

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

May 2021 Minutes

Meeting Date: May 11, 2021

At 6 pm President Elizabeth Sanfelippo welcomed everyone arriving into the virtually held Highland Park Neighborhood Association May meeting, introducing herself as President, Mark Ritter as Vice-President and Judy Jones as Secretary. Sanfelippo expressed appreciation to Stephen Foster, President of the Five Points Neighborhood Association, for setting up Highland Park's meetings via Zoom.

Sanfelippo apologized for sending the April Meeting Minutes late and asked if everyone had had opportunity to look them over - and whether anyone had any corrections or addition to those minutes. Being none Mary Helen Crowe moved adoption of the April Meeting Minutes as presented. Diann Weatherly seconded Crowe's motion. Sanfelippo took a vote; there were 10 yeas and none opposed so the April meeting minutes were approved. She thanked Jones for her ongoing good job on the minutes for Highland Park meetings.

Sanfelippo confirmed attendees as per city instructions, doing a verbal roll call of Highland Park residents on the call (additional names were added later as individuals joined the meeting).

Sanfelippo said she didn't think there was anyone from the Fire Department, Police Department or Public Works on the call. She said she had not heard about much in the way of crime in the neighborhood, other than unscooped poop - but that we were working on this! She said she did get an email from the manager (Deanna Bagby) at The Crescent, aka the Sirotte Building, who wanted to let us know that Sunday, April 25th around 5 pm one of the tenants came by and parked his car in the side lot of the parking area. Then around 6 pm he discovered that his catalytic converter had been stolen from his SUV. Sanfelippo said she had heard a little about thieves doing this on Nextdoor but that this was the first confirmation of it occurring in our area, that apparently thieves can get \$200 for the metals in the converter. She added that if it was bolted in instead of welded that it can be removed in as little as a minute. Sanfelippo thanked Bagby for sharing this with the neighborhood and said that unfortunately she wasn't sure what could be done about it, that if anyone experienced this type of theft to be sure and file a police report and let her know as well.

City of Birmingham Department of Transportation/James Fowler, Director

Sanfelippo introduced the speaker, James Fowler, the Director of the Department of Transportation, adding that he was also a resident of Highland Park. Fowler thanked Highland Park for having him this evening. He said they had been in their current house on 31st for about 2 years now and they love it. He said he and his wife have a dog, they

frequently walk to the park - and that was one thing he loves about the neighborhood, its walkability. He said having a walkable neighborhood was really important to them when they started choosing where they wanted to live, adding that this was also a reason he was so passionate about 'transportation'. Fowler said he had been the city's Director of Transportation this summer will be three years. He said since he has been there the department has been through a lot of changes much in the same way that similarly our city has been through a lot of changes in terms of infrastructure, how the city is managed, its direction. He said he wanted to point out a few of these things that people may or may not have heard about in the news, things that certainly matter to him and they affect how the Department of Transportation is managed and how other city departments are managed. He said when he started with the city there was a huge deferred maintenance backlog, adding that there still is. Fowler said there was an awareness that the city needed a significant investment in infrastructure. He said infrastructure can mean, in addition to resurfacing, sidewalks, sewers and water lines, also the buildings the city maintains, hundreds of millions of dollars in assets if not over a billion dollars by the time you add all the value up. So - they knew there was this maintenance backlog but there was also a massive deferred pension deficit that the city had not fully funded its pension obligations in the last two decades - and because of that, there was an effect on city operations because our bond rating was starting to be affected by that liability. He said there were a lot of cities struggling with this across the country and unable to overcome such massive pension debt. He said it starts to affect 'how much can we invest in our infrastructure'. He said this issue hits home pretty quickly in his department, but in truth, it affects all the city departments. He said in addition to this, a problem that it's not unique to Birmingham in the whole of the United States but that it is unique to Birmingham in our region, and to a degree within the southeast, is that they have a lot of neighborhoods that don't look like Highland Park, where folks have left the city. He said that in the last 50 years about a third of Birmingham's population has left the city and generally migrated out into the region. As a result the region has stayed about the same size but the city has lost about a third of its population. He went on saying one of the big challenges to the backlog is all the blight in a lot of Birmingham neighborhoods, that residents might recall one of Mayor Woodfin's campaign platform issues was how we were going to go about demolishing houses. Fowler says the things he cares about - streets, infrastructure, walkability, our programs, initiatives, etc - so when he walks in the door he is hopeful they can fund all those things right away but the truth is they are all pushing and pulling for a very stretched pool of resources.

