

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

October 2022 Minutes

Meeting Date: October 11, 2022

President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the October 2022 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association (being held in-person and via Zoom) to order at 6:00 pm. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself as President, Mark Ritter as Vice President and Judy Jones as Secretary.

Sanfelippo shared that the wrong link was distributed for the September Minutes (meeting date Sept 13). Secretary Jones apologized for being so late completing the minutes. Sanfelippo said we would correct and circulate the correct file link and approve the September meeting minutes at the November meeting.

Sanfelippo performed a roll call as required by the city for virtual meetings. She noted no representatives from Public Works, the Police Department or the Fire Department in attendance.

39 Hanover Circle Project/Mike Brown

Sanfelippo said last month a group who had recently purchased 39 Hanover Circle presented to the neighborhood regarding their renovation plans and their need for a zoning variance. She introduced Mike Brown who said he was here representing '39 Hanover Partners' who own the property at 39 Hanover Circle. Brown said they wanted to give an update from their last presentation and ask for the neighborhood support on their proposal to take the former skilled nursing facility and convert it, renovate it into a facility that fits within the neighborhood and the look of the neighborhood as a 'communal living facility' under Birmingham's zoning ordinance. The ordinance stipulates they have to request a special exception to the current zoning of D6 - which allows for a communal living facility with this special exception. Brown reviewed the group's presentation to the September Highland Park neighborhood meeting. He explained again the purpose of the planned 38 bed facility is to treat people suffering from eating disorders, this treatment to include overnight stays. Brown said they expected the average stay for people coming for treatment to be somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 to 90 days.

Brown reviewed the group's responses to some previously raised questions by neighborhood residents. He said the operating entity that owns the property is 39 Hanover Partners. Brown said their staff may range from 10 people at night to 20 people during the day. He said they will have a number of activities that will take place either inside the building or in their courtyard area. He said people will be driven in or brought in by others, family members or friends. Brown said individuals staying there will not have a car while they are there so the only car traffic will be staff and visitors who have only limited periods of time to visit and only during the daytime. Brown shared photos of nearby properties they used for building design inspiration.

A resident asked if this facility was affiliated with a hospital or medical center. Brown said no, they are not, but they do accept patients from St. Vincent's, Children's Hospital and the like. A resident asked how long they expected the renovation process to take. John Chapman, of 39 Hanover Partners, said that Brasfield's best estimate right now was eight months, adding they hope to begin very soon. Chapman said the operator they are aligned with has over a ten year track record, they are a local operator - and there is a significant need for this work. A resident asked about opening the fence for construction vehicles so there would be less of that kind of traffic through the neighborhood. Chapman said they would welcome that; that they were not a proponent of opening or removing the gate, they would be willing to place a gate person there who would open the gate only to allow construction traffic in and then close the gate. A Hanover Circle resident said the gate has a 20-30 year history, adding St. Vincent's actually had the gate built but the owners of 39 Hanover Circle had the responsibility to maintain it and it was to be used only for emergencies. A question was asked, if this variance is granted and they go out of business what else could go on this property with this variance in place? Sanfelippo replied the variance would only be for this property and this project, that it would not transfer to any other owners. A resident asked about the design and why it didn't seem to fit more with the neighborhood. The project architect explained the challenge of working with this particular building, it doesn't start out with characteristics similar to other buildings in the neighborhood, looking more like a cross between a church and a ranch. He pointed out certain building characteristics and explained similarities to nearby properties. Jones pointed out the project was a renovation and not a new build and that it was across the street from a hospital. A question was asked about landscaping; they replied there was an extensive landscape plan for the grounds. A question was asked whether this group has other facilities of this nature in Alabama or the country. Chapman replied with this disorder there is a spectrum of treatments, the most common of this is outpatient/day treatment. He said this facility will be residential in nature and those facilities are much more limited. Chapman said this urban setting, they think, differentiates this program from almost any other in the country; that they feel the communal nature of this facility and the urban setting will provide a higher level of treatment than is available in most places. He said typically now if someone is diagnosed at the level of needing residential treatment, they are most likely referred to facilities in Phoenix, Chicago or California. He said there are some new facilities in Texas and upon their opening they filled to capacity and have waiting lists. The resident asked if this company operated any other residential facilities, Chapman replied they do not, that they have been in operation for ten years but as out-patient providers. He said they, like other providers, have to currently refer patients out of state for this type of treatment. A resident asked if there will be any out-patient treatment at this facility. Chapman replied no there would not be any out-patient treatment. A question was asked about pre-screening patients for other issues before admission. Chapman replied there were definitely a number of screenings, adding that typically a referral to this type facility would come from a medical practitioner, that if there were co-diagnoses (which is not uncommon), for ex substance abuse (which is not treated at this facility), there are partners they would be referred to for that piece of their treatment. A resident asked if the current footprint of the building would be expanded. Chapman said it would moderately be expanded, primarily within the courtyard so not on any of the property perimeters. He said

