

# **Highland Park Neighborhood Association**

## **September 2020 Minutes**

**Meeting Date: September 8, 2020**

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo welcomed everyone arriving into the virtually held Highland Park Neighborhood Association August 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.

Sanfelippo asked if everyone had received the August meeting minutes. Sanfelippo said she had located one change needed to the August minutes, that the individual who had seconded the motion to approve the park bench in Rhodes Park was actually Horace Hulseley. She asked if anyone else had any corrections or edits. Hearing none, she asked the group to vote for approving the minutes by raising their hands. The minutes were then approved unanimously.

### **Roll Call**

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

### **City Updates**

Sanfelippo said she had not received any updates from the Police and Fire Departments. She shared there had also been some problems with 311 but she hoped that would get straightened out tomorrow.

### **Southern Area Framework Plan/Thomas Yuill**

President Sanfelippo introduced the speaker for the evening, Thomas Yuill, as a Senior Planner with the City of Birmingham. Yuill shared that he was one of the project managers for the Southern Area Framework Plan. He said another project manager was Hunter Garrison with the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (also known as RPC). Yuill said the City of Birmingham contracted with RPC to work with them on this project because it was really RPC's bread and butter, this type of long-range planning. He said unfortunately Garrison couldn't attend the meeting tonight. He said both he and Garrison live in areas included in this last phase, that he lived in Crestwood South and Garrison in Crestwood North - so they were both personally and professionally invested in the project, making sure that we have a valuable and useful plan come out of this process. Yuill said the purpose of the project, that basically they were mandated to do this because back in 2013 we had something called a 'Comprehensive Plan', an overall city-wide plan, that was

supposed to guide for several years, the actions of the city. As part of that plan there was a series of recommendations for a city framework plan focusing on different parts of the city. He said these were intended to tap into the citizens of those areas instead of some sort of overarching city-wide plan, very focused, specific and measurable. He said this Framework Plan for the Southern Area is the 9<sup>th</sup> one they have done and is the final one for the city. Yuill said the Southern Area is comprised of three key communities - the first is the Crestline (the Crestline and Eastwood neighborhoods), the second is Crestwood (which includes the Crestwood North and South neighborhoods), the third is Red Mountain (which includes the Highland Park, Redmont Park, Forest Park and South Avondale neighborhoods).

Yuill said the Plan answers a couple of questions. 1 - What is the state of the Southern Area? What are the demographics, what does the market look like, what exists in the Southern Area? i.e., businesses, assets, what trends in development and housing. It includes an inventory of the facilities in the areas like parks, rec centers, transportation infrastructure like sidewalks, bus routes. 2 - What are the issues facing the neighborhood, the community? 3 - What is the citizens' vision for the future, which is where they need our help a lot. Yuill said they answer these questions by getting information from residents. He said it was critically important that citizens complete the survey and share thoughts about issues and their vision for the neighborhood in the future.

How will the framework plan achieve this vision for the future? Yuill said they will create a set of recommendations to address the community's issues, how to get the community from where it is today to where residents want it to be in the future. He said they outline goals and recommendations, both short and long term. He said they will also set up a voluntary implementation committee that anyone can be a part of. He said if 'you' are a very civic minded individual, that you're the type of person that goes to all your neighborhood meetings, that pays attention to the city council meetings, that is very invested in the neighborhood, then you will likely want to be involved in this implementation committee.

Yuill explained the various chapters in the plan: an 'Introduction'; 'Community Renewal' ('blight mapping', a windshield survey where they just ride around and look at properties to identify dilapidated areas, wellness and Security in the area, how invested the community is in its neighborhood); Green Systems (Parks and Recreation Disaster Resistance, infrastructure issues like whether the community has issues with storm water, if there was a natural disaster would this area be prepared, etc); Economic Vitality (education and workforce opportunities; is this an area that is growing or declining and what can be done about that; identifying Catalytic Project Sites where investment in a project might spur a dozen more projects and lead to a huge boom); Transportation and Infrastructure (sidewalks,

the roads, bus routes, bicycle access to determine whether there are gaps); and finally the very important Future Land Use. Yuill said this is the shortest chapter and perhaps seemingly the most boring - but it's very important - they take the input residents give them and determine what makes sense to occupy 'this land' in the future; it might be residential now, does it make sense to remain residential in the future. Yuill said when someone comes in and wants to re-zone a parcel to do a development, that Future Land Use Plan informs that process, that a recommendation is made to the City Planning Commission and the City Council about whether this is in line with what residents want to see in the future. Yuill says basically they create a matrix with actions that need to happen in the community to get it where it wants to be, that they prioritize these actions as 'critical' or 'nice to have' - some things might take a short time to accomplish, some things might take years, so they include a timeline. Yuill said the Implementation Committee participates in identifying what's the most important issues/actions to accomplish.

