

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

October 2020 Minutes

Meeting Date: October 13, 2020

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo welcomed everyone arriving into the virtually held Highland Park Neighborhood Association September meeting, introducing herself and Secretary Judy Jones. The meeting was being held virtually using Zoom because of ongoing health and safety concerns related to the Covid19 virus. She communicated a special thanks to Stephen Foster of the Five Points South Neighborhood Association for assisting Highland Park tonight with his Zoom account.

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).

Sanfelippo asked if everyone had received the September meeting minutes. 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.

City Updates

Sanfelippo said she had followed up with Captain Cochran since we had not been receiving the monthly crime updates for our beat that we had previously. She said because of staffing changes related to the pandemic that they were no longer doing those reports. But, she said, if residents visit police.birminghamal.gov and click on 'Crime Information' they have this information broken down by precincts. She said our information was included in the 'South Precinct' which might be misleading given it did not reflect only Highland Park. She said he did share there had been a number of car break-ins but that some forensic evidence had been left at the scene and an arrest made. Sanfelippo gave the group a reminder to call 911 in case of emergencies and to call the non-emergency number 205-328-9311 if the situation is not an emergency. She reminded the group to lock their vehicles and not leave anything of value (or guns) in the car/truck. Sanfelippo said they had also had some reports related to a gentleman named Oliver Childs, saying that people had had a number of negative experiences with him. Sanfelippo shared Childs had a criminal background, is on probation and tends to be very confrontational with people. She encouraged residents to avoid interactions with him. Sanfelippo said that in the case of a negative interaction with him that someone had provided his probation officer's number and because Mr. Childs is potentially dangerous, she was going to share it with the group: Officer Nevitt 205-323-1091. Sanfelippo said Mr. Childs was African-American, slim build and perhaps in his 50s, rides a bicycle all the time.

Regarding Public Works, Sanfelippo said there were a few missed piles, and she had notified them of the locations. We had also planned another clean-up for the coming weekend. She said residents who wanted to participate could meet at the north end of Rhodes Park for supplies and to check in. She said everyone would return 12:00 to 12:15 to the same location.

Sanfelippo shared that Vice President Jessica Powers had resigned from her position. She added that the City had informed us that it is acceptable for the neighborhood to hold the position 'open' a couple of months until next regular elections. She said she was also uncertain how to do confidential voting during a 'zoom' meeting. Sanfelippo said elections would be held January 12 and the deadline to submit a declaration of candidacy had been extended until December 1.

Speaker-Chris Nanni/Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham

President Sanfelippo introduced the speaker for the evening, Chris Nanni, saying that he was with the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham and was going to share what they do and how we can get involved. Nanni said he had been asked to share about the work the Foundation was doing around Regional Cooperation. He started by sharing the Foundation had been around since 1959 and was 61 years old. He said the Foundation, in its simplest form, receives gifts from the community, they in turn invest those gifts and then invest the interest from those gifts back into the community. He said the Foundation is made of over 500 individual funds with assets totaling around \$240 million which makes them the largest foundation in the state. He said they have been transitioning the Foundation to look at some of the underlying issues in our community that are holding us back and to be more proactive in addressing them. He said they've worked on a number of issues to include trying to reduce the number of homicides in Birmingham and payday lending reform statewide, saying the Foundation serves a five county area including Jefferson County. Nanni said if there's time when he finishes, he'd love to talk about an exciting transportation pilot, a collaboration between the Foundation and the City of Birmingham called 'Birmingham on Demand'.

Nanni said he wanted to start by talking about their Regional Coordination efforts. He shared that one of the key underlying issues that holds us back is that Jefferson County includes 35 municipalities - which makes us the most fragmented community in the Southeast. He explained this is problematic because regions that are more cohesive, have more of a regional governance or representation, are doing much better in today's economy. He explained our economy is more based on an 'industrial economy', where sources of population, power centers, grew up around where the resources were - so we did have a Bessemer economy or a Birmingham economy or a Hoover economy. But the transition since the 70s on to more

information and technology has really made our economies inter-connected and regional in nature. So those regions that are more fragmented, like Buffalo, Pittsburg, ourselves, really struggle because our infrastructure limits the ability to address larger issues collectively, there's no one who can 'speak' for the region. Nanni says this has been known to be a problem and there have been efforts before at some kind of metro representation but those efforts have failed. He said that what a lot of people don't realize is that we were about the same size of Atlanta in 1950. In 1960 we were twice the size of Nashville. Those two cities/regions voted to go to a metro form of government and their economies took off after that. There was a big effort to do the same thing in our region in 1971 but we voted it down. Ever since then the population of our region has declined. Nanni said they heard acknowledgement from businesses that this is an issue, but also a resignation there's just nothing that can be done about it. The Community Foundation decided it wanted to understand the issue better and whether we could play a role in helping advance this.

