

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

July 2021 Minutes

Meeting Date: July 13, 2021

At 6 pm Judy Jones welcomed everyone arriving into the combination in-person and virtual Highland Park Neighborhood Association July meeting. Jones explained the neighborhood's President, Elizabeth Sanfelippo was out of town today. She introduced herself as Secretary and Mark Ritter (on the Zoom call) as Vice-President. She told the group this was the first 'in-person' meeting for the neighborhood in over a year - and that Highland Park might be the only neighborhood in the city that has not missed a single monthly meeting throughout the pandemic. She thanked Stephen Foster, President of the Five Points Neighborhood Association, for setting up Highland Park's meetings via Zoom.

Jones confirmed residents present in person had signed the sign-in sheets. Ritter performed a roll call confirming attendees/residents on the call as per city instructions (additional names were added later as individuals joined the meeting).

Jones asked if everyone had received the minutes from the June meeting and whether anyone had any corrections or changes to those minutes. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to adopt the minutes. Anne Sunkel moved for the adoption of the May Meeting Minutes as presented. John Somerset seconded the motion. Jones asked for a voice vote. There were none opposed so the June meeting minutes were approved.

Police Department Update/Captain Harry Greenberg

Jones recognized Captain Greenberg who introduced himself as the Captain of the South Precinct for the last seven months. He said he feels like he's coming home because he worked as an Evening Shift Lieutenant from 2008 to 2011. He says he feels that Highland Park has great participation from the community, that what helps them the most is to have an engaged community who is out there being the police department's eyes and ears. Greenberg said he wanted to plug the new Birmingham Police app, the BPD app that will allow residents to make reports right away from their phone. He said of course you can still call 911 or the non-emergency number which is 205-328-9311. He said they ask citizens to be alert, keep an eye out and call the Police Department in a timely manner when something is seen that doesn't look right. Greenberg said one thing that has concerned him is more occurrences lately when residents see someone looking into a car and they go out and confront the individual themselves. Greenberg said residents should report these occurrences and defer to the police and not put themselves in harms way over some kind of property crime happening late at night. He said residents can't know what the individual's mental state is, level of coherence or if they are armed. Greenberg said the good news is that virtually nothing in the way of homicides has occurred in our area. He said they were seeing an increase in property crimes over last year. Greenberg said the days of hot-wiring are gone but that auto theft was on the rise because people are leaving fobs in the console. People can reduce crime by reducing the opportunity for crime - don't leave your technology or valuables in

plain view in your car - and lock the car of course. Greenberg asked if there were any questions. Marcy Morgenbesser noted she had been pleased with response time by BPD and then went on to say there were five abandoned or vacant houses in that area and that there was currently an issue with people squatting in the houses. She asked whether there was any update on the situation, saying she knew it was a difficult situation with no owner present to press charges. Greenberg said she was correct, that it doesn't become a crime until the property owner specifically states they do not want that individual on their property. He said they really don't have lawful standing to determine who is to be on a property and who isn't - that he can't know who you have authorized to be in your house or not. He said unfortunately what they are finding is that many of these houses have absentee owners who live out of state. Jones asked if they had someone in their department who worked to locate these owners. Greenberg said they do - and what they are finding a lot of the properties were sold in a tax sale where they were bought in bulk and the owners are not interested in doing anything with the property to secure it. He said they do have a 'Project Hope Officer' (Officer Clarence Adams) that goes out and tries to address issues being experienced by people who are homeless. Brenda Dickerson commented on the increase in crime in the City and asked Greenberg how she should feel traveling outside Southside, traveling to the west side of the city. Greenberg said the majority of the serious criminal activity in the city occurs between individuals who know each other and are engaging in 'risky behavior'. He said more things happen if you are intoxicated and out with other intoxicated people at 2 am when rational thinking is sometimes impaired. Greenberg said if you were traveling in what his mother called 'decent' hours, he didn't think there was any more concern being in one part of the city or another - though he did stress it was always good to be mindful and aware of your surroundings.