Yuill said right now they were in the kickoff phase, that the first thing would be getting our input. He said once they get as much input as they can, they would begin writing the plan and finally presenting it to the public. Yuill said they would then make any adjustments needed based on feedback they received from residents. He said finally they would ask the Planning Commission and the City Council to approve and adopt it. He said he expected that to happen somewhere in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2021, so it is a long process. Yuill said they were starting with the compilation of information from residents and what he would love for everyone to do was at some point go to [imaginebham.com](http://imaginebham.com) and click the button that says 'Southern Area Plan Now Kicking Off'. He said clicking the button will take residents to a page that has two options - a survey and a wiki-map. He said the survey is pretty straightforward, a series of questions about what you like about your neighborhood, what you think could be different, what assets you think the neighborhood has, what assets it might lack. Yuill explained the wiki-map was an actual map you could go on and point out things/places you think are great (and perhaps we need more of it) or things/places you think need work. He gave an example saying in his neighborhood there was an intersection near his house which he felt was a problem, so he put a 'point' there that said 'traffic issue' - and then he explained the area would benefit from 'traffic calming'. He said there was no limit to the number of things residents could identify on this map.

Yuill said there would be a Zoom meeting for residents across the whole study area on September 29<sup>th</sup>. He said that was all he has, that he'd be happy to answer any questions.

A resident brought up the Arlington Hotel/Condo Development Project. Yuill shared that if that 'project' was of concern to residents it would be totally appropriate to

include it in survey feedback. Sanfilippo asked Philip Foster if there was any update to the status of the project. Foster replied there wasn't much new information. He provided basic background on the site, the project, that it was currently designated mixed-use medium which set height maximums that were unacceptable to the developer who attempted to get the property rezoned. Foster explained that while the developer was going through that process, previous agreements between Highland Park, Redmont Park and the City of Birmingham were discovered. Related to this there were legally restricted covenants which were codified in a 1992 Federal Court Settlement and restricted development even more than the current zoning designation. The developer then lobbied the city/mayor to help him lift the covenants. People/groups from both Highland Park and Redmont Park subsequently met with the mayor and also circulated a petition that collected hundreds of signatures opposing the development. Foster said his impression was that neighborhood efforts had made an impression on the mayor and that he was now less inclined to help the developer with his efforts to lift the covenants. Foster said he had understood through 'third hand' sources that the developer has abandoned the idea of a hotel and that he is willing to consider a lower height, but Foster thinks it would still be beyond the current height restrictions so would require the project to still have some sort of rezoning - so they would have to start over from scratch on documenting the 'new' project and obtaining new approvals and such. Foster said with the current economy, the pandemic and its effect on the travel industry, and the neighborhood resistance that a 'hotel' project is less attractive. Foster said he had found out the Framework Planning Process had started and went online and read about it and completed the survey. He said he made general comments - but didn't highlight the Arlington lot or make any comments specific to the property - and he wondered if you could go back and add content to the survey after it had been completed. Yuill replied he didn't think a survey could be accessed after it had been completed but that residents could go onto the wiki-map and continue putting points and comments on it as much as needed. Mary Helen Crowe asked Foster how Highland Park residents would be notified if the project becomes active again at City Hall. Foster said anyone can meet with the mayor - but that his rezoning request was returned back to him, they asked him to withdraw it as his plan had changed substantially from what he had originally presented to the neighborhoods. So for the effort to be reactivated he would have to start from scratch, as in coming back to the neighborhood, filing a new proposal for rezoning - but since the city is now aware and both neighborhoods are now aware of these restrictive covenants, the chances of him getting a rezoning request outside those restrictions approved are greatly lessened. But regardless, the neighborhoods would be involved anew in an advisory capacity. Sanfilippo thanked Foster for the update. She asked Darryl Lee and Councilwoman Abbott to let her know if there were any new developments. Lee replied they would definitely keep the neighborhood updated, that the city attorney had been pretty silent on this