In 2017, the Foundation along with a local non-partisan, non-profit think tank, PARCA, released the groundbreaking report 'Together We Prosper'. In this report we have 3 chapters. Nanni said the first chapter looked at historically how we got into this situation of having 35 municipalities, going on to say it was really two things. One, because we were an industrial city - and two, it was an overlay with our history with race. There were attempts at consolidation along the way, Birmingham was in fact born out of consolidation in the early 1900s. There were more attempts and more failures after that.

Nanni said in Chapter 2, they studied four regions who had overcome their fragmentation using four very different models. They looked at: 1) Louisville (more fragmented than us with 70 or 80 cities) who in 2000 consolidated their main city and county government into a metro government; 2) Pittsburg which was accomplished by a strengthening of the county government (by adding branches) to provide the larger regional services; 3) Charlotte, which is called a functional consolidation where the city and county have an agreement to take certain functions and responsibilities; and 4) Denver, which was multi-county and really through associations (for ex Mayor's association) addressing issues like transportation and economic development. Nanni said they had a team that went out and talked to the movers and shakers in each of those 4 regions.

Nanni said Chapter 3 overlaid Birmingham onto these four models to identify the pros and cons of each for our city. He said they never, in the report, advocate for one model over another. Nanni said during 2017 and 2018 they made over 70 presentations throughout the county, to Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis, Neighborhood Associations, to anyone who was interested. He emphasized no one speaks for the

region, saying that even Birmingham, which represents a third of the county population, or the county, cannot speak for the region. He said Jefferson County made it very clear they did not want to go the direction of having an elected County Manager. Nanni said the one they really explored was the Denver Model - taking existing associations and breathing life into them and having them operate in new ways. They settled on working with the 'Mayor's Association' in 2018, that the 35 mayors were already meeting monthly for luncheon but it was more for networking, they weren't trying to take on larger issues or solve problems collectively. We asked them if they would be willing to do a professionally facilitated deep dive to determine whether there was an area where we could come together. An obstacle was that with our region, the 'pie' is fixed - one city takes from another to benefit them but it hurts the 'region'. For example in Nashville, if they bring in another professional sports team, they don't see that as competing with the football or soccer teams already there - they see it as a component of creating a 'destination'.

Our region, the pie is fixed - one city takes from another to benefit them, but it hurts the larger region. Nashville's mentality - if we bring in another professional sports team - we don't see that as competing with the football or soccer team - they looked at it as they were creating a 'destination' town for sports. Our mentality was built on competition, Nashville's on cooperation.

Our goal, to find an issue that everyone had - and solve it in a way that benefits everybody. In October 2018 we brought the mayors together. 18 of the 35 mayors, all the larger cities, participated. We had a four hour meeting and asked them to select one issue to come around. They selected two. The first was a 'no poaching of businesses' agreement; that historically there were incentives to steal businesses from one city to another, which helps the receiving city but not the region, we're not growing the economy; nothing added, just switching around instead of bringing companies in and growing the pie.

The second issue, most counties have one 911 center, we have 15 - and the mayors wanted to look at consolidating some of the 15. The Foundation helped staff these committees with the mayors and we researched other cities that had successfully implemented 'no poaching agreements'. And in April 2019 we had 23 of the 35 mayors, all of the large cities, sign a no-poaching agreement called 'The Good Neighbor Pledge'. Those 23 represented over 80% of the population of the county. Nanni went on the say that the 911 Call Center consolidation is a complex issue but they are continuing to work on it.

In January 2020 we brought mayors back in and did another deep dive. The level of trust so much greater than in 2018. We asked them to choose one issue - and the issue they chose was very complex - but they wanted to look at consolidating the 17

jail systems that we have in our county - jails the cities do not want to maintain, they are having difficulty financing them, they aren't filling them, buildings in bad shape - they just wanted out of that business.

In March 2020 the Foundation hired PARCA again to research what we actually have in the county now because there was essentially no information on these jail systems, the cost, populations, etc. Nanni said we now have a sub-committee of Mayors headed by Mayor Woodfin - and now the County is interested in perhaps building a regional facility that can contract with the cities and that study is currently underway.

