expanded and to watch for more information.

Fells reported an internal effort to improve Community Resources digital footprint, that they now they had a Facebook page and a web page in the city's site within the Community Development section. She asked everyone to follow their Facebook page for updates.

<https://www.facebook.com/City-of-Birmingham-Community-Resource-Services-Division-103002728133940/>

<https://www.birminghamal.gov/community-development/community-resource-services-division/>

Fells shared she had been working diligently to get our neighborhood updates on questions and projects in work. She shared that in the case of the printing overage charge we had voted on that night, why it had not fallen within the 20% overage rule - the city attorneys had decided that it was a 'fee for additional work' - and when it was a 'subsequent charge' it did not fall within that 20% overage rule.

Fells commented next on Do Dah Day, as in Highland Park's approved donation to the organization that has been stalled. She said it had been additionally hard to get the donation processed since the event had been canceled for 2020. Sanfelippo

provided background in that the neighborhood had voted to donate funds toward Do Dah Day, a festival that benefits the Greater Birmingham Humane Society (and Animal Control) in the city. She shared that their fees to hold the event had steadily increased over the years, permitting and such - so the neighborhood had allocated/approved funds to make a contribution to that. Sanfelippo said there was an issue with the city about a 'charitable donation', that it's more clear cut if the donation is to an 'event'. Sanfelippo said we have been trying to get some clarity on the city's position but it seems that the best approach is just to contribute the money to next year's event. Sanfelippo thanked Fells for her efforts to help us understand what is permissible with this donation, what we can and can't do, that her desire was to keep Do Dah Day informed about the disposition of this donation. Fells said she wanted to achieve clarity on the question and reported it had been elevated to the mayor's office for direction. She said she had learned one relevant thing through her research, that allocation for an educational component of an event was a valid donation purpose. She said perhaps that would help us next year. She said bottom line neighborhoods couldn't make donations for charitable purposes but could make contributions/allocations towards projects with a public educational purpose.

Fells said she had communicated with Ray Davis about the tree planting project which was going well. She said Davis ideally wants the trees planted in the winter. Fells said things were underway, that processing paperwork for the project would typically take 90 days from start to finish, that she wanted to be sure we got things completed to get the trees purchased and planted on time. She said that all we needed now was a quote and that Davis was handling that.

Fells referenced Highland Park's Sidewalk and Brickwork project and that she had emailed resident Adam Ward on that today. She said her contacts in the city had been very helpful with respect to the contacts the neighborhood needed to get the quotes required. Sanfelippo reported the neighborhood had gotten the quote from CP Construction and that we appreciated the information forwarded on getting other quotes; that what she understood was that either we or the city would need to get alternate bids. She said Adam had documented the work that needed to be done, he walked the site with Clasco Williams of CP - and that he would coordinate the efforts to get additional quotes. Sanfelippo asked Fells to confirm that was what we needed to do to proceed. Fells said yes - or work through the city's purchasing department. Fells said regardless of how we proceed, to get the bidding process started another quote was needed. She added that the quotes would definitely need to compare 'apples to apples' on the work needed.

Fells said anyone who wanted to receive her weekly email communications/updates to let her know. She shared her contact information - phone: 205-297-8336; email jasmine.fells@birminghamal.gov

Sanfelippo asked Fells if she had received any updates from the Building Department on the 'Sisters Houses'. Fells said no. Sanfelippo said she would fill her in on this situation later.

Sanfelippo thanked Fells for joining the meeting - and for what she does for us all the time.

OLD BUSINESS

Sanfelippo reported the petition against lifting the covenants for development on Arlington was sent to the City Council members, the mayor's office and Community Development. She told Fells they (she and Alice Williams of Community Development) were the only ones who acknowledged receiving it. She said she assumed the others did get it but we haven't heard any updates.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Recycling will now be once a month, the 1st Wednesday of each month. Sanfelippo said she hoped that is going to come back to regular weekly pickups. Recycling in general across the city is not great but Highland Park has been a big participator. Jones reported that she had gone to Birmingham Recycling facility in Avondale/41st Street today and wanted to remind everyone they could still take their recyclables to this facility if only having a monthly pickup was problematic. 9 41st St. S., Avondale, AL 35222 M-F 7am-4pm.

A resident asked if it was once a month for part of the city or all. Sanfelippo said she thought part of the confusion was due to a pilot project going on for part of Crestwood. In this project residents received a big trash can and big recycling bin and had pickup once a week for both. To clarify, Sanfelippo said the city was back to picking up recycles curbside, we used to have a pickup once a week on Wednesdays - but the service was suspended because of staffing issues related to Covid. Now they've brought it back but it's only the first Wednesday of each month. Sanfelippo reminded everyone of the basic rules regarding city recycling - no boxes soiled with foodstuffs/grease, no plastic bags, no glass; she said all the materials could be put together in a bin, box or paper bag. Accepted materials are plastics 1 and 2, aluminum, tin and steel cans, newspaper, cardboard. Anne Sunkel shared that Target had put their bins back out for glass recycling.