subject and that he thought the effort was at a standstill for a number of reasons. Sanfelippo asked if there were any other questions for Yuill. Sanfelippo thanked Yuill for his presentation this evening. He added one thing, that he had shared with the group about the implementation committee, but there was also a steering committee which is made up of similarly civic-minded involved individuals, that if any residents were interested in participating in this, there was some time commitment with respect to meetings - but any interested individuals could give he or Hunter a call or email (interested residents can get his contact information from Sanfelippo).

### **City Council Update/Darryl Lee**

Sanfelippo asked Darryl Lee for an update on city council activities. Lee said there was a lot going on right now, they were certainly working on budget issues. He said they had received hundreds of calls about the libraries and he wanted to assure everyone that 99.9% of all the libraries will be open. He said this might involve some flexible hours and other changes in operations but the services will be there. He said there was a very strong possibility that the Eastwood branch would be closed, saying one reason was the lease is \$50,000 a year and they would not allow us to do a one year lease, they would only agree to a two year lease - which the Library cannot do. Lee said the city was working with a \$63 million shortfall. He said regarding city parks, they would for the most part be open, adding that Highland Park Golf Course would be for sure because of its revenue production. Lee explained that State Representative Oliver Robinson had worked the former Mayor Bell to pass a new law that took control related to the budget from the City Council and gave control totally 100% to the Mayor. Lee said the Council can want or recommend changes but the mayor does not have to make them. He said they can look at it, make comments or suggestions but the mayor does not have to make changes to the budget in response to Council feedback. Lee said there were meetings going on with various departments to try and figure out how to move forward with this shortfall. Lee also said neighborhood elections were being moved to January, that if Covid was still a problem then, they might be moved further out to March or June 2021. Lee said he thought they were still asking for 'declarations of candidacy' from anyone wanting to run by Sept 14.

Carla Youngblood asked Lee said that even though the City Council didn't have the authority to change anything in the budget, didn't they still have the ability to withhold their approval? Lee said yes, that was correct - that if the Council didn't approve the 2020 budget, the city would have to continue working off the 2019 budget.

### **Community Resource Officer Update/Jasmine Fells**

Sanfelippo invited Highland Park's Community Resource Officer, Jasmine Fells, to provide an update. Fells said Dr Lee touched on several things she was going to talk about, confirming what he had said about the neighborhood elections. She added encouragement to anyone interested in running for office to get their Declaration of Candidacy forms submitted. Fells said people could call her office for more information, that her direct number was 205-297-8336 - or residents can email her at [Jasmine.Fells@birminghamal.gov](mailto:Jasmine.Fells@birminghamal.gov).

Fells said she was continuing to work with neighborhood on several projects and expressed appreciation to Sanfelippo for keeping residents up to date on progress. She referenced the Highland Avenue Tree Project saying it was in the works, that she was working with the Beautification Committee to get the necessary quotes. She said once they got all the information together for submission, there would be a 90 day timeline from start to completion. She expressed appreciation to the neighborhood for the vote on the sign project production overage, sharing that all of that had been successfully worked out now, saying the check to the graphic designer should be going out this month.

Fells asked if there were any questions. Jones asked Fells if the change in voting date for neighborhood elections would affect the terms being served, as in whether the next terms would be for the full 2 years or be shorter. Fells said she was uncertain about this but that it would likely just be a shorter term for the officers elected next after their installation.

Sanfelippo told Fells she would get the necessary information to her on the dog poop stations/bags the next day. She thanked Fells for all her support during this challenging time.

### **Old Business**

Sanfelippo shared that during the August meeting there had been a discussion about group that was exploring purchase of a building in the neighborhood for a 'crisis diversion center'. She said residents in the immediate area of the building (Hanover Circle) had expressed much negative feedback about the project and that as a result, the agency had decided to seek another location.