Nanni shared that the regional city councilors have begun to meet and look at issues they all have. They contacted us during the summer, they want to have an organization like the mayors and identify and work on shared issues. We will help by facilitating those meeting. And we hopefully at some point be able to link the mayor's association with the city councilors association.

Nanni said he feels our region's two biggest barriers were 1) realizing our fates are connected to one another; 2) a profound lack of trust that we need to overcome and it will take a lot of intentional effort to do that. Nanni said he feels we have overcome much of these barriers with the mayor's group and that we are better positioned to take on larger issues.

Mary Helen Crowe asked if Nanni anticipated some kind of project that will be more visible to citizens rather than more administrative in benefit like the jail project, as in something that would create a similar spirit of cooperation amongst the citizens of the region. Nanni said the Foundation was 'issue agnostic', that for this to take shape they really need leave it to the Mayors and now City Council members to identify the issues they see as necessary to move the region forward. Jones threw in an example - with all the municipalities struggling related to revenue deficits right now anything the municipalities can do to reduce expenses by working together may result in immediate and visible benefits to the citizens, for example - saving money on jails might mean more potholes can be filled - or the libraries opened. She also said she remembered efforts by Birmingham to expand the bus lines into other municipalities but there was resistance to doing that, contributing to that effort - and that if they all began working together and did something about regional transportation, that could potentially be huge. She said she felt everything about this project was exciting.

Nanni said coincidentally the most important thing they are working with right now has to do with transportation. He said interestingly, in 1952, at the height of busing issues and especially against a backdrop of the racial issues being experienced at the

time, our state government passed a law, it didn't say anything about 'race' but it stated that state transportation dollars can only go toward roads and bridges. So, without saying anything about public transportation or race - they stopped any state dollars from going to transportation. As a result, we are one of only five states in the country that doesn't allow state funding to go to public transportation, meaning that we are never going to have a fixed rail system because we can't attract the matching federal funds for the project(s). It is incumbent upon the cities to fund these projects themselves and they're never going to have the dollars to do that. So they are looking at possible solutions. Nanni said certainly you will not solve it with a \$500,000 bus (and that's what they cost, not even to operate it) - that runs at a quarter capacity. We investigated, found a community that had gotten away from using buses and were paying residents to use UBER, which was an interesting solution that was working in some communities but didn't seem to be an answer for us. Then one day about 2-1/2 years ago Nanni said he was listening to NPR and heard about this new startup called VIA which was a ride-sharing service for public transportation. The first iteration of this was in Arlington Texas. The Foundation called and talked to the city people there and found they loved it and were intending to scrap their bus system and grow the VIA pilot. Nanni said he talked to City Council member Darrell O'Quinn, who at the time was head of the City Transportation Committee - and he already knew about it and had already invited them in for a conversation. Nanni told him the Foundation would like to be part of that conversation also. They courted each other back and forth until finally in December this past year the Community Foundation funded 75% of a pilot, a little over \$500,000, to do a VIA pilot in the west side of Birmingham and all of downtown. Nanni said the pilot project was to address the highest transportation need, linking people with jobs and medical appointments. He said they had six Mercedes vehicles. He says VIA runs project, hires the drivers, etc. Nanni said the service works similar to the UBER app, you request a ride, they pick you up within a block of where you are - then take you, picking up and dropping off others along the way - and drop you within a block of your destination. He said the pilot, Birmingham On Demand (BOD) had been very successful, they had started it December 3, prior to COVID, and had worked up to 1000 rides a week. When Covid hit they went down to 400-500 per week but were now picking back up. The biggest complaint from people is that the region isn't big enough. He shared that because the city pays VIA upfront, the city can charge what they want for the rides - and had set the fee here for \$1.50 per ride. Nanni shared that the avg wait time for a city bus is one hour - and the average wait for BOD pick up was 8 minutes (they also send a message when pick-up is 2 minutes away) and that the average ride was 2-1/2 minutes. He said their riders score the service an average of 4.85 out of 5.

Nanni that though the pilot had been very successful, they feared that with the 60 million cut in city budget for the coming year, the program would be cut. But, he

said, it was one of only 3 items that saw an increase in funding sharing the program went from \$250,000 in city funding this year - to \$900,000 next year. He said Birmingham will keep the pilot at the same size right now but have a goal to grow and increase it. Nanni shared that the number one destination for the west side of town was the Publix on 20th Street because the pilot area was a 'food desert'. He shared that a challenge for riders is understanding the service isn't intended to be door to door, especially for shoppers who have bags on their returns.