Fowler said a couple of big things that have happened is 1) that the city through a couple of constrained budget years, the last three years, is on the verge of fully funding the city's pension obligation and that has seemed to be a major step in stabilizing the city's bond rating which gives us a much stronger financial foundation as a city. He said one of the ways they have been able to achieve this as a city is that if you look at the city of Birmingham and the number of employees per capita, our city has a much larger budget than any city in the state of Alabama, that Birmingham's budget is about twice that of the

next largest city in the state. He explained the budget had been constrained over the past several years but one of the ways they have found savings in the budget is constraining positions in the city so that the number of employees has been constrained - which on one hand creates a tightness with our services but on the other hand that has been one of the ways we've been able to shore up the finances of the city and put ourselves on a much stronger footing. Fowler said this is the backdrop against which we are trying to go through transitions in our Department of Transportation and the city's transportation infrastructure and all of that shades what we are trying to achieve. He said taking a step down from city-wide to our department - when he started they had a Department of Traffic Engineering, because our city, like so many around the country, had a traditional focus on how to move as many cars as efficiently as we can through the city. Fowler said he knew, as did Mayor Woodfin and many councilors that supported this effort, knew that we wanted to change the definition of what 'transportation' was. So they changed the title of the department to Department of Transportation to acknowledge the responsibility that we have toward pedestrians and transit users into cyclists in addition to motorists as well. Fowler shared it wasn't just a name change, that there were a number of initiatives that came along with that - 1) they basically built a position within the department for someone to manage special programs and initiatives and that person oversees parking, coordination with the Transit Service, scooters and many other initiatives; 2) they looked at all their design policies and hired a new design manager, Bert Kuyrkendall, adding that his design philosophy is a lot different from what we've had in the past as a city and really as a nation in its focus to design for pedestrians and walkability first, then build on that with transit usage and cyclists and then where cars fit into all that.

Fowler said with all the financial shoring up and the restructuring of the department, as a city we've had to suffer some with the depth of our staffing to just provide basic services - for example, striping, following up when someone has a stop sign request. He said basic services they've tried to protect is, for example, the ability to restore signals when there is a storm or power issue. He said with this last big storm they had about 40 traffic lights that went into 'flash' and that they had crews that went out in bucket trucks to restore them. He said they've also tried to protect their striping and signage services though it's not to the level they would like it to be. He said they were currently working on passing a budget for the coming year and his department has prioritized hiring staff to work on the striping.

Fowler said he wanted to share about several initiatives they were working on. One, the city-wide scooter program, saying 'Shared Microbility' is the term they use which includes bikes and scooters, shared devices. He said another initiative was adding an electronic pay option to the city's parking meters - 'Park Mobile', adding that this had been rolled out but there was more to do beyond this initial step. Fowler said his departments also coordinates with VIA, Micro-Transit Service, company that operates the supplemental shuttle service that utilizes Mercedes vans and an app - 'Birmingham On

Demand'. Fowler said his department has also gotten involved with resurfacing and sidewalk planning, that they had not been involved with this previously. He said they were involved in bridge inspections and maintenance, they now have a bridge inspector and have close to a hundred structures around the city that they inspect and maintain. Fowler said they've also started a 'traffic calming' initiative which has become very popular in terms of folks requesting these services. Fowler said they had gone as a city, like a lot of cities, without having systems for looking at how we transition into a modern era where we are focused on walkability, how we place stop signs, how we approve and install things like speed cushions, speed humps, those devices but also blinking signs, radar signs, all of these things that Fowler says goes into 'traffic calming'. He said they have a backlog of 120 streets around the city where folks have asked for help in looking at the design of the street to modify driver behavior. He said, with a chuckle, that he knows 31st Street gets a lot of requests, saying if anything it probably does suffer because it is his street.

Sanfelippo thanked Fowler for his remarks and asked for any questions, first catching up with people who had entered the meeting after roll call was taken. Sanfelippo told Fowler that she had first encountered VIA when she lived in New York City, as an alternative to Lyft and Uber. She asked him if he knew whether the city subsidizes the VIA program there. Fowler said he was sure that they did.