Sanfelippo shared there had been some progress on repair/renovation of the Sisters Houses, that residents had noted scaffolding going on at the houses. She asked for residents to continue sending her updates as they observed progress (or lack of progress) occurring.

Sanfelippo said two cleanup days had been scheduled, that due to Covid concerns, the efforts could be 'on our own' or in socially distanced groups of people as people preferred. She said the city would be sharing supplies, to include bags, gloves and litter grabbers. She said the cleanup would be Saturday September 19 from 9 until noon, and that she and the supplies would be located at the north end of Rhodes Park (28<sup>th</sup> St and Highland Court) from 9 until 9:30 so people could pick up supplies. She said residents participating would be asked to sign in and share what areas/streets they intended to work on. She shared that if they were rained out on the 19<sup>th</sup>, they would reschedule for Sunday the 20<sup>th</sup>. Sanfelippo said the second cleanup they would focus more on limb gathering and then coordinate with the city to get those picked up.

Diann Weatherly asked about the major digging work, the sewer project, happening along Highland and in the alley behind Milner. She said there was also a lot of additional utility marking going on, for example, for Spire - and that it was literally on top of some of her plantings behind her house. She said she would actually need to move the plants if they were actually going to dig there. She asked if anyone else dealt with anyone on this county project. There were no answers. Sanfelippo prompted Christine Wilson who shared that she had approached the workers to ask them about their efforts but didn't have much to add about their project schedule. Philip Foster added that they had possibly cut an ATT cable during their digging which had cut internet to a number of houses on the street - and that they had made a temporary repair but left the cable unburied. He said ATT had said at some point they would come back and make a permanent repair and bury it back, so it was possible that the utility locating/marketing was happening in advance of ATT making that permanent repair and burying the underground cable again - but that the possibility exists that there will be sewer work back there, that he didn't know. Dianne asked if we had contacts with the utility companies so that we could call or email about these projects. Sanfelippo said she did not but that she would see what she could find out with respect to contact information or project details. She added she hoped they would knock on a resident's door before destroying plant beds but could not guarantee that. Jones said that she had noticed a utility location/marketing company on her street and had visited with the young man who was in a marked truck but not wearing a uniform. He told her they often needed to walk up beside houses, which Jones said was good for residents to be aware of when work was going on. Sanfelippo said we encourage nosy-neighbor-ness - and to pass along any information learned.

Mary Helen Crowe said they were walking and passed the area where EATS was, specifically the building that has been being worked on for a long time. They just chatted with the people working there, she said she thought the building was owned by Dr. Luigi Bertoli. She said she thought Bertoli's intent was to make some sort of

specialty lab - and reported that the dumpster was gone and that there was room framing happening on the inside.

### **Announcements/Reminders**

Sanfelippo reminded the group that recycling was now once a month on the first Wednesday, telling the group that any recycling left out on other Wednesdays would be picked up as trash. She said residents could take their recycles to the Center on 41<sup>st</sup> Street in Avondale, that that facility was open weekdays from 7 am to 4 pm.

Sanfelippo said the Farmer's Market at Unity Church continues on Saturdays from 4 to 7 pm.

Sanfelippo reminded everyone if they have not done the 2020 Census to do so. She said enumerators were making their way around so residents who had not submitted their census might get a knock on the door. She said these individuals would have identification, a badge, and a census bag clearly indicating they are census workers.

Sanfelippo shared the city had published the Large Trash and Brush for the rest of 2020. The remaining dates for the year were: Thursday September 24, Thursday October 15, Thursday November 14, Saturday November 21 (because of Thanksgiving) and Thursday December 17. She reminded residents to make neat piles away from trees and utility poles. Sanfelippo also shared we have some letters to send to some residents reminding them not to put piles out the day after a pickup - and to put it out on their own property if possible.

Sanfelippo gave a shout out to the Communication Committee for their help compiling 'helpful information for residents', that this information had been added to our website. She said residents could review the information at [www.highland-park.org/helpful-information](http://www.highland-park.org/helpful-information). Sanfelippo shared a number of 'friendly and informative' letters had been developed to help residents deal with common neighbor situations when they wished to remain anonymous. She said anytime a resident was experiencing an issue they'd like help with to email [highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com](mailto:highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com).

