

# Highland Park Neighborhood Association

## October 2021 Minutes

**Meeting Date: October 12, 2021**

Vice President Mark Ritter called the October 2021 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association (being held via Zoom) to order at 6 pm. He introduced himself, President Elizabeth Sanfelippo and Secretary Judy Jones. Ritter said he would be leading the meeting tonight. He thanked Stephen Foster of the Five Points South Neighborhood for continuing to set up our neighborhood meetings on Zoom.

Ritter asked Sanfelippo to perform the roll call as required by the city for virtual meetings.

Ritter asked if residents had received the September 2021 meeting minutes and whether there were any changes or corrections needed. No changes or corrections were requested. John Somerset moved to approve the September 2021 minutes. Helen Rivas seconded the motion. No one opposed so the motion carried.

### **Birmingham Police Department Update.**

Ritter noted that Captain Greenberg was not on the call tonight but noted he had attended the last two meetings. He reminded the group to always report crimes to the police and that the non-emergency number was 205-328-9311. Ritter shared that crime stats could be found on the Birmingham Police Department site (<https://police.birminghamal.gov/>) – under the tab ‘Crime Stats’. He then shared his screen to display the stats for the current week (<https://police.birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Weekly-Crime-Info-October-11-2021.pdf>) and reviewed them briefly with the group.

### **Speaker/Brent Cotton, Birmingham Visitors and Convention Bureau**

Ritter introduced the meeting speaker as Brent Cotton, Associate Director of the Birmingham Visitors and Convention Bureau. Cotton thanked Ritter for inviting him to speak tonight saying he was Associate Director of Convention Services for the Convention and Visitors Bureau, that he had been there for a little over 15 years, that he was in Sales for 12 of those and changed to Convention Services about 3 years ago.

Cotton shared that the Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau (GBCVB) is an organization that promotes Birmingham as a meeting destination across the country and world, that they are a local organization that focuses on conventions, sports events, group tours, leisure travelers and other tourists. He explained that in their industry, they are called a DMO, ‘Destination Marketing Organization’, adding that most every city has a Convention and Visitor Bureau of some sort. Cotton said the GBCVB was originally a part of the Chamber of Commerce, saying they became an independent organization when established as such in 1969.

Cotton explained the organization's structure saying their five departments (CEO/Administration, Marketing & Communications, Convention Sales & Meetings, Tourism & Travel, and Sports) report to a 12-member board of directors and that their funding comes from a portion of the hotel lodging tax. Cotton said they focused on large and small groups, wanting everyone who comes to Birmingham city to love the city, that they recognized that anyone from a smaller group might be associated with a larger group to which they might recommend bringing an event to Birmingham.

Cotton said the tourism side focuses on weddings, family reunions, group tours (for ex., youth tours, high school bands or youth chorus, a middle school coming to the city for a civil rights tour). He said they also work with individual travelers by working with the information centers at each of the rest stops to get them material on the city.

Cotton said once the meeting is booked it's turned over to his department, that they want to make sure the meeting planner has everything they need to have a successful event in Birmingham. He said they want to encourage visitors to have an authentic experience in the city, with opportunities to explore historic, cultural and recreational attractions in Jefferson County.

Cotton said the economic impact of tourism to the city was amazing – that in the last 'normal year', 2019, the Travel Industry for Alabama had a record year - travel expenditures represented \$16.8 Billion; there were 208,000 travel related jobs created; and \$61 million in Lodging taxes generated. Cotton broke the figures down further, sharing that the 2019 travel expenditure figures represented \$5.2 billion for Baldwin County, \$2.4 billion for Jefferson County, \$1.6 billion for Madison County, \$1.3 billion for Mobile County and \$1 billion for Montgomery County.

Cotton said the services offered by the Convention and Visitors Bureau include hotel and venue selection, site visits for potential event planners, planning before, during and after events, publicity and promotion assistance, itinerary planning, and brochures, bags and badges.

Cotton played a video created by the GBCVB Marketing department for to capture the 'vibe' of Birmingham - <https://www.birminghamal.org/in-the-arms-of-the-south/>

Cotton told the group exciting things were happening, that the World Games would be here in summer of 2022 – but that the World Police and Fire Games would be here in 2025 and that would be even bigger than the World Games. Cotton added that if residents saw the news last night, that it wasn't definite yet – but the USFL is looking at Birmingham to play their season here, that their teams would be located in Birmingham and play their games at Protective Field which would represent a huge economic impact for the city.

Cotton asked if there were any questions. Helen Rivas said she was going to speak later about the campaign to help transit, that she would assume the GBCVB would be interested in supporting better transit in Birmingham, especially in this, funding that doesn't take away from the 'roads and bridges' folks, that they are hoping to have the

federal dollars that are designated for transit put into this 'trust fund' which would then provide matching money to draw down federal dollars. Cotton replied they were definitely focused on transit for the upcoming World Games, that a lot of the tourists would come from over 100 countries – and they weren't use to the automobile as being a primary type of transportation. Cotton said Sara Hamlin was their Vice President in charge of Tourism and has been working with the City on those issues, that if Rivas wanted to send him information, he would forward it to Hamlin. Rivas said it was all part of a broad-based campaign, that they'll figure out who will be the best person to talk to, adding she had been working on 'transportation' for 24 years. Ritter said we will make contact between she and Cotton for the purpose of discussing this offline. Rivas thanked Ritter.

Ritter thanked Cotton for participation in the meeting.