the expansion was primarily for the art room (with a tall ceiling and lots of natural light) that is a very large component to the programming treatment this facility provides, which differentiates from almost every other facility in the country. A resident commented that Chapman had talked about the benefits of the urban setting for the treatment facility and asked, if the treatment is all inside, why the neighborhood/urban setting matters. The presenters replied most of the other residential facilities were in remote locations and the reality is that most of the people who have this disorder live in the real world, hearing sounds of the city, not in a pasture or overlooking the ocean, that people were more successful with the treatments when provided in an environment similar to 'their real world'.

Sanfelippo recapped for the group, telling them Highland Park does have a zoning committee headed by Jim Cooper. She said they got together, discussed this project, asked follow-up questions of the developers, and confirmed with the city this would be non-transferable. She said they have passed all this information along to Hanover Circle residents and received only positive feedback regarding the information shared. Sanfelippo shared the Zoning Committee has voted on the requested zoning variance. She said, on behalf of the neighborhood Zoning Committee, she would like to recommend neighborhood approval of this project. Glen Kinzler moved that Highland Park accept the recommendation of the Zoning Committee and approve this project. Jim Cooper seconded the motion. The vote was 17 supporting the motion and 1 opposed. The motion passed.

Department of Transportation/James Fowler & Eliza Bigham

James Fowler introduced himself saying he serves as Director of the City of Birmingham's Department of Transportation. He introduced Eliza Bigham, a Traffic Systems Engineer who has specifically been working on some projects in the neighborhood. He said, in full disclosure, he is also a Highland Park resident. Fowler said they wanted to talk about a few pedestrian related changes that will hopefully be made in the neighborhood during the next few months - and how those changes link into some of the objectives with the new organization Friends of Highland Park.

Fowler showed a map of the neighborhood to orient the group. He spoke about Highland Avenue intersections as it weaves its way past the parks. He said for some time they have been set up to prioritize traffic flow along Highland Avenue and as a result there are some unexpected and awkward conditions for traffic and pedestrians at the corners of Rhodes and Rushton Parks. Fowler talked about 5 intersection/projects - 1) 30th and Highland at Rojo (making it an all-way stop); 2) Northeast corner of Rhodes Park (making it an all way stop and adding a crosswalk on the currently unstriped leg of the intersection), 3) The other corner of Rhodes Park (another all-way stop with the high visibility crosswalks); 4) 28th Street and Highland Court (tighten the intersection with striping and raised buttons); 5) Traffic calming for 31st St (addition of 3 sets of speed cushions).

Fowler emphasized the striping of these intersection legs would be in the 'high visibility' style as opposed to the minimal design currently used. He said he wished they could do all intersections but just don't have the capacity to do that - but he thinks in these big intersections it's important. He also explained the difference between a speed hump and a

speed cushion, saying the speed hump goes all the way across the road whereas a speed cushion is 3 sets of humps that are side by side allowing a vehicle with a very large wheelbase, like a firetruck or ambulance, to straddle it.

Fowler said the 31st Street project has just completed one of the last steps in the process, a survey of residents who live along the street to sign a petition saying they support it. Fowler said he believed 2/3 of the residents signed in support of the project; Sanfelippo confirmed she had gone door to door and gotten the needed support/signatures. He said he thought the next step was for the neighborhood to vote on funding the 31st St project.

At this point the presentation was turned over to Friends of Highland Park (FOHP - the 501c3) to share their overlap with these projects. FOHP Secretary Judy Jones first asked Fowler about the decision to eliminate the 3 way stop at 28th and Highland Court. Fowler explained they felt adding stops at both ends of the park would reduce speeds on Highland Court, that they will do this and continue to observe. He said they were trying to avoid putting in so many stop signs that people get annoyed with them and there's less compliance. Resident Jerry Moore expressed disappointment there wouldn't be stop signs added at this intersection. He also shared concern about the paint used for crosswalks, that it was often very slippery when wet and he hoped they would use something with some grit in it.