Greenberg thanked the neighborhood, telling residents to contact the precinct or communicate concerns to their neighborhood leadership - that they are in contact with the precinct all the time.

Public Works Update

Jones confirmed there was no one from Public Works present at the meeting.

Speaker/Dr. Mike Mugavero

Jones introduced the speaker for the evening, Dr Mike Mugavero. She said Dr. Mugavero joined the ID faculty at UAB in 2006 and was named Project Director of the UAB 1917 Clinic Cohort a prospective, observational HIV cohort study. His research focuses on the effects of clinical, behavioral and epidemiological factors on health behaviors and outcomes in HIV patients. He serves as Associate Director for the Center for Outcomes Effectiveness Research and Education, Co-Director of the Center For AIDS Research, and Director of its Clinical Core facility. Dr Mugavero said Mark Ritter had asked him to speak to the neighborhood either about the Dewberry Building and/or their new clinic - but that he was in Infectious Diseases at UAB since 2006. He did residency training at UAB from 1999 until 2003, went to North Carolina for 3 years and came back and has done HIV medicine predominantly since that time in research at UAB. He said the Dewberry Building was on 32nd St South and 5th Ave South - that it is

remarkable state-of-the-art facility. He said for it is remarkable for persons living with HIV, a highly stigmatized disease, to receive their care in a building like this. He said they share the building with Birmingham AIDS Outreach, which has grown tremendously in recent years expanding into the Magic City Wellness Center which provides primary care as well as prevention, treatment and screening services - as well as now the Magic City Acceptance Center and the Academy for students. He said with Karen Musgrove's leadership, Birmingham AIDS Outreach is just a gem. Mugavero said BAO is really a great cause to support, that they are doing really great work in the city.

Mugavero said right now we are all struggling with is COVID. He said he thought it a shame how politicized this virus has become, that the virus doesn't have a brain, doesn't have a political affiliation. He said after 18 months he is certainly tired of it, that all of a sudden people know who he and his colleagues in infectious diseases and epidemiology are and what we do. He said there is additional uncertainty now with the Delta variant and what is going to come. The challenge is it's become so politicized and folks get so alarmist. Mugavero said he has known Tony Fauci for a long time, that when he worked back in the 80s with Ronald Reagan the HIV activists couldn't stand him. So he has worked with every Democratic and Republican president for 40 years and he's just been a scientist, to see him be so vilified is hard to see. He said if people want information about vaccination there's a lot of people out there to talk with and get that information. He said he's been impressed by how many people have needed a conversation with someone like him before they've been comfortable getting it. He said regarding the Delta Variant, any virus can mutate. He said with HIV, when it mutated it became harder to get - but the Delta Variant is easier to get and causes more illness. He said he didn't feel we were going to see a nationwide spike but he did think we were going to see spikes in states like ours where vaccination rates are low and he thinks the next 2 or 3 weeks are going to be very telling. Coming out of July 4 weekend TSA and AAA said there was more air and land travel than before. Mugavero said it is younger folks including children is getting this Delta, and there are currently 12 children in the hospital in Mississippi, not a lot but it's not great, especially thinking about going back to school and getting into close settings. He said he thinks a lot of people haven't been paying attention and it was worth it now to go to trusted sources and learn more about this Delta Variant.

Marcy Morgenbesser asked about the current thinking on vaccine boosters. Mugavero said Pfizer made an announcement that boosters might be necessary without citing any scientific data, just put it out there. He said the CDC and FDA put out a joint statement last night saying they have seen zero evidence at this point to suggest that a booster would be necessary or that there is any waning of immunity. He said we only have six months since the earliest folks got vaccinated so there's a limited amount of data to draw from. He said we'll get more data into the summer and fall and will know more. Morgenbesser commented that she knows there is asymptomatic transmission and she hoped that public messaging would include more overt 'if you're sick, stay home'. Mugavero said he agreed.