Sanfelippo shared a 'fun fact' while waiting for questions (live and via the zoom chat) - saying the sidewalk in front of your home is actually your responsibility to maintain. She asked Fowler how residents would go about making repairs to them. Fowler said Birmingham is not much different from other big old cities in that its current backlog for sidewalk maintenance is estimated at around \$200 million. He said from the research they have done, most cities have a similar requirement in their code that homeowners are responsible for maintaining the sidewalk in front of their home. He said obviously 'this' is not going to maintain the sidewalk, there's just no universe where everyone is going to adequately maintain their sidewalk. He said what a lot of cities have done, and the direction that we will likely go in, is coming up with some sort of partnership program where the city can help partner with the homeowner or neighborhoods to co-invest in basic sidewalk maintenance and infrastructure. He said if someone wanted to repair or replace a sidewalk in front of their house they would go through Planning Engineering and Permits (PEP) to obtain a permit to replace the walk. Fowler added that Birmingham was a long way off from having such a partnership in place, that development of such a program would be a heavy lift for the city right now. Sanfelippo said someone had also asked about curbs that were in bad shape as well. She said there was another question about whether the city was going to come back and correct the levels of the handicap ramps at corners. She asked Mary Helen Crowe for more information on the question, whether there were specific locations that were a problem. Crowe replied there were locations where paving projects had created an issue, where someone in a wheelchair couldn't get to the ramp because of the difference in street/sidewalk ramp level rendering

the ramp not functional. Fowler said that's a good point - that paving projects sometimes create problems and sometimes the issue is caused by retro-fitting a ramp where there had not been one before. He said he thought the best way to address this would be to create a list of where the problem locations were and the city would follow up with the contractor and work through that the best they could. Crowe asked where to submit the list. Sanfelippo asked Crowe to report it to 311 but to also send the list to her along with the 311 ticket confirmation number.

Fowler said he wanted to share a little about 311 - that there were many links in that process and that where this administration has decided to start shoring up the process is with the software, getting it to a more functional place - and building a team of people who can at least 'receive' the call. Fowler said addressing these issues do not necessarily fix process issues further down the chain, giving an example of reporting a pothole. He said he believes their Public Works Department does a great job, they fill in a lot of potholes but that they are still very much overwhelmed with the volume of those requests - that 311 may be doing their job receiving and communicating the issue - but that Public Works still has that backlog that affects their ability to respond in a timely fashion. He said creating the right systems on the back end within the receiving departments to be able to effectively produce the results that he thinks people are expecting to see, that he thinks 'that' is next in the administration's efforts to build for the city. He went back to his initial remarks about the city's efforts at stabilizing major debt obligations, focusing on blight, stabilizing the bond rating, that now we have stabilized some of those things that gives us a better foundation to focus on some of these systems that will hopefully, on the back end, start to deliver some of those results.

Sanfelippo read another resident question - when the streets get paved who is responsible for raising the manhole covers? Fowler said it should be the contractor who does that work, that they can and should adjust the covers as part of that work. He said it was a new-ish group that had been set up for this work within the last two year, a Capital Projects Group saying the reason he raised that distinction is because previously when a lot of these paving projects were done, the same group that managed the delivery of those capital projects was very much blended in with a whole other long list of responsibilities and so Fowler said he thought a whole lot of those little details that are important when a project would get delivered, would just get lost in the noise of all the other services that team was also responsible for. He went on to say that because we as a city recognize the importance and magnitude of delivering capital projects well there is now a dedicated Capital Projects Group that has been stood up to do that. Fowler said he thinks that is probably who Highland Park has been working with, that it was some of the same names but the structure was significantly different. Fowler said he thought that was who we were working with on Highland Park's sidewalk project.

Sanfelippo said ‘excellent segue’ and shared that she did follow up with Michael Eddington with the city and the start date for Phase 1 for sidewalks along Highland Avenue is imminent.

Sanfelippo took a resident’s question about storm sewer covers, whether concrete is better than metal as they all seem to get askew creating a huge hole which would seem to be a big liability for the city. Fowler said this responsibility falls to the Department of Public Works who, he said, does a great job managing a huge volume of need. He said he didn’t know what was best in terms of material. He said they do get knocked by vehicles and that he thinks, with the sheer volume of calls taken by Public Works, that these tend to get deprioritized. He said his perspective had been broadened since he came to work for the city, that in Highland Park, things are beautiful - the streets are nice, the sidewalks aren’t perfect but we have them - and that many other areas within the city are dealing with severe blight problems, a lot of our city resources get consumed by these areas - picking up litter, cutting grass in abandoned spaces, etc. Mary Helen Crowe pointed out that a decade or so ago, a young child fell into one of those sewers and was swept away, that something like that would likely represent a significant liability for the city. Fowler said he agreed that it is a significant concern. Sanfelippo encouraged residents to report displaced sewer covers to 311 (and highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com).

