

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

March 2022 Minutes

Meeting Date: March 08, 2021

President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the March 2022 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association (being held via Zoom) to order at 6 pm. She introduced herself and Secretary Judy Jones, saying Vice President Mark Ritter was unable to attend the meeting tonight. She thanked Stephen Foster of the Five Points South Neighborhood for continuing to set up our neighborhood meetings on Zoom.

Sanfelippo performed a roll call as required by the city for virtual meetings.

Sanfelippo asked if residents had received the February 2022 meeting minutes and whether there were any changes or corrections needed. No changes or corrections were requested. Suzanne Baker moved to approve the February 2022 minutes. Ralph Crowe seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Birmingham Police Department Update

Sanfelippo noted no one was on the call from the Police Department.

Birmingham Fire Department Update

Sanfelippo noted no one was on the call from the Fire Department.

Public Works Update

Sanfelippo noted no one was on the call from Public Works.

Black Warrior Riverkeeper/Charles Scribner

Charles Scribner introduced himself as Executive Director of the Black Warrior Riverkeeper, a non-profit organization founded twenty years ago and based in Avondale. He explained they work throughout the entire Black Warrior River

Watershed. He said they are a proud independent member of the International Waterkeeper Alliance as well as Waterkeepers Alabama. Scribner said he was glad to be speaking to the Highland Park Neighborhood Association because approximately seven years ago, the HPNA passed a resolution unanimously opposing the Shepherd Bend Mine which was a coal mine proposed just across the river, 800 feet, from where 200,000 people in the Greater Birmingham area get their drinking water. He said that was a nine year battle successfully led by the Black Water Riverkeepers with the help of supportive entities like HPNA.

Scribner displayed a map of Alabama divided by watersheds. He explained a 'watershed' was all the land area that drains to a particular body of water – so everyone was always in a watershed. He shared that Highland Park was actually in the Black Warrior River Watershed, that any rain drop that falls on the downtown side of Red Mountain is going to make its way through creeks like Valley Creek to the Black Warrior River and then ultimately out to Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Scribner said each of the Alabama Waterkeeper organizations are all independent nonprofits so they have their own budgets and board of directors. He said every Waterkeeper organization, regardless of size, is required to employ a full-time paid spokesperson and patrol person. He explained that Waterkeepers use litigation, the court system, like the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, when necessary, to fix pollution problems. He said if residents wanted to learn more about other areas in Alabama that are patrolled by Waterkeepers, to check out the website www.WaterKeepersAlabama.org.

Scribner explained key features of the Black Warrior River Watershed would include downtown Birmingham, Smith Lake, Bankhead National Forest, the cities of Cullman, Jasper, Oneonta and Tuscaloosa (which is their namesake because Tuscaloosa actually means Black Warrior in Choctaw). He said if you go south of Tuscaloosa on the river you get to Moundville Archaeological Park, adding that Moundville was the leading population center in North America several hundred years ago. South of Moundville the river flows into Demopolis where it combines with the Tombigbee River

and flows out to Mobile Bay and the Gulf. He said litter and pollution that originates in city of Birmingham or Tuscaloosa eventually makes its way into the river and then the Gulf. Scribner said he likes a quote from Wendell Berry – “Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you.”

Scribner told the group another feature of the Black Warrior River Watershed was its biodiversity. He said they protect water quality for three reasons: public health, recreation and wildlife habitat. Scribner said Alabama was number one in the country for our freshwater biodiversity so we have more species of freshwater fish, turtles, mussels, snails and crayfish than any other state. He said the Vermillion Darter and the Watercress Darter are freshwater fish who live in the Birmingham area and nowhere else in the world.

Scribner said their staff included Nelson Brooke (Riverkeeper), Eva Dillard (staff attorney) Katie Fagan (Outreach Coordinator) and John Kinney (Staff Scientist). He told residents this was their 20th anniversary and for more information on their history and accomplishments to visit their website at www.blackwarriorriver.org.

Scribner explained that storm drains did a great job taking rain water away from the streets but unfortunately any litter washes into the storm drains as well. He said there are some pretty significant creeks running underneath the pavement, including Village and Valley Creeks and the storm drains connect into those creeks. Scribner explained this is why they do cleanups in areas where you don't necessarily see 'water' - so they can keep the trash out of the local storm drains and creeks and ultimately out of our into our drinking water supply. He said they had recently entered into a partnership with the City of Birmingham to organize clean-ups, especially ahead of the World Games in July.

Scribner said they would love to work with Highland Park to organize a clean-up. He said anyone wanting to become a member (donor or volunteer) could contact him at CScribner@BlackWarriorRiver.org or through the website or social media. He said

residents could also report pollution and sign up for their email list. He thanked the neighborhood for being civically involved citizens because that means they care about democracy and their communities. He told the group this was the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act which was passed in 1972. He said all of us can be involved in Clean Water law enforcement because Congress inserted citizen enforcement provisions – which means when federal or state government isn't enforcing pollution laws, citizen groups, like the Black Warrior Riverkeeper, can use the Clean Water Act in court to enforce those laws – but they can only do that when people, like the residents of Highland Park, report pollution and give them standing through membership.

Request by Baptist Church of the Covenant/Annual Easter Egg Hunt.