Jones asked if Mugavero knew how Jefferson County was doing with respect to vaccinations relative to Alabama. Mugavero answered we are doing better here, that number 1 in the state was Lowndes County, that they are at about 48%. He said Jefferson is 'up there' but not a single county in Alabama has eclipsed 50% receiving 2 vaccines. Mugavero said ADPH has a Covid19 dashboard you can see Covid vaccination data updated county by county, and there are other tabs for testing and cases. He said people have focused a lot on testing and case numbers, but we are focused more now on the number of hospitalizations as an indicator of the true disease prevalence - how much disease there is in the community. He said in the last several weeks they've seen an uptick in hospitalizations and this is what he'll be watching in the next few weeks as we come away from the holiday.

Anne Sunkel asked what the main reasons are that people remain resistant to getting the vaccine, aside from conspiracy theories. Mugavero said some had concerns about fertility and childbearing and there is no impact on that whatsoever. Jones said she had heard concerns it had only been released for emergency use. Mugavero said that was only due to FDA procedures and the data that is required to get emergency use versus full use approval. He said the other thing that comes up is that it was developed so fast and the reality is it wasn't, that there have been decades of research on MRNA vaccines. He said this vaccine was indeed the first of its kind but it wasn't like they started researching it on December 31, 2019. He said the challenge has been around packaging the vaccine, that it was very unstable, that if you injected it, it would breakdown before it could get your immune system to build up immunity - and this was what most of the recent research had been focused on.

Jones asked if there were any more questions. Being none, she thanked Dr. Mugavero for attending the meeting, sharing his thoughts - and his ongoing contribution to our community.

City Council Update/Councilwoman Valerie Abbott

Jones introduced Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Abbott shared that today was the first day the City Council met in person in about a year and that only 2 of them were wearing masks adding that they didn't know who was vaccinated and who wasn't. Abbott said they were about to purchase some new garbage trucks, street sweepers, police vehicles and vehicles for public works. She said the city has a lot of old and broken-down equipment and that affects its ability to be able to do a good job of keeping things cleaned up. She said they also ordered some equipment for the landfill and it alone costs a million dollars. She said it just lets you know that garbage isn't free. Abbott said the city has received over \$70 million from the federal American Recovery Act money and we will receive another part of that money next year. She said they had been working on how to spend the dollars and there was a process on making suggestions because there are limited areas in which we can use the money. She said one of the most requested city services from residents is street paving and that is not one of the things on the list. But she said storm sewers, storm water issues, was on the list. She said this was important because the City of Birmingham has hundreds of miles of storm sewers that are not in good shape. She said this wasn't a very glamorous thing for

elected officials to do with money because it's hard to go to a ribbon cutting and get your photo made with a storm sewer. Abbott said she was very high on using a portion of this money to fix storm sewers because otherwise we will never get around to it. Abbott said the bids have been taken for the Hanover Circle paving project. She said they were supposed to have had a press conference on this on Monday, but it was canceled because of weather. Abbott said the last thing was since decisions related to the spending of neighborhood funds are made by the neighborhood associations, they would like for everyone to be thinking about how we want to spend that money and go ahead and spend it, because most know how long it takes the city to do things so it would be better to decide on a project and start the wheels turning now rather than wait until the last minute and find out the money wasn't spent fast enough to count in the year in which it is allocated.

Brenda Dickerson asked what other 3 or 4 things can the Cares money be used for besides sewers. Abbott replied that this was not Cares Act funds, this was the American Recovery Act funds. She said related to these funds they can use those for anything related to the Corona virus, for example broadband for the city of Birmingham so that everyone has access. She said in addition to the storm water issues she said funds can be used for clean drinking water issues. She said there was money for social services for people and neighborhoods that have been hit most severely by the pandemic. She said she could not remember all the purposes but that she had pulled it off the federal website (<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>) and sent it to all of her colleagues and maybe to all the neighborhood officers - but we can resend that again so that it can be shared with interested parties within the city and neighborhoods can share it on their websites, those neighborhoods that have websites. She said she does know that if the funds are used for other than the valid purposes it must be paid back to the government.