Sanfelippo said a resident had asked how the city was preparing for transportation related to the World Games. Fowler said the city had hired a consultant, the same consultant the World Games is using to develop a Birmingham Transportation Plan for their operations - and they are now helping us develop our plans, that they are looking at parking capacity for venues and how the public can move about between the different venues. He said there wasn’t a complete plan at the present time but that they were working through it. Fowler said the consultant was Calloway Transportation and they specifically work on major events and they have a long history of working on international events like this. Fowler said he is hopeful that the city can leverage some of the investments they are making in infrastructure, either building or already in place - for example, they are getting ready to start construction on a bus rapid transit project and that will connect a number of those venues. Fowler said the existing transit authority’s system is a part of the planning group, that there are a lot of ways to leverage their service.

A resident asked when VIA was going to expand the service area. Fowler said he didn’t know the official answer but he could provide a few highpoints. 1) the area where it is likely most effective would be where there is an existing bus route but the route is underutilized. He explained this is because VIA micro transit exists in a hybrid space between individual ride-share, having your own car and having a high capacity bus. He went on saying it fits into this hybrid space that gives a lot more flexibility and so it can provide more efficient coverage than a big bus over a large area. He said his expectation is that in the future we will start looking at replacing some of the underutilized bus routes

in some areas with the micro transit service - but that hasn't been decided yet, it's not official yet but it was certainly something the Transit Authority was factoring into their long range planning. Fowler said he was excited to announce that the Transit Authority was going through a very big process to re-look at all of their transit routes around the city and region and that's something that hasn't been done for many decades and is long overdue. Fowler said our system, like a lot of systems around the country, was very much designed to cover a really broad area to provide coverage but that a lot of cities around the country now are going through a redesign so they can focus more on frequency as in the frequency a bus goes along on a route - so as opposed to spreading out buses across the whole city the focus is on key areas and deliver a high quality frequent service to those key areas, that seems to drive up a lot of ridership and has been very effective in other cities that have gone through that redesign. Fowler said Birmingham is going through that redesign now and micro transit is part of that equation.

Sanfelippo said someone had offered a comment that VIA should be in partnership with the Transit Authority where VIA provides the last mile especially in less dense neighborhoods, that this would allow BJCTA to realign their bus service and focus on express service with free transfers to and from VIA, that would improve overall frequency, speed and quality of the transit services. Fowler said that very much aligns with the ideals he was just describing which is, in some of our less dense neighborhoods which do not generate high ridership for these big buses, that's probably the most effective place where we can expand micro transit and provide a flexible service that feeds into a more frequent core bus service. He said that although micro transit was started as a pilot under the city's umbrella, at some point in the future (time frame to be determined) that probably does need to go under the umbrella of the Transit Authority.

A resident asked if a homeowner has liability if sued because someone hurt themselves on the sidewalk in front of their house. Fowler said according to our ordinances yes, the responsibility is on the homeowner to maintain their sidewalks. But, he said, he can't predict how this gets interpreted when it plays out in a court of law.

A resident asked for an update on the resident parking permit program. Fowler said the honest response is the same person that is managing our intermodal system, our VEO scooter and bikeshare rollout, and VIA micro transit - as well as other initiatives - is the same person that would lead the initiative to build this program, that while they have continued to have it on their agenda, it just continues to slide because of the quantity of other initiatives that are being pursued by the city related to innovative transportation. Fowler said he didn't want to imply there had been no work on the project, that they have a framework that has been drafted by some initial research - it's just the backlog of other important initiatives. Fowler said his hope had been to have it in place by this fall because that is when students returning to UAB's campus but he doesn't know if that will be the case, but it continues to stay on their agenda.

