

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

November 2021 Minutes

Meeting Date: November 9, 2021

Vice President Mark Ritter called the November 2021 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association (being held via Zoom) to order at 6 pm. He introduced himself and Secretary Judy Jones, explaining that President Elizabeth Sanfelippo was out of town. He thanked Stephen Foster, past president of the Five Points South Neighborhood for continuing to set up the neighborhood meetings on Zoom. Ritter then worked on a roll call as required by the city for virtual meetings.

Ritter asked if residents had received the October meeting minutes and whether there were any changes or corrections needed. No changes or corrections were noted. Horace Hulsey moved to approve the November 2021 minutes. Philip Foster seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Birmingham Fire Department Update. Ritter noted that no one from the Fire Department was on the call tonight.

Southside Precinct Update/Captain Joe Roberts. Ritter recognized the new Southside Precinct Captain Joe Roberts who had recently replaced Captain Greenberg. Roberts said he has been a Captain for three years, having been part of BPD for almost 28 years. He said he had come from Homicide having been there for about 3 years. Roberts said he was thrilled to be at South Precinct adding that he stays in touch with Captain Greenberg on a regular basis. Roberts said he looked forward to partnering with community groups. Ritter told Roberts that if there was something he wanted to draw resident's attention to that we would include it in the minutes. Roberts said Highland Park was doing very well, very low numbers of incidents, primarily property crimes - adding the only assault crime was a domestic assault. He said they did have an auto theft that was from a parking garage but it had been an inside job that they have solved. He said the rest were small thefts, as in under \$500 - and that was only 7 in the past two months. He said they were trying to keep 'breaking and entering of vehicles' as low as possible, that it wasn't necessarily a problem right now in Highland Park, that they were generally trying to spread the word to lock up your valuables, don't leave them in sight in your vehicles. Captain Roberts said they were encouraging the use of cameras, whether Ring or other surveillance cameras, saying the city now has a 'real time' crime center which has started its work. He said at some point they would be furnishing a link to add your camera to their network.

Ritter asked about the drag race thing in Birmingham, that it seems as though that has gotten bigger and if that could be attributed to something in particular. Roberts replied that 'exhibition driving' was now a nationwide problem in most all medium to large cities. Roberts said they were tracking Birmingham's problem areas, saying that most of it was around the city center, Sloss Furnaces, Railroad Park. He said they were combatting this with a task force, staging folks in the area to do surveillance work.

Environmental Code Update/Officer Tyice Wimes. Officer Wimes said she was new to this role but had been in Code Enforcement for two years now. Horace Hulsey said he has called 311 about the UHaul Storage facility, that there is currently a whole house full of

furniture behind the facility next to the alley and that it's been there probably about 8-9 months, and that no one will do anything about it and it is getting worse. He said there was alcohol, it was bringing out the homeless, people were sleeping there, that it's something that several buildings overlook and was an ongoing problem they've been unable to get addressed. Wimes replied her supervisor had been contacted by someone with UHaul who had made promises, that they were hiring a company to come in and remove the debris. She said she wasn't sure what the current status was, that she thought the last she had heard the city was going to come and remove the trash. She said she also thought the storage facility had committed to getting a dumpster and constructing a fence around it. Wimes committed to send an update the next day.

Virginia Samford Theatre Update/Cathy Gilmore. Ritter introduced Cathy Gilmore as the President of Virginia Samford Theatre (VST) and thanked her for speaking to the neighborhood meeting this evening. Gilmore began by sharing the VST was the oldest theatre in Birmingham and that they were celebrating their 94th year in the neighborhood, adding how special it is to live in a neighborhood that has an historic theatre. Gilmore said after a year of doing socially distanced shows they have a full season ahead. She said they do recommend masks at the performances but they will not require them. Gilmore said, starting next week they will be presenting a production of Madagascar Junior which is part of the VST's junior program 'STARS', an acronym for 'Students Take a Role at the Samford'. Thirty students will participate in the production which will run November 18-21. Gilmore said VST has four STARS shows every year. She said the program is so popular that in the summer, when they run their camp, they have to go to Temple Beth-El because they don't have enough room to house all the children.