Sanfelippo told the group to let us know (highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com) if you see any valuables left in cars, see cars illegally parked, or see landscaping contractors blowing leaves and yard debris into the streets and gutters. She added that if there was a contractor name/phone number on their truck, to get that information as well. She said we didn't want to scold them; we just want to help

spread the word that they're not supposed to do that (per city code), because it contributes to our storm drains getting stopped up. Sanfelippo said Ray Davis is not on our call tonight but he is awesome, walks the neighborhood a lot - he gave us a very detailed list of locations where storm drain tops are askew, broken or missing and where the drains are clogged up and need to be cleaned out. A shout out and thank you to Ray, that list has been sent on to the city. He also compiled a detailed list of dead trees/limbs that need to be addressed before they cause an accident.

The next large trash and brush pick up is going to be July 23rd and then August 13. We did have an issue, someone contacted me about a neighbor putting trash on the street in front of an unoccupied resident's house. They were doing that right after a pickup occurred, so it just turned the location into a dumping site for the next 3 weeks. Sanfelippo said the Communications Committee is working on a standard letter that we can drop off to people informing them when the pickups occur.

Sanfelippo said she has not seen the mosquito spraying truck but wanted to remind residents that the city phone number to opt your address out of the spraying is 205-254-6413.

Sanfelippo thanked Anne Sunkel and Judy Jones for plugging away at the edits and fine tuning for the neighborhood's 501c3 application.

Sanfelippo said she didn't know who in the group had gotten to go but the Farmer's Market at Unity Church last Saturday was really cool. She said about 10 vendors had meats, eggs, flowers, tea, shaved ice, little baskets with baguettes, cheese and pasta salad, etc. Everyone was masked and respecting social distancing when in line for vendors. She said it appeared to be a success and shared it would be happening every Saturday from 4 pm to 7 pm. She encouraged residents to check it out.

Sanfelippo said the next meeting would be Tuesday August 11. She told the group to plan on the meeting being held on Zoom again because the covid numbers aren't looking so good for Jefferson County at the present time.

Mark Ritter spoke up and said one of more contentious discussions at our meetings in recent memories had been about the scooters - not that he was pro or con on the question but as a biker he wondered if there was an update on the issue, noting that Councilwoman Abbott had seemed to be very much against the scooters. Sanfelippo said she would check on the status, adding that Abbott was an avid walker who is likely cool with non-motorized biking but yes she definitely had issues with the company that brought the scooters in and didn't get permission or buy-in with the city, and that may have turned her off on it as well. As Sanfelippo recalled, her

concerns were greenlighting a project that hadn't met safety concerns to her satisfaction.

Marcy Morgenbesser brought up issues being aired on NextDoor related to "abandoned" houses in the neighborhood . She said she didn't want to open a can of worms at our meeting but wondered about these individuals and their calls for meetings, etc. Morgenbesser asked if this was an issue people were following, if there was a forum to air people's feelings about this. Sanfelippo provided some background saying a few are owned by one person, a few more by another and several more by other individuals. Sanfelippo said she feels like it is 'our' issue, it affects our property values, that it is an issue of safety, people feel nervous walking by those houses, we don't know if there are squatters inside doing drugs, etc. She added that the city of Birmingham has a maintenance code, houses aren't supposed to fall into that kind of disrepair. Sanfelippo said there was a special amount of frustration with these owners because several addresses were under a court order but the owners seemed to know the system well enough to do a little bit of work and have the city say ok - and then progress seems to lag. She said it's on her list to follow-up on but she also knows the courts have been backed up with the virus concerns. She shared the overarching sentiment is definitely to preserve them but at this point she was uncertain that could happen - or if the owner could get it together and make repairs in a timely fashion now. She confessed this issue to be a really big issue for her, that it had been one of the issues she ran on when she ran for neighborhood association president.

Anne Sunkel shared there was a lot of legal jeopardy related to these situations because the owners know and work the system and that it is a challenging path for sure.

Morgenbesser asked if typically these owners current on their property taxes. Sanfelippo said as far as she knew, they were indeed current. She said that had also been interesting to learn about as there were some companies who would go in and pay delinquent taxes, then the owners would have to pay them or lose the property (after several years of delinquent taxes). She felt that had previously been a dynamic involved with at least one of the Sisters Houses (two large homes on Highland Ave. on the south end of Rhodes Park (2731 and 2733 Highland Ave.)).

Jones shared with Morgan that our neighborhood leadership had been extremely engaged in attempting to do something about these properties, staying engaged, attending hearings held at the courthouse, etc. She said, in her opinion, we have a high degree of engagement in the problematic properties located in Highland Park right now. Sanfelippo said we will press on with these issues, adding that the idea of starting a petition had come up, the question being whether we petitioned the

owner or the city. Sanfelippo said she will keep residents updated as progress is made.

Sanfelippo said she hopes everyone is doing well, she encouraged everyone to care about our neighbors and stay safe. She thanked everyone for making time tonight for the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association