A resident asked if the city was monitoring safety consequences related to increased scooter usage? And is the city responsible for these injuries like the recent one near Pepper Place? Fowler replied that the users and the motorists ultimately are responsible for injuries, so all users need to follow all applicable laws. He said the incident at Pepper Place was extremely unfortunate and that he doesn't have all the details from what happened. From the perspective of traffic and transportation downtown, he doesn't know specifically who was at fault in that incident but that he does know that the Birmingham region is identified as one of the most dangerous places to be a pedestrian, based on research from 'Transportation for America', that they look at crashes around the country. Fowler said he didn't know what Birmingham's current ranking was, that the report came out just a little while ago- but that in recent rankings we were like 13th most dangerous place to be a pedestrian. Fowler said he didn't think it was a conversation about only scooter usage, that is was more a conversation about our city in particular, within the region, about vulnerable users - and to him that includes pedestrians, transit users, cyclists, scooter users - all in that context, those are all vulnerable users. Fowler said he thinks our city needs to go through the same paradigm shift that other cities around the country are going through which is - in the past we believed we could make our roadways safer by making them safer for vehicles and removing obstructions and he knows within the industry that is actually not the case, that the more you start to separate obstructions from vehicles and the more we slick up our roads for vehicles to move safely, the more dangerous they start to become because the speeds increase and the severity of the crashes actually increase with that. Fowler said in our livable centers we need to focus on how streets are designed to encourage lower speeds for our drivers. He said, for example, if we think about the large one ways that go through our downtown area, that is designed in such a way, for those of us who are drivers, the cues we receive are telling us we can go pretty fast. Fowler said that is dangerous to what we are trying to achieve which is a walkable multi-modal environment, that we are going to have to, over time, look at our streets and find ways to slow vehicles down and make our areas more livable. He added we don't want to get rid of cars, that's not the goal, but we do need to design our streets in such a way that it sends us cues that we need to slow down. Sanfelippo said a great example of this, giving kudos to Fowler, is Oporto-Madrid where the city has taken the 4-lane to 2, added a bike lane - and it just seems to be inherently working better. Fowler said he thought that was indeed a perfect example, because their department, knowing what they know today, would not design a 4-lane road because there are inherently higher crash rates along 4-lane roadways than there are on 3-lane roadways - and 3-lane roadways can carry just about as much traffic - and the safety benefits are huge. Fowler said he has had complaints but ultimately it's a good thing because it has reduced speeds which reduces crash rates and the severity of crashes. Fowler told residents to please expect to see more of this over time. He said the projects can be controversial because people just want to 'drive through fast' - and they have to design streets now in a way that encourages a safe speed.

Sanfelippo relayed another chat question asking Fowler to speak to the Department of Transportation's short and long term plans for technology upgrades to work more efficiently. Fowler said with respect to technology, right now they were focused on basic safety, primarily keeping traffic signals functioning. He said they were looking ahead at how the signals could be better coordinated or at least functioning a little smarter - 1) they are developing a long range plan, they are hiring a consultant to look at the city's signal system, and come up with short term, mid-term and long term goals - a strategic plan for the signals. He said, for example, our intersections can be a lot smarter about basic 'detection'. He said they used to do that with 'loops' embedded in the pavement but they're doing it more now with cameras and/or radar. Fowler said the intersections around St Vincent's were an example of where they needed to do a better job of this, that drivers wait for signals at those intersections on Clairmont because there is no detection. He said another one he was aware of was at the Goo Goo Car Wash on 24th Street at 4th Ave South - and on weekends when you're going north, there's a south bound left turn arrow, you can't see it but you're just sitting there and waiting - and there's nothing happening - and that's because there's no detection right there at that intersection. Fowler said those examples exist across the whole city adding that if you address detection for any one or two of those locations, it's not major - but to look at the whole of the issue, it's insurmountable.

Sanfelippo referenced a question related to crosswalks - said she had looked it up as it related to Independent Presbyterian Church and their day school pickups in the mornings and afternoons - that IPC has some cones that remind people it is AL state law to yield to pedestrians in the crosswalks. Sanfelippo said she understood that if someone was standing on the curb, looking like they were about to cross the street that you, as a driver, are supposed to yield to them. She asked Fowler if that was true, he said generally yes, that there was a big nuance to that, as in - as long as it was an unsignalized crosswalk, then the pedestrian does have the right of way. Fowler said that we know, that at some of those mid-block locations, compliance is not always high and that pedestrians still have to pay attention, that it may be legal to step out but being legal doesn't help you if you're killed by an oncoming vehicle. He said the big exception is at signalized intersections/crosswalks, that if there is a traffic signal then the pedestrian has to wait to get the green (white crossing signal) signal to cross. Sanfelippo (sort of jokingly) said if Fowler wanted to get us some paint that she thinks there would be Highland Park volunteers who would repaint some of the faded crosswalks in the neighborhood.

Fowler said he wanted to share a couple of remarks about intersections he and Sanfelippo had discussed that his department had not gotten to - as in several confusing intersections along Highland around the parks. He said he does feel that those intersections need to be 'all way stops'. He said one was where Rojo was, 30th and Highland - and then a few blocks away, at Rhodes Park, that should probably be an 'all stop' intersection as well. He said he does expect they will get to converting those to 'all way stops' at some point in the future.