Sanfelippo said the Baptist Church of the Covenant had reached out to the neighborhood regarding their annual Easter Egg Hunt at Rushton Park. She said this year they would like to do the event Saturday April 16 at 10 am to 11:30, saying volunteers would arrive at 9 am, set up games and hide eggs – and would do clean up afterward. She said anyone was welcome to participate. Jasmine Fells said procedures had changed some at the Park and Recreation Board, that she knew there was a packet to request an event in conjunction with the neighborhood. Sanfelippo explained this was more a gathering, nothing was being sold – and it wasn't a 'neighborhood event' per se. Jones made a motion that the Neighborhood support the Baptist Church of the Covenant having their annual Easter Egg Hunt on April 16 from 10 until 11:30 am. Suzanne Baker seconded the motion which then passed unanimously. Sanfelippo said residents could visit www.BCoC.net for more information.

Request by Bob McKenna/Concert in the Park.

Sanfelippo said a request had been received from Bob McKenna and One Love Center to have a concert and gathering noon to 2 pm Sunday April 3rd in one of the Highland Park parks. Jones shared McKenna didn't know which park, that he wanted to confirm access to power first. Suzanne Baker made a motion that the neighborhood supports McKenna's April 3rd event. John Somerset seconded the motion which then passed

unanimously. Jones clarified McKenna's event didn't include vendors, inflatables or alcohol and was open free to the public.

Request to Plant Memorial Tree

Sanfelippo said there was a request to plant a memorial tree in Rushton Park for longtime Highland Park resident and friend Jutta von Buchholtz. She said they have been in touch with the Park Board and were awaiting their reply. She said they have selected a 'certified' male ginkgo tree and want to plant it near the stairs that go up to the corner at IPC. John Somerset made a motion that the neighborhood support the memorial tree planting for Jutta von Buchholtz. Suzanne Baker seconded the motion. The motion then passed unanimously.

Community Resource Officer Update/Jasmine Fells

Jasmine Fells shared they had a neighborhood officer training in February on community collaboration that went very well. She said their next training would be in April and it would be on using social media. Fells said the city was taking applications for ACE (Academy of Civic Engagement) and the classes would be virtual and in person. She said anyone interested to visit www.birminghamal.gov/ACE.

Fells said they had received the Purchase Order today for Highland Park's tree and shrub planting. She said she would share Highland Park's budget numbers when they paid that invoice. Fells confirmed she would coordinate related activities with Beautification Chair Ray Davis.

Sanfelippo told Fells that had received a quote of nearly \$11,000 to replace the sign on Highland Avenue near Freddy's that had been knocked down. She said the information has been sent to the city legal department and hope to hear back from them soon about the possibility the funds could be recovered from the driver's insurance.

Old Business

Sanfelippo gave a shout out to Ray Davis and the Beautification Committee, saying they were always was doing great work with plantings, weed control, grass planting, etc.

Sanfelippo told the group the neighborhood was about to start the second phase of the sidewalk repair project. She said she planned to get a price from the company on several other repairs – for example, to the steps in Rhodes Park and damaged retaining walls along Highland and part of Clairmont.

Sanfelippo reported the current work permits granted to the owner of the Sisters Houses were being voided and he has a court date with the city in April. She said she hoped this would push something to happen, either more work on the properties or an increased interest in selling them.

New Business

Water Company ‘Lead in Water’ Warnings.

Sanfelippo shared that Short Cliff resident had reported receiving visits from Birmingham Water Works employees delivering brochures about lead in the water and filter pitchers. She said these residents were in an area where the water lines/pipes were about to be replaced because of age. Sanfelippo relayed what a Water Works representative said, in response to a post about this, there was no reason for concern. Mary Helen Crowe said that didn’t give her any comfort and asked when the replacement project would start know but would look into it further. Sanfelippo said she did not know but would look into it further. She said in the meantime she recommended using the filter. Another resident asked if the filter was supposed to help now or after the replacement project work began. Sanfelippo said she would follow up with the Water Works and obtain some answers.

Candidate Remarks/Carla V. Morton (Circuit Judge Place 23).

Carla V. Morton introduced herself to residents and shared her qualifications for as a candidate for Jefferson County Circuit Judge, Place 23. The candidate's website is <https://www.carlavmortonforjudge.com/about-3>.

Council Update/Councilwoman Valerie Abbott

Abbott said there was a good bit of discussion at the Council meeting today about a large development going up in District 7 where they will be developing a large amount of acreage and adding about 900 new dwellings. Abbott said there would be no Council meeting next week because all the council members, except her, were going to the League of Cities meeting in Washington DC. Sanfelippo asked Abbott about the Water Works water quality questions and issues discussed earlier. Abbott said she was uncertain and that the water lines were being replaced in Glen Iris because of water pressure issues and not related to lead in the water. She said they did want to check residents' water for the presence of pollutants. Sanfelippo said we would definitely follow-up with the Water Works.

Abbott briefly addressed city redistricting saying she encouraged residents to visit the city's website to look at the new districts (www.birminghamcitycouncil.org/28449-2) She said there will be a public hearing on the redistricting at the Crossplex (5:30 pm March 29) but people can make comments from the website if they don't want to attend.

Friends of Highland Park Update.

Jones shared the newly formed Friends of Highland Park (FOHP) had received it's recognition as an official corporate entity from the State of Alabama. She said their next step will be to file an application to obtain 501c3 status.

Next Meeting.

Sanfelippo said the next meeting would be via Zoom, 6 pm, April 12.

Sanfelippo asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Suzanne Baker made the motion, Ralph Crowe seconded the motion. There was no opposition.

The March 2022 Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Jones

Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association