### **City Council Update/Councilor Valerie Abbott**

Ritter introduced Councilwoman Abbott who shared there had been a Council meeting that day. She said they had a public hearing on a bar that was making so much noise that it was driving neighbors insane, that they took away their liquor license which effectively put them out of business. She said the other thing that was supposed to come before the Council and didn't – was that they were supposed to hear from the Library Board about their proposed closures of four library branches in Birmingham but that it was canceled, that they know the four branches targeted for closing but that they do not know the Library Board's take on it. She said her understanding was the branches targeted for closure were either ones with structural problems or ones that flood routinely. She said this was controversial, that there were a number of people present to protest, that the mayor took them out in the hall and the Council didn't see them again. She said otherwise it was a peaceful meeting, that they had a going away event for Councilor Hoyt who is leaving. She said they had two colleagues in run-off races that didn't make it so next Tuesday will be their last day. Abbott said that will be interesting because a third of the Council will be new people.

Abbott asked for questions. Ritter mentioned riding around Hanover Circle and that the residents must be glad that work is starting and that the neighborhood appreciates Abbott's support in making that happen. Abbott said it was indeed an exciting project but that she knew that residents in that area would be frustrated for a while with the activities – but that this too will pass.

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

Fells said she wanted to bring a few things to residents' attention. She said regarding allocations for holiday socials and the MLK Unity Breakfast, that they had communicated information on that to neighborhood officers – that if the neighborhood was interested in a table at the breakfast it would be \$1500; that allocations for food for holiday or get to know your neighbor celebrations should not exceed \$500.

Fells reminded the group that next year Birmingham was expecting the World Games, that this would be an amazing opportunity for everyone, young and old, to get involved through volunteerism, that she was working closely with that office, that anyone

interested in volunteering could get in touch with her office, 205-297-8336. Fells said residents could also visit the website for the Games - <https://twg2022.com/>

Fells said in October 2022 they would have another neighborhood officer election, that everyone elected this past year knew that this year would be a short one due to the COVID pandemic, so we are getting back on our regularly scheduled elections for neighborhood elections by hosting an election in October 2022. Fells said she wanted everyone to consider voting, whether coming to designated polling sites or voting absentee.

Fells said her department was publishing a twice a month newsletter to their website, that they would be sharing there and with neighborhood officers and on their website, highlighting neighborhood projects, city initiatives, She said that anyone wishing to share information on a resident who has been exceptionally helpful, someone you think other neighborhoods would benefit in knowing – email her, Jasmine Fells at [jasmine.fells@birminghamal.gov](mailto:jasmine.fells@birminghamal.gov).

Sanfelippo asked about emailing an ‘old’ director of public works – and not realizing there had been a staffing change. And the same thing happening with our ‘environmental code enforcement officer – and whether that was normally information she would receive and pass on... Fells said she was uncertain – but would help in making that connection.

### **Beautification Committee Update.**

Ritter reported ongoing efforts to solicit help in mitigating the neighborhood’s infestation with crepe myrtle bark scale. He said neighborhood leadership had met with city officials and developed a game plan which was proceeding forward.

Ritter asked John Somerset for a Community Garden update. Somerset reported the Garden’s yearly fundraiser was back again, that they had had a fundraiser in 2019 called the Bark Party – and that this year, post Covid, would be ‘The Return of the Bark Party’ at the Clubhouse on Highland, October 21 from 6:30 until 8:30, there will be refreshments, a dog talent and costume contest. Sanfelippo added, bring your cash and credit card to bid on auction items too. Ritter shared there would be a Community Garden cleanup on the morning of Saturday morning October 30.

### **New Business**

Ritter introduced Helen Rivas. Rivas shared she’d been working on transportation for 25 years. She said the state now has the opportunity to get funding through the American Rescue Funds. She said they want to be sure the transit-specific funds go into the Transportation Trust Fund which was created 3 years ago to hold money to fund public transit but has not been implemented. Rivas said hopefully soon there will be some other seed money going in that will generate interest in getting the effort started. ADECA (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs) will administer the funds. Rivas said they were able to get the bill passed (creating the fund) because it wouldn’t take any money away from ALDOT and state roads and bridges projects. She said Alabama was notorious for leaving billions of dollars on the table in the past. She

said in rural areas funds, for example, might use monies to fund a 211 number residents could use to coordinate van pools. The city of Birmingham would want to increase bus routes and run frequencies. Rivas explained the Trust Fund monies could be used as matching funds to draw down federal dollars. Rivas told residents they could help support this effort by 1) calling their state senator and representative and 2) sign the petition that the Transit Citizens Advisory Board is sponsoring to support the Transportation Trust Fund

(<https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/d/e/1FAIpQLSeSo9JepU4ahSsHNQ9hvurvKHaR5EqRxeXun3ZYiGgnLmQVLg/formResponse>)

### **Announcements and Reminders.**

Ritter shared that volunteers were needed for planting the middle planter along Highland, across from the Golf Course pond at the stairs, Saturday October 23 from 10 am until noon with a rain date of Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup>. Ritter said those interested can email [HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com](mailto:HighlandParkNeighborhoodAL@gmail.com) or reply to the newsletter to sign up.

Ritter said the neighborhood would appreciate helping notify FIDO when bag stations in the parks are empty, that FIDO provides the bags.

Ritter reminded the group that recycling is the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month.

Ritter 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. He said the next large trash and brush pick up was this coming Friday, October 15. He gave a reminder to residents to make neat piles, separate furniture and trash from more mulchable items and to bag your leaves.

**Next Meeting.** Ritter said the next meeting would be the second Tuesday of November, November 9 at 6 pm. He said speakers for that meeting would be Cathy Gilmore (President of Virginia Samford Theatre) and Christina Argo (Birmingham City Transportation Department) to discuss the Veo/Bolt scooters. Ritter said the neighborhood would not be having a regular meeting, that we may opt to have a social event at Rojo instead.

Ritter asked if there was a motion to adjourn. John Somerset made the motion, Helen Rivas seconded. There was no opposition.

The October 2021 Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting was adjourned at 6:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Judy Jones  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association