Sanfelippo remarked that we were working on sidewalks but there were a lot of places in the city that didn't have them. She said yes, some parts of our streets are very bad but if you drive around other parts of the city it's even worse. She asked Fowler who gets his lowest score for the worse stretch of road that he knows needs to be repaired or that is hot on the repair list. Fowler asked if the question related to within Highland Park. Sanfelippo replied she was curious for both the whole city and Highland Park. He said within the city that we have so many blighted neighborhoods that you could point to any number of them and give them a very low score. He said there is an exciting initiative that UAB and many other partners have taken on, to start and make repairs in some of those neighborhoods, called the UAB Grant Challenge - or by another name, UAB Live Health Smart. He said one of the areas his department was involved with was in the Kingston neighborhood and in North Titusville, Bush Hills and eventually over in East Lake - those are neighborhoods with some really severe infrastructure challenges and so they were working with UAB and several major contractors who are donating their services (including Brasfield & Gorrie, Dunn Construction, B. L. Harbert, and he thought there was another that would help with East Lake) - those areas needed a lot of help so there's kind of a community investment in resources there. So, he said, city wide, those are definitely up there on the list. Fowler said within our neighborhood there are plenty of streets that have a lot of need, that he would point to one that the neighborhood has been discussing for a long time, that needs a lot of help - Hanover Circle. He said it's an old concrete roadway but it does look like a bomber flew over and dropped bombs in different areas along the street. He said this project is real, that it sat for a while but that it is now fully funded and is about to be bid. Fowler said he wanted to point out one more thing that is important to realize - that one of the city's biggest challenges maintaining the quality of the roadways around the city is not just potholes where the asphalt is falling apart but it's really the utilities - the Water Works, the Gas Company, the sewer lines, the storm sewers. Fowler said what they're trying to do is, let's say if the city receives a big influx of infrastructure money, something that is high on his list is working with these utility companies to upgrade some of these really old utility lines. He said his house is 100 years old - so he doesn't know if the water line in front of his house is also 100 years old - or has been replaced once and is 50 years old - and that is beyond its useful life. Fowler said there are all these places along 31st street where we've punched into the roadway to fix leaks or make adjustments to this old outdated water line that's underneath and that is true citywide. He said while the Water Works has a pretty decent budget to go through and replace old water lines as a part of a 30 year plan. And so if we do receive an influx of infrastructure money something that Fowler thinks will be important (he doesn't know if this is shared across all departments) - he thinks we should at least in part try to replace some of our outdated utilities because this was going to result in better quality streets.

Sanfelippo said she thought it had been Fowler who had mentioned they had started having monthly meetings with ALDOT and the utility companies to provide them with a list of streets with paving projects pending - to ask them to execute any pending repair

projects for those locations before the streets are paved. Fowler said that was correct, they have a monthly coordination meeting where they look at what is being planned to be resurfaced and then additionally like, for example on 31st Street, it was probably resurfaced 3 or 4 years ago and has since been impacted many times since then - there is actually an escalated fee that utilities have to pay to impact that street even for emergency repair, they pay several thousand dollars per impact after a street is resurfaced. We don't actually get to see the benefit of that, but the city does get to recoup at least some money that can be put back into maintaining streets.

Sanfelippo asked if there were any more questions. She said questions could always be emailed later to highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com. She thanked Fowler for speaking to the neighborhood tonight and expressed appreciation for all he and his department do for our community.

City Council Update/Councilor Valerie Abbott

Sanfelippo introduced District 3's (Highland Park's) City Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Abbott told Fowler she really appreciated his presentation. She expressed hope that the people with the scooters quit littering the neighborhoods with them by dropping them wherever they land because that's a problem. And they drive like idiots and that's a problem. She said her issue was if you, a driver, hit one of them, what kind of insurance do they carry? Because the car driver has to carry insurance by law, when the scooter operators cause an accident, how do they pay? She said these are important questions, adding they don't wear helmets - day or night, these are serious issues for those of us who live in these neighborhoods.

Abbott went on to say they did have a council meeting that day, saying thankfully they are limited to only essential city business and so a lot of the falderal that the council normally engages in is eliminated - which is the only delight of the pandemic that she can think of. She said their agenda had tons of overgrown weedy lots and houses that needed to be demolished and thankfully, for the most part, our neighborhoods don't need to have houses demolished, we just need for people to maintain them.