Mary Helen Crowe asked if Abbott knew when the storm sewer work might start. Abbott said it hasn't even been approved so she doesn't know. But, she said, there were enough council members who were concerned about storm water issues that she was confident there would be some of these storm sewer projects. She said the project she specifically turned in was the flooding that occurs during hard rains at Virginia Samford Theatre and Episcopal Place. She says storm water management is the city's responsibility and we apparently aren't doing a very good job. She said there were many other places with these issues, like Avondale's business district that goes under water when we have these rains. She said they have been told the final rules on how the money can be spent would not be out until August but we're starting to think about it now so we don't wait until the last minute to make decisions. Mary Helen Crowe asked if these projects might include replacement of storm sewer covers. Abbott said she definitely thought it would. Abbott said just yesterday she wrote to the administration and asked for the status of a partnership between the UAB School of Engineering and the City of Birmingham for UAB to research materials to make the storm sewer covers out of rather than reinforced concrete.

Someone asked Abbott if the sidewalk and brick work happening in Highland Park near Caldwell Park was occurring around all city parks. Abbott said she wasn't aware of it but assumed it was because of some problem or safety hazard. Jones shared that Highland Park Neighborhood voted to use some of its discretionary funds to advance this project. She said the project had three phases, the first being where the work is happening now around Caldwell Park.

Someone said they lived near 30th Street and Clairmont and they have a retaining wall issue, as in the wall is crumbling - and asked what the chances were of Recovery Act funds being used for something like that. She said one of her neighbors had been going back and forth with the city about repairing that and she's only been told there's no money in the budget for that. Abbott said she didn't think that would be one of the allowable uses. Abbott said they have that issue a lot through the city, where property owners build retaining walls on city property and then expect the city to repair them - but the city didn't put them there in the first place. The resident said she thought this wall was built by the city, that the neighbor had received some kind of documentation supporting this - and the response was still they didn't have money for this type of project. Abbott said she did not feel the Recovery Act funds could be used to build or repair a retaining wall.

A resident asked if there was any update on the parking permit project. Abbott said there is not, that the person working on it left city employment and the city is trying to hire someone to take her place. She said it was not 'gone', just not being worked on right now.

John Somerset read a question received from an in-person attendee, saying he thinks it is related to the Cares or Recovery Act money - Does the bonus of city workers who are non-essential constitute a possible payback in August? The questioner clarified that his question was if the City of Birmingham would use Cares Act funds to give a bonus to all workers, not just essential workers. Abbott said she thinks Recovery Act money can be used to compensate first line workers - that she wasn't sure about all workers. He asked if someone picking up trash would be considered essential. Abbott replied that would be a question for the mayor. The questioner said he didn't realize the federal government was still reviewing the criteria - and that he now realized if a payback occurred in August and it turned out not to be a valid use for the funds that the city would have to pay it back. Abbott said the Cares Act money is very different from the Recovery Act funds - that the Recovery Act funds are the ones that could go to sewer repair while the Cares Act was likely where the recent employee bonuses came from.

Mary Helen Crowe asked how the city's financial situation doing, is it recovering? Abbott said yes it was recovering, that the city had projected a \$57 million shortfall and it wasn't nearly as bad as they projected and that there was some revival going on. She added the current budget was the largest in Birmingham's history so there is definitely recovery going on.

Community Resource Officer Update/Jasmine Fells

Jones asked if Highland Park's Community Resource officer, Jasmine Fells, was on the call tonight. She was not.

Old Business

Jones shared the neighborhood was still waiting to hear on the 'weed prevention' project, but that we did not know anything yet.

Jones says that as she mentioned earlier, Highland Park has invested some of its discretionary funds into sidewalk repair. She said there will be three phases, the first of which just started near Caldwell Park and will go to Niazuma.

Jones reported that the Friends of Highland Park organizers continues to meet on obtaining their 501c3 status so they can raise funds and apply for grants for the good of the neighborhood. She said they have performed the 'name search' as required by the state and have confirmed that the name 'Friends of Highland Park' is available - and have submitted their 'name reservation form' to the state and applied for an EIN. She said they are on the verge of opening a checking account. She said they were still performing a review of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Anne Sunkel added that the group had raised money to pay the filing fees for these activities, that these contributions would not be tax deductible because they had not achieved their non-profit status yet - and the contributions were greatly appreciated.

