

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

May 2022 Minutes

Meeting Date: May 10, 2022

President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the May 2022 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association (hybrid meeting being held in person and via Zoom) to order at 6:05 pm. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself as President, Mark Ritter as Vice President and Judy Jones as Secretary. She thanked Stephen Foster, past president of the Five Points South Neighborhood for continuing to set up the neighborhood meetings on Zoom and Evan Godfrey and the Highland Park Golf staff for setting up our meeting tonight.

Sanfelippo asked if residents had received the April 2022 meeting minutes and whether there were any changes or corrections needed. No changes or corrections were noted. John Somerset moved to approve the April 2022 minutes. Ellen Bruck seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

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

Birmingham Fire Department Update. Sanfelippo noted that no one from the Fire Department was on the call or at the meeting tonight.

Southside Precinct Update. Sanfelippo noted that no one from the Police Department was on the call or at the meeting tonight.

Public Works/Environmental Code Update. Sanfelippo noted that no one from Public Works was on the call tonight.

Election Year Update/Judy Jones, League of Women Voters. Jones shared she was secretary of the neighborhood, the newly formed nonprofit Friends of Highland Park - and also the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham (LWVGB). Jones said she joined the League about 2 years ago, that with the coming of the pandemic she felt the ballot box getting further and further away. She said the absentee voting procedures were not straight forward or easy to find. She decided she wanted to be part of a group whose mission focused on voter education in a non-partisan way. Jones said since joining she had worked with a number of projects, the most recent of which was VOTE411. Jones showed the group the VOTE411.org site and how they could enter their address and see a customized list of races, candidates and ballot initiatives for the May 24 primary. She explained the League had taken the contested races in both Shelby and Jefferson counties and developed candidate survey questions. Jones said a unique link was sent to each of 85 candidates (in both the Republican and Democrat primaries) so they could complete the survey. She said roughly 2/3 of the candidates had responded and that the information had been published to the public May 2. A question was asked about the governor's race. Jones explained the State League (LWVAL) did the statewide races - and that VOTE411 would show candidates for your local races and the contested statewide races. She told the group she felt the judicial races very important but observed voters rarely knew a lot about these candidates unless they had a personal connection to them. She said this is a great example of why the VOTE411 site is so helpful, that voters can pull up judicial candidates for a certain race - and

actually compare their survey responses side by side. She gave some examples of the questions asked of judicial candidates, admitting some were softball questions but explaining the league tries not to ask leading or biased questions. She said it was obvious that some candidates took it seriously while others might not - but that in and of itself was good information for voters. Jones shared the League would update the site to reflect primary winners and the candidates for the November general election.

Jones then demonstrated several other sites where voters could look up their races and candidates. A resident asked for the site names. Jones replied you could google 'find my representative' and find a number of sites but emphasized some of these sites had not been updated with new district information since the changes that took place because of the census data. She demonstrated with her own address, the site shows her address incorrectly in State House District 52 and it is now in District 55. Jones said the only site she has found with the correct information is the Alabama Secretary of State's website - www.SOS.Alabama.gov. Resident Ellen Bruck asked if we were in the same district, Jones replied no. Jones said most of Highland Park and Redmont were now in a new district, as was parts of Five Points South and Avondale. Jones pointed out that previously Democrat Terri Sewell had been our Congressional House Representative and now it was Republican Gary Palmer. Jones said voting locations had not changed.

Jones said in addition to the VOTE411 project the League also had a very active project involving Voter Rights Restoration, that since last summer they had registered 100+ people to vote who had previously thought they couldn't because of convictions. She shared League volunteers would go to the Bureau of Pardons and Paroles, set up a table and as people came through offered to check their voter status. Jones said very often they'd check and find out the individual actually could vote, in some cases the League would register them right then. She said there were some crimes, like 'murder', that you couldn't get your voting rights back (unless you were pardoned). But, she added, a few years ago the state legislature changed the definition of 'crimes of moral turpitude' which resulted in fewer types of convictions where voting rights could not be restored. Jones said for some convictions the individual didn't lose their rights at all, they just weren't aware they could still vote.

Jones said the League also help voter registration events saying they had a special program now to get into high schools. She said 17 year-olds could register to vote ahead of turning 18. Jones said the League recently supported a new unit on the Samford Campus. Jones said all the League work was non-partisan, that some people tend to think that efforts to register people to vote and increasing ballot access means the group must lean to the liberal side of things. She said that was absolutely not true, that the group works hard to avoid any appearance of partisan leanings.