Abbott said they funded the final demolition of Banks High School which has been a lingering eyesore for the neighborhood it sits in with all kinds of vandalism, gunfire - the surrounding area has just been miserable for probably 20 years. She said hopefully someone will come in and build houses there. She said the Council did have some discussion this afternoon at a special meeting about the Federal Recovery Act money that is coming to Birmingham. She said they actually received a \$74 million check and that these funds will help repair the damage that has been done to city's residents and businesses by the pandemic. Abbott said there was a wide range of things that can be done with this money - but not street paving and sidewalks - but that it does include water services and sewer repairs. She said the Water Works is in charge of water but the city does an abysmal job of dealing with sewers - not only can we not keep sewer covers in

place, which is a public safety issue, that she remembers when the young girl fell into one and was swept away, that most of the people in the city now have forgotten about that incident because apparently they think that cutting/weeding overgrown lots and demolishing houses is more important than dealing with open storm sewer inlets - especially if someone is walking at night and steps into one. Abbott added that this money should allow the city to do some things that really need to be taken care of. She said her take on a sewer repair is that you can't really attend a ribbon cutting for them so we don't do them. Abbott said it's good we're getting these funds, that half is already in the bank and we're supposed to get the other half in perhaps two years. She said we just got the information on it today and there's 151 pages to read. She said if anyone wants to read it, she would be glad to forward it to them - if fact, she said, she would send it to Sanfelippo. Abbott said there was an 8-page synopsis that outlined what the city can and cannot spend money on. She said this is very good news because it's money the City didn't have until it came into the bank today.

Abbott asked if there were any questions. Sanfelippo said she knew the city had allocated funds for replacement of lights at Legion Field and a couple of other parks and as a result, someone had emailed her and asked what was going on with the lights in Rhodes Park. Abbott replied these are locations where World Games events are going to occur. She said the city doesn't maintain anything until it breaks - and the light poles at George Ward and Memorial Parks are made of wood. She said the question in her mind is that this is a no-bid contract that's been given to Alabama Power and that she has received some calls from electrical contractors who want to know how the city can do a 'no-bid' contract with Alabama Power for something that is not part of their PSC mandated utility provision, because those contractors would like a chance to bid on these millions of dollars in work and they're trying to figure out what the city is up to. She said she is wondering that herself because we do have state bid laws in Alabama that require work to be bid. She said the council members who have parks with these issues really want the problems to be fixed but they want it to be done legally. She said they are taking a second look at the process to be certain that everything is above board.

Sanfelippo asked if there were any more questions for Councilor Abbott. Darryl Lee spoke up informing the group the City has a Rental/Utilities Assistance Program to assist people with issues related to the Covid crisis. Lee said information is on the city's website - <https://www.birminghamal.gov/renthelp>. He said anyone needing assistance who did not have internet could call 844-287-1250. Lee said in addition to this program the State of Alabama has a program that will assist with mortgages and they will have information on this posted as well. Councilor Abbott thanked Lee for sharing that information and added that the program was for individuals who, for instance, lost their job during the pandemic and can no longer pay their rent. She said the Federal government has had a moratorium on evictions and in some cases the landlords can't make his own mortgage payment because the renters are unable to pay their rent. She said the company the city is engaging to handle this program is partnering with Aletheia

House and they will have a card, like a credit card, but all it can be used for is paying rent and utilities. She said they believe they have come up with a fraud proof way to administer the program and help people who have been hurt by the pandemic. She said she had been very impressed with the presentation by the group that's going to help with the program, that she has confidence they're going to get it right.

Community Resource Representative Update/Jasmine Fells

Sanfelippo said that Jasmine Fells, Highland Park's Community Resource Representative, was not on the call tonight.

Old Business

Sanfelippo said Highland Park was waiting on the weed prevention that the neighborhood had allocated funds for, that she thought there were some delays with city processing but that should be in the works soon.