Sanfelippo reported the Beautification Committee was working to obtain a 3<sup>rd</sup> quote for sidewalk repairs. She thanked Adam Ward for all his hard work on this project. Sanfelippo said that they'd received two proposals so far, one for \$10,000 and a second for \$23,000, that they were now trying to reconcile the gap in those two, trying to be sure we were comparing apples to apples. Sanfelippo said Jasmine Fells had been very helpful in terms of helping us with our next steps and getting this



through the city process. They were also trying to find a third company to perhaps provide another estimate that might land in the middle of that.

Sanfelippo said the tree project was in work, they were getting quotes so that the order for that could be completed.

Sanfelippo thanked Judy Jones and Anne Sunkel for their hard work on the 501c3 application for the new organization 'Friends of Highland Park' (FOHP). Jones shared that she and Anne Sunkel had met last week and were happy to announce that resident Rowena Frazier was going to join the group and assist in getting this organization off the ground. She said the three of them had stepped up to become the initial organizers of FOHP, to complete the application for the 501c3 and recruit others to be involved as well. She said they planned another strategy session this coming Thursday evening. Jones said the initial effort will involve soliciting dollars for submission of the 501c3 application. Jones said one thing she had realized tonight during the discussion of the needed sidewalk repairs was that there could be neighbors who wanted to contribute or raise money for the repairs and that this 501c3 would be wonderful receiving receptive for those funds to help make projects like that happen. She said it had also occurred to her that there were corporations across the country that award grants to neighborhoods for things like playground equipment - but that you can't even apply for those opportunities without a non-profit status, so that was why we were trying to push on and finish this process. Jones said she sees FOHP as being supplemental to the Neighborhood Association.

Mary Helen Crowe asked if the city was going to repair the steps at Rhodes Park, where the tape had been put up and the steps had been broken for a year or so. Dr Lee replied it was still on the list but that he did not have a date for the project. He said that and repairing the lighting in the park were both on the list, sharing that replacing the poles was projected to be about \$200,000 because of dog urine damage to the wiring. He said they were working with Alabama Power to return adequate lighting to the park and stretch the dollars as far as they can. He said everyone was tied up with the budget process right now which directly affected these projects. Dr Lee said as soon as they got any sort of date for the project he would share it with the neighborhood.

Sanfelippo said the next meeting would be 6 pm Tuesday, October 13 via Zoom. She thanked Highland Park resident Jamie Whitehurst for use of his Zoom account over the past few months. She said Whitehurst had some conflicts over the next few months so Stephen Foster from the Five Points Neighborhood was going to assist us in our meeting set-up so we could continue with the Zoom meetings.

Sanfelippo asked if Joseph Casper Baker was on the call. He was not. Sanfelippo explained he had contacted us about running for City Council and was slated to speak.

Larry Contri said he noticed Officer King was not on the call tonight and asked if she knew anything about police reports for the previous month. Sanfelippo said she did not but would reach out to he and Captain Cochran. Contri said the reason he was asking was for people who traveled down 7<sup>th</sup> Ave South, where a number of those businesses were closing up, there is a new homeless commune under the viaduct there, with all sorts of debris along the fence line, that the issue needs to be addressed and the area cleaned up. He said he understood there had been a higher presence of homeless lately around the shopping center at Clairmont and around that area. Sanfelippo confirmed Contri was talking about the area under the 280 bridge, Contri said yes. Sanfelippo said she had heard but not received formal confirmation that Walter Gibbons was no longer head of Public Works, and asked Dr Lee is he had any confirmation on that. Dr Lee confirmed that Mr. Gibbons was no longer employed with the City of Birmingham. He said Ralph DeBardlabon Jr, who had been the Deputy under Gibbons, was now the Public Works head. Lee said he thought we would see a lot of good things from DeBardlabon, that he had been with Public Works for 35 years. Sanfelippo said we will miss Walt, that he had always been great to work with - and we would look forward to working with the new head.

Sanfelippo said she had just received some information on the utility makings, that for example orange was for cable - but that she would reach out to the utility companies and get more information on that.

Carla Youngblood offered her assistance in setup for the zoom meeting next meeting if it was needed. Sanfelippo thanked her.

Sanfelippo thanked everyone for their attendance and adjourned the September 2020 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association