Gilmore said after Thanksgiving, December 3-5, they will have the Black Repertory Theatre presenting a staged reading in VST's Martha Moore Sykes Studio. She said the week after that they will have the Steel City Men's Chorus on the main stage presenting their holiday show, 'Coming Out for the Holidays' featuring the Sugar Babies (Friday December 10 and Sunday December 12). Gilmore said the next production is the wonderful Dolly Parton musical '9 to 5' January 20 through February 6. She said the show after that is another STARS production, 'Junie B Jones', based on the popular children's book. Gilmore said the next show will be Stephen Sondheim's 'Company' which is currently being revived on Broadway (March 30-April 10). She said they will close out their regular season with 'The Sound of Music' (June 9-26), saying she advised folks to get tickets for this show early because the performances will sell out.

Gilmore said VST will end its performance season on Sunday July 10 (1 pm - 6 pm) with the Bravo Arts Festival. She said the Festival will showcase the many wonderful arts organizations in Birmingham and to include visual artists who will display their work in Caldwell Park. Gilmore said the festival will be presented in conjunction with the 2022 World Games being presented in Birmingham July 7-17th.

Gilmore said that anyone who has ever been to a production at VST knows it to be a unique space with such a wonderful tradition in Birmingham. She said she hopes residents will support their neighborhood theatre in its 94th year, that they are very proud of what they do.

Request for Bluebird Houses. Ritter said residents Mary Helen Crowe and Janet Wallace had made a request to the neighborhood regarding placement of blue bird houses in Highland Park parks but they were not on the call tonight.

City Council Update/Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Ritter introduced Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Abbott shared that today was Council Day. She said there wasn't much going on today, that they approved a lot of cutting of vacant lots and tearing down of dilapidated buildings. She shared the Birmingham Museum of Art was going to hold an auction for some items they own but do not need. Abbott said she learned that sometimes when people 'pass on' they donate their art collections to the museum and that after the museum reviews these new holdings, some things they decide to keep and some they don't. She said they contact the family to be certain they don't want any of the art back and if they don't, the museum holds an auction. Abbott said she had not previously known the museum did this.

Abbott said they have had two meetings with the three new council members and she felt very good about this council and feels very optimistic and excited about the upcoming year. She asked if anyone had questions for her. Philip Foster asked if the Council had done committee assignments yet. Abbott replied yes, that they have committee assignments and new officers adding that Wardine Alexander is the President, Crystal Smitherman is the President Pro-Tem. She said she would serve on the Planning and Zoning Committee, saying that two members had never served on Planning and Zoning before (LaTonya Tate and Clinton Woods). She said they have some appointments to be made, to the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Planning Commission if anyone is interested and willing to volunteer their time. Ritter asked if Council Meeting agendas were available to the public before the meetings. Abbott said yes, the agenda was on the city website every week (<https://www.birminghamcitycouncil.org/meeting-archive/>) - and many meetings could be watched online while they were happening.

Resident Barry Norris asked the status of the Building Trades Towers, whether it was being renovated or just sitting there. Abbott said her understanding was that it has a different owner and was being renovated. She said she didn't know anything about the timeline as the project didn't require a zoning change so very little information about the project had been available to the city.

Community Resource Officer Update/Jasmine Fells. Ritter said Fells was not on the call this evening.

Beautification Committee Update. Ritter said the Beautification Committee had two new members, sharing that Anne Sunkel and Ellen Diethelm were now members. He said the committee was working to find an outside landscaping company to help the neighborhood with the crepe myrtle problem. Ritter said they'd thought the colder weather would help with the issue but it doesn't seem to have yet.

Friends of Highland Park Update. Ritter asked Jones for an update on the 501c3 creation effort. Jones said progress has stalled a bit, that she unexpectedly had her mother staying with her over the past 40 days after a fall and hospital stay, that she had taken her mother home the previous weekend and expected to focus back on moving this effort forward.

Sisters Houses/Rhodes Circle. Ritter reported that apparently an inspector had checked on these residences October 20 and confirmed there wasn't much happening.

Announcements and Reminders.

FIDO Volunteer Request. Ritter told the group that volunteers were still needed to check the dog bag dispensers in the parks to refill them when needed (bags provided). He said anyone wanting to help could email HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com or reply to the neighborhood email.

Ritter told the group that recycling is now the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month. He reminded the group that if you live in an apartment or condo building with a dumpster that the city will not pick up large trash and brush from your location. Ritter said the next large trash and brush pick up is Wednesday December 1st.

Ritter told the group we were always looking for meeting speakers and if anyone had ideas for speakers to forward them to any of the neighborhood officers - or email HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com.

Next Meeting. Ritter said there was no meeting planned for December unless urgent business arises. He said neighborhood leadership had been discussing doing something social and that residents would hear more about that later.

Ritter asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Philip Foster offered a motion to adjourn. Barry Norris seconded. There was no opposition.

The November 2021 Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association