Nanni said the City of Birmingham pays roughly \$10 million to the Transit Authority for city bus service when they could likely have a micro-transit solution for the whole city for between \$6 and \$8 million. Nanni said they have met with the County and they are interested - but like with most municipality/governmental entities right now, their finances are strained because of COVID. But he added this was likely the direction of transportation solutions going forward into the future.

Mark Ritter asked Nanni what citizens could do to help the Foundation and these projects. Nanni said he had seen a recent huge shift in the make-up of local leadership in government, giving the example of the recent elections in Homewood, where candidates had been diverse, younger, and seemingly more open to progressive solutions. He said it will be very helpful for everyone to can get to their local leaders and encourage them to become interested and aware of opportunities for regional cooperation with other municipalities.

Sanfelippo thanked Nanni for his presentation. She told residents if they had other questions to email them to highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com and she would forward them on to Nanni.

City Council Update/Darryl Lee

Sanfelippo asked Darryl Lee for an update on city council activities. Lee shared with the group that the city budget had been passed. He said we still regretfully have the furloughs in place and added they were trying to increase infrastructure to help bring in tax dollars to hopefully bring back these employees. Lee said the Library had been the hardest hit, that we hope to get funds coming back in soon. He shared they had negotiated a reimbursement from Jefferson County for over \$9.2 million for COVID funds. Lee explained we had to receive them from the county rather than to the city directly from the federal government because the city population was below 500,000. He shared the reimbursements were for the Police Department, the Fire Department and for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Lee reported that Public Safety had made a change to the contract they submitted, that the Police Department would not be using the facial recognition software that

had been originally proposed because of significant opposition within the community.

Lee told the residents he regretted to inform them that David Silverstein had resurrected his Arlington development project - but that the one bit of good news was that the most controversial part of the project, the hotel, was no longer on the table, that it had been dropped from the development proposal and that some of the proposal specs had now changed. Phillip Foster explained that the 60/35 foot height restrictions represented a compromise to protect the historical and residential character of the neighborhood. He said he felt most people in both Highland Park and Redmont neighborhoods are still very interested in protecting that character. Foster said he knew everyone would like to see something on that property but definitely within the 60-foot covenant restriction - which would also be consistent with the height limitation approved in the master plan for 'mixed use medium'. Sanfelippo added that it would seem he will still have to request rezoning which he cannot do without getting the covenant lifted. Foster said it seems to him that the mayor isn't interested in going against the neighborhoods. Dr Lee added that the last time he spoke to Mayor Woodfin, which was yesterday, he was definitely in support of the neighborhoods.

Mark Ritter asked if Silverstein should get neighborhood approval before the covenant gets rewritten. Dr Lee said he agreed that it would seem that it would be very helpful for Silverstein to come to the neighborhood and share the new proposal and see if it is now in line with what the neighborhood can live comfortably with. Lee said he would take our issues/questions back, continue to monitor the situation and communicate any related or time-sensitive information back to Sanfelippo.

Sanfelippo said she and the attorney for the developer (Randall Minor) had discussed the possibility of a small Zoom meeting sometime during the next couple of weeks to discuss the situation - and also inviting Silverstein to present again to the neighborhood. She recommended that Lee circle with Julie Barnard (city attorney) and Kim Spearl (city zoning). Lee said he would do that. Lee remarked that it was interesting, that the whole project had been completely dormant, no information, no apparent interest - and then all of a sudden, within the last 48 hours, it emerges anew. Jones asked why would the project be considered now, when Highland Park was on the verge of starting its framework planning process. Lee agreed that the timing was bad, that he thought this was more an issue of Silverstein pushing the project right now.

Sanfelippo asked if Lee had an update on the Hanover Circle paving project. Lee said he had put in a request for an update but had not yet received it and would follow up the next day.

Sanfelippo said she saw when Councilor Abbott sent the follow-up email to Stephanie McGee about the residential parking zones but she didn't think she had seen a reply - and if Lee knew about any update. Lee said he had not heard an update on that project.

Mary Helen Crowe asked about the property on/near Rhodes Circle, where developers had wanted to build condos close to the street and the neighborhood had taken a position against that development. Crowe said the lot had become very overgrown and they had seen a city sign on the property stating it had to be mowed or the city would do it. Sanfelippo explained that anyone could call and report a property for being overgrown by calling 311 or emailing us. She also said she thought the project was on the back burner for H2 Development.

Sanfelippo said she had sent an email to Artemus about dilapidated and abandoned homes in the area but had not heard a reply. Lee said he would reach out to him the next day.

Councilwoman Abbott shared that Lakey Boyd had resigned and that was a contributing reason the Parking Permit project was stalled, that there was no one to work on it.