Jones shared that a friend of hers who lived on Highland Ave had shared concerns about fast moving traffic on Highland at the 8 am and 5 pm hours, that was entering and exiting Highland from Niazuma. He said he'd observed the traffic was cut-through traffic and not residents. Jones said she felt Highland Park residents as a whole would be supportive of additional stop signs and calming measures, that it would be people coming through the neighborhood from other places who would feel inconvenienced. Jones used this as a segue into the mission of Friends of Highland Park which is "to protect, preserve, enhance and benefit the Highland Park Neighborhood. Jones said the organization has obtained its non-profit status and they are hopeful they can raise some tax-deductible contributions and obtain grant money to accomplish projects to benefit the neighborhood. She said FOHP has a board of seven people - President Anne Sunkel is on the line tonight, as is Vice President Marian Wilson. She said there was no formal relationship between the neighborhood association and FOHP though she, as secretary of both organizations, provided overlap. Jones said the group has discussed potential projects and realized a majority of their ideas initially were related to 'walkability' and 'intersection' safety' (especially crosswalks) arose as a priority. Jones shared that President Sunkel and Vice President Wilson had walked Highland Avenue and scored intersections based on criteria that included visibility, pedestrian use, speed of traffic, etc - and they have passed that information, along with recommendations, to the city. A resident asked why 27th Street wasn't included in this project, that the traffic coming from Niazuma toward Rhodes Park, past Park Towers, was fast moving and very dangerous to the high number of pedestrians in the area. FOHP President Sunkel echoed resident's concerns and explained the city's limitations in doing all the intersections needed in the neighborhood. She said we would like to add the signage that will help make pedestrian crossings more visible - and these are the type of projects FOHP wants to raise funds for. A resident of Park Towers spoke, reiterating the number of people

who live within that 1-3 block range, and the poor condition of the crosswalks there as well as the visibility to the oncoming traffic in both directions. Anne Sunkel emphasized all these locations were 'on the list' - they just all couldn't happen at this time but would definitely happen at some point. Jones said one thing FOHP had realized was that these changes were going to take education on the part of both drivers and pedestrians, that they weren't sure yet how to accomplish that. A resident asked about a pedestrian push-button for the intersection at 31st and Highland. Fowler said they would look into that. He went on to say residents' point about 27th is a great one, that they are only starting at the corners of the park but they will certainly look at the 27th intersection as well.

Mary Helen Crowe asked about the shrubs in the medians that were tall enough to obscure vehicle traffic, that she thinks they need to be trimmed down by the city. Sanfelippo said Public Works staffing issues right now will make it difficult for the city to help in addressing this. Jones said we have actually talked some with the Beautification Committee about this and might be able to work something out on trimming the shrubs. She shared visibility had been part of their criteria when evaluating the intersections for safety so felt there was about to be some attention to that issue.

Sanfelippo said this brings us to our next item which is the city has asked us to contribute \$5000 of neighborhood funds (and the city funding the other \$5000) toward the speed cushions on 31st. Sanfelippo said this was presented to the spending committee and they did not recommend supporting this expenditure, that they felt that either the city or the residents of 31st Street need to fund it. Suzanne Baker moved that we not fund this project for 31st Street. Eliza Bigham spoke to clarify the city has a certain amount of money to spend for traffic calming, which includes speed cushions, so their policy is that their department will invest half and the neighborhood is asked to contribute the other half. Baker said she was unclear about what speed cushions on 31st would actually accomplish. Fowler said their department currently had 200 traffic calming requests across the city. He said they have been allocated a budget of \$75,000 city wide - so, in order to make the best use of those funds city-wide, we have set a policy that their department will pay for half and the other half should come from the neighborhood or some other source. Councilwoman Abbott said speeding on 31st has been a problem since she lived on it some 30 years ago. She expressed surprise that this opportunity would be turned down by the neighborhood, that the opportunity may not come again. She said there are 100s of requests from neighborhoods trying to slow traffic in their community. Abbott said she wanted to caution Highland Park about turning down this offer because they may not get another chance. Baker said she withdraws her motion and would leave the issue to others who knew more about the situation on 31st. Phillip Foster asked if there was a mechanism through which residents could contribute toward the effort. Fowler shared the city did the first speed table on Carlisle, then the residents (not the Redmont Neighborhood Association) contributed for the others. Mary Helen Crowe said she was confused about how particular projects have been selected, prioritized. James Fowler said in his mind the conversation about stop signs and crosswalks is completely separate from discussion about traffic calming. He said stop signs and crosswalks are just typical traffic safety devices that the city has installed and will continue to install at no additional cost to the community. He said the city has studied these Highland

Park intersections and determined the intersections are awkward and need to be improved - and because stop signs and crosswalks are a low-cost change it just seems a logical thing to do. He said speed bumps can start to get expensive and are not a 'required thing' like stop signs. As a result, to stretch city resources, their policy is for the neighborhoods and/or residents to contribute to the project. Jim Cooper spoke saying this was such a small amount and if this many people on a street felt there was an issue, why would he, as a good neighbor, want to turn this down? He said he was baffled we were even still talking about this. Sanfelippo asked if there was a motion. Jim Cooper moved to approve using neighborhood funds to support the installation of speed tables for 31st Street. Judy Jones seconded the motion. There were 17 voting yes and none opposed. The motion carried. We thanked James and Eliza for coming.