Sanfelippo recognized Anne Sunkel for an update on the formation of a 501-c3. She clarified this effort was separate from the neighborhood but that we were championing and encouraging this effort so that the organization can accept tax deductible donations and put that money back into the neighborhood. Sunkel said the process had been ongoing to finalize the documents required to make application for a new 501-c3 organization with both the Feds and the state of Alabama. She said right now the project is being worked on by herself, Judy Jones and Rowena Frazier and wanted to finalize the effort as soon as possible. She said they were meeting tomorrow evening to work on the documents, that had been the difficult part of the project, going through every word, every sentence to make sure it's what we want to present to the IRS as well as to the state. Sunkel explained the funds used by the Highland Park Neighborhood Association come from the city and it's a long process to request and receive the funds and the funds have to be utilized for an approved project. She said there are other ways they feel they can raise money in the neighborhood with different events or grants and put it into a non-profit where we can allocate it ourselves as to what we want. She said what she was there to ask for tonight is donations for fees that must be submitted with the various applications. She said the group has reviewed the requirements and they feel they can make application using the 1023-EZ form which is significantly less with respect to effort and fee. She shared that fee is \$275 to the federal government, that there was another \$100 fee to the state, as well as a possible \$50 fee to Jefferson County for a total of \$425. She said we do not have our tax ID yet and have not opened a checking account, so her idea was that people interested in helping could Venmo her. She said she was willing to contribute and that she already knew of a few others who had expressed an interest. Sanfelippo thanked the group for the hard work they were putting into this effort, that she knows they have been very thoughtful in terms of reviewing the documents. Sunkel asked for any feedback

from the group. Mary Helen Crowe suggested information on the organization be put in the neighborhood newsletter so everyone would know what they were doing - and include information on how to help. Sanfelippo suggested including Sunkel's email address rather than her Venmo details so that interested parties could get in touch with her individually.

New Business

Sanfelippo asked if there was any new business. None was offered.

Announcements and Reminders

Sanfelippo reminded the group that recycling is only the first Wednesday of each month. She cautioned residents not to put recycling out on other days because it would just be picked up with the trash and taken to the dump.

Sanfelippo reminded residents that if their building has a dumpster that they do not receive large trash and brush pick up by the city, that they had large items of trash or brush, they would need to coordinate with their home owners association or property manager to take care of it.

Sanfelippo said she was sure everyone had seen the flags along Highland Avenue, that FIDO (Friends in Dog Ownership) has been back at flagging dog piles for their annual campaign, adding the group had taken last year off due to the pandemic. She shared the FIDO Flagging and Bagging Campaign was started in 2014 and the idea is to highlight the impact of failing to scoop your pup's poop, that one pile here and there adds up. She said the program was a playful way to remind people to pick up after their dog. Sanfelippo added there was a city ordinance that could potentially fine individuals \$100 if they don't pick it up. She said the group was going to stagger the clean-up to continue social distancing protocols, that individuals would likely be collecting flags and piles Friday May 14-Sunday May 16. Sanfelippo said anyone interested in more information or helping with the program could email highlandparkFIDO@gmail.com.

Sanfelippo said the neighborhood's large trash and brush pickups have been moved to Friday adding that Highland Park's next pickup is Friday May 21 and then June 11 and July 2 after that. She gave a reminder to report missed pickups to 311 and then to email her with the confirmation # at highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com.

Sanfelippo said Do Dah Day was returning, that it was going to be at Cahaba Brewing because the city was still not issuing permits for events like this. The event will be this Saturday May 15, 11:01 until 6:01 and there will be Covid precautions in place. She said they were doing tickets, that she believed admission was \$5 in advance and

\$8 at the gate. She said more information was available at their website <https://www.dodahday.org/>

Sanfelippo shared that Virginia Samford Theatre has an upcoming show, 'Million Dollar Quartet' will run June 11-27. Sanfelippo said she believed they were still doing masking and operating at a reduced capacity.

Sanfelippo said the next meeting would be June 8 at 6 pm. She said she knew we were all anxious to get back in person but for the time being we want to err on the side of caution and continue with Zoom meetings for the near future and reassess along the way. She said that when we do go back to in-person meetings that we want to have a Zoom option for those who want to do that as well.

Mary Helen Crowe asked a question for Councilor Abbott, whether the city was doing anything to encourage more people to get vaccinated. Abbott said the city government does have some public service announcements, some radio ads and things like that, trying to get the undecided or hesitant people to get a vaccine - but beyond that, the city wasn't in charge of the numbers, that it was more the Health Department who were most considering the number of vaccinated and unvaccinated. Sanfelippo said the last few Community Advisory Board meetings they've had speakers from UAB talking about it, letting people know where they can go and encouraging people to get a vaccine. Abbott said yes, she thought we were in the encouragement mode right now.

Sanfelippo asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Philip Foster moved the meeting be adjourned. Mark Ritter seconded. There was no opposition. President Sanfelippo thanked everyone for their time and participation and adjourned the May 2021 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association at 7:48 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association