Mary Helen Crowe reported continuing issues with 3308 Cliff Road, saying it had been turned into an AIRBNB - and that it was now, essentially, a party house. She said there were often catering trucks, blocked streets, noise, partying until 11 pm. Lee asked Crowe to email him details on the address, what was happening, a link to the AIRBNB listing and to include photos if possible. Jones cautioned everyone to be careful taking photos of individuals who might not want the photos taken, to be safe. Lee shared that short term rentals was an issue that the state legislature hadn't addressed so cities were having to manage it using codes they could find that were applicable. Councilwoman Abbott asked about the zoning for the address, Crowe replied it was at one time apartments and still might be zoned for that.

Sanfelippo said she did not think our Community Resource Officer Jasmine Fells was on the call but that she had reported the tree project was moving ahead, as was the project to replenish the poop bag stations and replace a damaged dispenser in the parks.

Ray Davis reported meeting with the City's Department of Horticulture at the CrossPlex, saying that both Danita Ryan (Head of Horticulture) and Teddy Kapera (Weed Control, Dept of Public Works) were present. He said the purpose of the meeting was to figure out what Highland Park can do about the many weeds

between sidewalks and streets - and in the parks, a problem made worse by the irregular mowing schedule. He shared the 3 primary culprits were dallisgrass, spurge and mimosa weed. He said the weed control had previously been the responsibility of Parks and Recreation but that they hadn't done much with it and it had now been turned over to Horticulture. He said they have good intentions and good programs but like with all other city services right now, were stretched in the way of funding. Davis said when he proposed that perhaps Highland Park could underwrite some of the efforts with neighborhood funds the whole tenor of the meeting changed, that the city people were impressed that Highland Park might be willing to do that - and that it made us appear willing to be a partner and not just a squeaky wheel customer. Davis said he had gotten a cost of \$3,087.25 for the program - which would provide a direct means of weed control for the parks and Highland Avenue, from the 280 overpass to Clairmont - for 12 months. Davis said he wanted to recommend that the neighborhood approve this expenditure for this program. Sanfelippo asked about the chemicals that would be used. Davis replied that the city had been using 9 chemicals for years, for herbicides, and the one used depends on whether it's being used on trees, shrubs, flowers, weeds, or grass. He said they are now using two new chemicals to fight weeds, Derigo and Esplanade, both proven to work on our problem broadleaf pests. He said he had researched the chemicals and believed them to be safe if properly used - and he had no reason to think they wouldn't be properly used. He also said he thought this a good program and didn't really see an alternative to it. John Kearney asked if Davis thought these chemicals were a threat to bees or butterflies. Davis replied that it was his understanding that these chemicals were no threat to these insects. Jones asked when would be a good time to start the program if it were approved by the neighborhood. Davis replied the primary applications would be in fall and spring and given the time it would take to get the funds approved and to Horticulture, perhaps February 2021 would be a good goal. He emphasized that the neighborhood's investment would get them a 12-month process that would include rework where/when needed in the covered area. Sanfelippo said she would forward the request to the Spending Committee for their recommendation - and that if anyone had any other questions or thoughts to email them to highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com

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 Recycling and Recovery Center on 41st 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 for the fall/winter on the first Saturday of each month from 3 to 7 pm.

Sanfelippo shared the city had published the Large Trash and Brush for the rest of 2020. The remaining dates for the year were: Thursday, October 15, Thursday November 5, Saturday November 21 (because of Thanksgiving) and Thursday December 17. She reminded residents to make 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.

Jones shared information about deadlines related to the November 3 election: 1) the Voter registration Deadline was October 19, 2020; 2) the Absentee Ballot Application deadline for submission was October 29; 3) the deadline for hand-delivery of absentee ballots is November 2; and 4) that the deadline for mailed in Absentee Ballots was 12 noon on November 3.

Sanfelippo reminded the group that the deadline to respond to the 2020 Census was October 31.

Jones reported the ad hoc 501c3 committee continued to work on the application process. Jones said she had reached out to a few other neighborhoods who had established these sorts of non-profits. Jones also reported that the Communications Committee was working on a letter to go to condo/apartment building managers, association officers - about the need to bag their leaves.

Sanfelippo gave a special thanks to Adam Ward for his continued work on the sidewalk repair project saying their efforts were still underway. She also shared that trees had been ordered for a second round of plantings later in 2020 or in 2021.

Sanfelippo thanked everyone for their attendance saying the next meeting would be at 6 pm Tuesday November 10 via Zoom. The October 2020 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association was adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association