Mark Ritter asked why a candidate might not complete a League candidate survey. Jones said if he'll take the Governor's race, for example, none of the Republican candidates responded. She said this could be because the League is perceived as left-leaning, it could be because the candidates didn't perceive the survey to be important to their voters and potential constituency. She pointed out they sometimes have trouble with incumbents replying, saying she guessed they think as incumbents they've a good chance of going back in so why share their thoughts in issues. She gave the example that the incumbent for Highland Park's new district (55) didn't respond. She encouraged residents to look at

VOTE411 and if they were so inclined, to contact candidates who didn't respond and encourage them to do so. A question was asked about League meetings, if they met monthly or whatever. Jones said the League is a membership organization, that they were having their annual meeting this week. She said dues were \$55 annually, they have sliding scale dues for students and have an dues assistance program for those financially challenged to join. Jones said they didn't so much have zoom meetings as much as programs. She said Highland Park's resident bird guru did a program for the state league on Birds and the Effects of Climate Change. She said they have had programs this year on environmental issues, transparency in government - and a recent great program on a new approach to gun violence being piloted in Jefferson County. She said all their programs are free to the public.

City Council Update/Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Sanfelippo introduced Councilwoman Valerie Abbott. Abbott said she felt the most important thing the Council did today was to change the zoning ordinance to add overlay districts for the City of Birmingham. She said the purpose of them is encourage people to redevelop historic properties that may not measure up to the current codes. She said as a result they may give people, for example, a pass on the parking requirements or some other city requirement that may encourage people to preserve buildings over 50 years old.

Abbott said the Council also added more funds from the American Rescue Fund for rental assistance for people who couldn't pay their rent during the pandemic that might be facing eviction.

Abbott said Birmingham was 58 days out from the opening of the World Games. She encouraged residents to watch the news as there would be some street closures related to the games. Ellen Bruck asked if there was a list of streets closing. Abbott said she wasn't aware of a list but the city's web site had a map of closings, adding most were near venues where certain events would occur.

OLD BUSINESS.

Sanfelippo told the group that our Community Resource Representative, Jasmine Fells, has left that position and Highland Park did not yet have a replacement representative. Sanfelippo said Alice Williams, the Deputy Director of Community Resources has been filling in for us.

Sanfelippo said we were still working with the city legal department to get the neighborhood sign, knocked down near Freddy's, repaired/replaced.

Sanfelippo reported the Beautification Committee has had some problems with the vendor, that there were delays in getting our trees. She said the neighborhood was now shooting for the fall for a tree planting.

Sanfelippo reported the neighborhood was working on getting bids for the next phase of the sidewalk repair project. A question was asked whether the sidewalk project would include storm drain covers. Sanfelippo said it would not. She recommended residents download the 'SeeClickFix' app and report them as they come across them. Sanfelippo also said this is something we could look into using our funds to address.

Sanfelippo introduced resident Anne Sunkel. Sunkel gave a brief history of how the newly formed 'Friends of Highland Park' evolved. She announced the organization had just last week received its letter from the IRS informing us that Friends of Highland Park was an official 501c3 non-profit. She shared that the initial board included the following residents: Herself, Anne Sunkel, Judy Jones, Marian Wilson, Sue Alexander, Tom Wofford, Ray Davis and Marcy Morganbesser. She encouraged residents to start thinking about potential projects.

Sanfelippo talked about the horrific flooding experienced by Virginia Samford Theatre and Episcopal Place during heavy rains from water coming through Caldwell Park. Sanfelippo said thankfully they were meeting with the city next Thursday at the theatre to discuss a path forward. She said there has been confusion on whether a study has been started or completed. She said she hoped to have an update on that at our next meeting. Councilwoman Abbott said because Episcopal Place had paid for a study by Shoel Engineering but it didn't include all the affected area - so the city is retaining Shoel to add on to what they have already done to better define what the city needs to do to correct the problem. She said the funding for the project was coming out of District 3's America Rescue Plan funds but that they didn't know yet how much it would cost.

Announcements.

Sanfelippo thanked everyone who participated in the neighborhood clean-up day last Saturday. She said about 15 people picked up litter, collected brush and limbs and collected the FIDO flags and dog piles.

Sanfelippo reminded the group that recycling is now the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month. She told residents if their recycles were missed to be sure and report it via 'SeeClickFix'. She said the next large trash and brush pick-up is this coming Thursday.

Sanfelippo said Do Dah Day would be this coming Saturday 11:01 at Cahaba Brewing.

Next Meeting. Sanfelippo said the next meeting will be held 6 pm Tuesday June 14, in person and Zoom, at the Highland Golf Club.

Sanfelippo asked if there was a motion to adjourn. John Somerset offered a motion to adjourn. Anne Sunkel seconded. There was no opposition.

The May 2022 Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm.

After the meeting was adjourned Sanfelippo told the group there were two candidates wanting to make remarks to residents. Antwon Bernard Womack introduced himself as a candidate for Representative of State House District 55 and shared his goals for the district. Sara Beth Conkle introduced herself as a neighbor off Cliff Road and that she was on the ballot for State Democrat Executive Committee District 55 Representative and wanted to serve.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association