City Council Update/Councilwoman Valerie Abbott

Councilwoman Abbott reported the Council approved the Regional Planning Commission to handle a workforce development program funded by a grant received by the city. Abbott said the Council also approved funding to support the Legion Soccer Team, Birmingham's professional soccer team that plays at Protective Stadium. She expressed being pleased the neighborhood approved funding for the speed tables on 31st and recommended surveying the entire neighborhood to determine all of the streets that would benefit from a look by Traffic Engineering because getting in the queue is a big deal. Abbott mentioned ongoing staffing issues for the police department and public works. She said right now the City of Birmingham has more trucks than they have people qualified to drive them. A resident asked for an update on the city's effort to draft an ordinance on short term rentals. Abbott said this was a hot topic in all of District 3 and that they have been told the City's Legal Department would have a proposed ordinance for Council review in October. Another resident asked for an update on the old Western supermarket property development. Abbott said she had attended a presentation by the developers to the Five Points South Neighborhood Association meeting. She said she had asked for the presentation and when received would forward it to Highland Park. She said the proposal involved demolishing the current building for a five-story apartment building. Abbott mentioned the completion of the Hanover Circle paving project. Jim Cooper spoke sharing there were some issues, especially with Hanover Park, that it has just been decimated. He said there were also significant issues with the curbing. Abbott said the challenge with curbing is identifying whether it was the water company or the paving contractor who did the damage. She said she would try to get over there, drive through and take some pictures. Abbott said she would send the photos to 'see/click/fix' but also will send them to the Mayor's Joint Chiefs of Staff because in her neighborhood when they did the milling, they milled off the curbs and they've never been back to fix them. Cooper said he could forward photos to Abbott's office. Abbott thanked him.

Glen Kinsler introduced himself to Abbott, saying he lived at 1335 32nd St. He said there is a half-demolished building in terrible condition at 1400 33rd St South. He said a group of investors purchased it with intentions of refurbishing it. He said it partially collapsed, right now it is half demolished, half collapsed. He said he thinks the new owners are awaiting getting the proper permits to continue doing the demolition. He said this has been going on for 9 months, that he moved to this street almost a year ago and it happened shortly after

that. Abbott asked him to send the photos and address and her office will check into what the city-side of the story is. She said the permitting process should not take that long.

Sanfelippo asked for an update on what the city was doing about the street racing issue. Abbott said not much, but that they were doing the best they can considering it is an overwhelming problem. She said the police department currently has a 'no-chase' policy which makes it difficult to catch these people when they run. She said they have given out tickets, they can impound people's cars but she says they are hamstrung because state law doesn't give them all the tools in the tool box to be able to crush the problem as they need to. Abbott said they were trying, through the city lobbyist, to work with the legislature to pass the laws needed to give the Birmingham police (and police in other communities) more power to deal with this problem.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A resident asked if the Southside Precinct Captain could be invited to speak at the next meeting. Sanfelippo said she would definitely invite Captain Joe Roberts to the next meeting.

Sanfelippo thanked Christine Wilson for assuming responsibility for putting out the neighborhood association 'meeting announcement' signs.

Sanfelippo thanked Ray Davis, Tomas and Kristina Jilling who came out and helped weed the playground at Rushton Park. We are still waiting on a quote for fresh mulch and trashcan liners for the playground.

Sanfelippo shared recycling was still the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month.

Sanfelippo shared the next Large Trash and Brush pickup was Monday October 24.

Sanfelippo announced Neighborhood Elections for Neighborhood Officers are scheduled for next Tuesday 7 am to 7 pm October 18th. She said unfortunately there are only 4 voting locations, the closest of which are Memorial Park Rec Center and Legion Field. The other two are Hawkins Rec Center and Hooper City Rec Center.

Councilwoman Abbott said there was a question about the Episcopal Place water/flooding problem. Abbott said she had forgotten to mention they have received their capital project communication from the mayor's office and the 'Caldwell Park Drainage Study' is one of the items on the list. She said Schoel Engineering is doing the study of the whole area to determine the reason for the flooding in this area whenever we have a heavy rain. She said they were supposed to be giving a presentation to the stakeholders as soon as their study is complete. Abbott said she just wanted the neighborhood to know the study is underway.

Next Meeting

Sanfelippo said the next meeting will be 6 pm Tuesday November 8. She shared that since November 8 is an election day - and the Highland Golf Club a polling place, the November 8 meeting would likely be 'Zoom only'.

Glen Kinsler moved to adjourn the meeting. Jim Cooper seconded. The October 2022 Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting was adjourned at 8:02 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association