Announcements and Reminders

Jones reminded the group that recycling is only the first Wednesday of each month. A resident shared that an email had just gone out telling residents that recycling was being expanded to the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month.

Candidate Remarks

Lashaunda Scales introduced herself as the President Pro Tem of the County Commission and said she was running for Mayor of Birmingham. She said she wanted to see our city move forward in a non-divisive way. She says she believes in Birmingham and raised her family here. She referenced the riot downtown and that she felt that Birmingham, as a historic civil right city would come together. She said she believes we need to improve on our race relations. She said the pandemic brought many of these problems to light. Scales said she wasn't not interested in pointing fingers at the mayor, she was interested in making Birmingham be the best city we can be. She said we were getting ready for the World Games but after the Games we will be having the World Games for Police and Fire - and that the question we need to ask is if all of Birmingham is ready. She said some of the negative things are the crime rate and the way our city looks and is cleaned. She said the Games will require all-hands on deck. She said she doesn't believe in being divisive. She said she has been in public service for 11-1/2 years, working with Ms. Abbott on the City Council for 9 years. She said she was the first African American to represent the east side of Birmingham. She said there was concern in the community initially about how she would lead, represent them - but since then they have realized that Scales does not care if someone is gay, straight, white or black, that if you are a resident of Birmingham you deserve to receive

the best quality of city services offered. Scales said her key issues were 1) reducing city crime, 2) keeping the city clean, 3) supporting our city workers, 4) supporting our education system, 5) support city businesses, and 6) supporting young professionals in our community. Scales then took a number of questions from residents. (Scale's Campaign Website: <https://scalesbhm2021.com/>)

Joseph Campbell Baker III introduced himself as longtime Birmingham resident who is running for City Council District 3. He said he runs the social media group 'I Believe in Birmingham' and has been involved with numerous civic events over the past several years. He said in 2017 they ran a series of debates for the municipal elections - and chose not to this year because of the potential conflict of interest. He said some of the reasons he was running is the state of education in our city - but he looks beyond the education we're giving our children and believe that we need to put funding in job skills training and adult education. Baker said he wants see training for people to become entrepreneurs, that we grow small business in our community. He wants to see Birmingham have more citizen led initiatives, more partnerships between the citizens and police. He feels Birmingham is well positioned to be a major player in future technologies especially genetics, bioengineering, advanced medical treatments, cybernetics, robotics, machine learning and other technologies. He feels this would be a wonderful way for Birmingham to build a better future. Baker also feels it will be very important to rebalance the power between the mayor and the city council (re the 2016 change to the Mayor/Council relationship). Campaign website: <https://www.electjcb3.com>

Mary Boehm introduced herself and said she had represented the residents for the last 4 years on the Birmingham School Board. She said she was embarrassed she didn't attend the Highland Park meetings more often but that the School Board meeting was the very same night. She said one of the things she was proud of that they were doing is the vaccination of their 12-16 year old students. She said they haven't done as many students as they would like but they will continue this effort for the next several months. Boehm said getting back to school is so critical, that we lost a year, Birmingham made the decision to stay out of school when many of the surrounding cities went back. Boehm said our teachers, administrators and our students were hard hit by Covid and we made the decision to stay home. It's been a terrible year; learning remotely was tough. We want to get everyone vaccinated so we can get back to school. Boehm said she was running again for another term, that she believes Birmingham is a city in a position to make change - we've had schools on the failing list but we are making progress getting those schools off that list. The money that we have from the Covid relief funds will make a difference in our kids' lives if we spend it wisely. (Boehm's campaign website: <https://www.boehmforbirmingham.com/>)

Jones thanked everyone for participating tonight - and for their patience with the experimental in-person and online meeting format. She said the next meeting would be Tuesday August 10 at 6 pm, format/location to be announced.

Jones asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Brenda Dickerson offered a motion to adjourn. Cheryl Chapman seconded. There was no opposition.

The July 2021 Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association